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Community Involvement and the Role of the Church in Peacebuilding in Kenya: *Amani Mashinani* Approach

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Abstract
Amani Mashinani (Peace at the Grassroots) is a model of peace building that demonstrates the importance of community involvement and Church leadership in peacebuilding efforts in North Rift region of Kenya. The role of community members and the Church in working together during times of conflict demonstrates the possibilities of increased opportunities for positive peace and reconciliation. This essay highlights the role Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret played to transform inter-ethnic conflicts. The role of Bishop Korir as a religious leader is acknowledged through his ability to mobilize local warring communities to embrace the idea of Amani Mashinani to promote peaceful co-existence among ethnically diverse communities. Amani Mashinani compliments on-going work by Church leadership in peacebuilding in South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Introduction
The mission of the Church as defined in *Nehemiah*12:12-21 is to provide hospitality in the face of conflict. Nehemiah the man of God taught the Jews to be hospitable to their enemies despite the difficult condition. The late Bishop Cornelius Korir heeded the call to extend hospitality to warring communities by positioning the Diocese of Eldoret (CDE) to play a role in mitigating the conflict in the North Rift region of Kenya. Since the 1990s CDE became a sanctuary for victims of ethnic animosity. In 1997, CDE was instrumental in helping manage the Pokot and Marakwet conflict. Bishop Korir and CDE staff's first hand encounter with conflict prompted the realization that the "Church needed to exercise 'stewardship' in the community by resolving to work with the people to achieve sustainable peace" (Korir, 2009, p. 2). It was during this period of working with the Pokot and Marakwet that *Amani Mashinani* was born. The success of the grassroots peacebuilding approaches used to reconcile the erstwhile warring communities in Elgeyo Marakwet County is commendable because it has been replicated to reconcile communities (Kikuyu and Kalenjin) in Uasin Gishu County.

Following the 2007/8 post-elections violence, Bishop Korir ordered that the gates of Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret for victims of internal displacement. The church received thousands of displaced persons in need of shelter, safety and basic needs of life. The previous experiences of helping victims and working with conflicting communities was instrumental in addressing some of the immediate concerns about the Kikuyu and Kalenjin conflict after the 2002 and 2007 elections.

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Bishop Korir's commitment to peace and reconciliation among the communities augured well with John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* which highlights truth and justice as pillars of peace. This Papal encyclical was written at a time that many nations of the world had emerged from the struggle for independence or were still in the struggle. The Church through its encyclical *Pacem in Terris* taught that for universal peace to be established on earth comes by way of truth, justice, charity and liberty. It also stressed the need for local dialogue among the people involved in any conflict. *Amani Mashinani* model encouraged both victims and perpetrators of violence to participate in dialogue that would help them manage and/or reduce violent conflicts and increase opportunities for positive peace and reconciliation.

The genesis of *Amani Mashinani* was seen as an opportunity for communities to find and grow peace together. Bishop Korir conceived this grassroots approach to peacebuilding with the goal to engage members of local communities to work together to resolve their conflicts and celebrate the outcome of their efforts. On the other hand, *Amani Mashinani* stands to show the role the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret played in promotion of peace in a country where tensions flare up sometimes after elections. In this regard, *Amani Mashinani* offers insights into considering how to respond to criticisms levelled against the role of the Church during times of crisis in Kenya notably during and after the 2007/8 post-elections violence. Wafula (2014) points out that the Church has not been able to broker lasting peace. This observation is supported by factors identified to explain the inaction of the Church in Kenya. Kilonzo (2009, 2014) opines that the decision by religious leaders and their congregations were partisan along political party and ethnic identity during the 2007 elections rendering the Church to remain silent during the post elections violence. Additionally, the Moi government derailed efforts by the Church to become a voice of the voiceless. Despite the challenges posed by the political climate at the time, CDE went ahead to broker peace between the conflicting communities in the North Rift. CDE provided refuge to victims of violence and support to promote *Amani Mashinani*.

Specifically, I am interested in the attention given by the Church to promote peaceful co-existence among diverse ethnic communities. Similarly, I am interested in exploring ways that *Amani Mashinani* emphasizes building of relationships and interactions among diverse members of the warring communities. How it facilitates people-to-people dialogue to help warring communities to manage and reduce violent conflicts and increase opportunities for positive peace and reconciliation. Further, I reflect on aspects of the model that serve as best practices for communities seeking to make community involvement an integral part of peacebuilding.

The Consequences of Conflict and the Role of *Amani Mashinani*
Ethnic hostilities among communities in the North Rift region in Kenya go back to the 1992 general elections. The violence has affected diverse communities living in the area and severely disrupted harmonious co-existence and other physical destruction as well as psychological trauma, displacement of women and children, and increased poverty due to stalled economic development (Korir, 2009, p. 4-5). The violence that followed the 2007 general elections was fatal. According to the Human Rights Watch (2008) "the scale and speed of the violence that engulfed Kenya following the controversial presidential election of December 27, 2007 shocked both Kenyans and the world at large. Two months of bloodshed left over 1,000 dead and up to 500,000 internally displaced persons in a country viewed as a bastion of economic and political

stability in a volatile region" (Human Right Watch 2008 para.1). Prior to the crisis that followed the 2007- 2008 post elections violence, Bishop Korir along with the Diocese of Eldoret had embraced the realization that the church and the diocese had a special role in calling for peace in the valley (Korir, p.2). According to Bishop Korir, the focus of what needed to be done is as follows: i) "to reach the actual perpetrators and victims of violence", ii) "to facilitate *Amani Mashinani* – peace in the village, not peace in urban hotels, and iii) "to ensure that sustainable peace would have to be rooted in the local environment and engage those most affected by the violence, not just those who show up to NGO conferences" (Korir 2009:p. 2-3).

The Church as an institution has its unique calling and mandate to provide hospitality in the face of conflict. Across history, wherever people have been trapped in a conflict situation, the place to find solace and refuge has been the Church. A recent case in history is the experience of Tutsis who sought refuge in Churches during the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Even though the safety and protection that the victims expected was never achieved, the very fact that the Church was the first place for the victims to consider for safety, speaks to the expectations people have about the role of the Church in times of crisis. As earlier noted, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral had served as a sanctuary for victims of ethnic conflict since the early 1990s. However, the magnitude of the conflict was not as extensive as the violence following the 2007 elections when Bishop Korir opened the gates of the church for the victims who were members of the two warring communities. There are two observations to be made regarding the success of the Church in 2008. First, the work Bishop Korir did in Elgeyo Marakwet provided experiences relevant to managing the situation in Uasin Gishu. Secondly, communities were trusting of the diocese and Bishop Korir's engagement with peace efforts over the time.

Even though the victims were aware of the larger historical context of the cause of the conflict, namely contestation of land tenure in the Rift Valley region of Kenya, many did not anticipate the violence that followed the outcome of the 2007 national elections. It was incomprehensible to explain what would make families joined through inter-ethnic marriages to turn against each other. There were reported cases of ethnic cleansing, neighbours killing neighbours who were from a different ethnic group, destruction of property, looting and so forth. This is a testimony to the fact that conflict is cruel to families, neighbours, country, and all humanity. It is against this backdrop that the pursuit for lasting peace was sought among diverse ethnic groups in the North Rift Valley region of Kenya. This quest for peace solidified Bishop Korir's lifetime commitment to find solutions to ethnic conflicts in the region.

Contextualizing *Amani Mashinani* and its Role in addressing Inter-ethnic Conflicts.
Bogner and Neubert (2013) argues that post-conflict reconstruction begins from people's initiative considering that conflicts are by nature complex and have multiple causes. Shah (2014) emphasizes the need to address these deeply rooted causes of conflict. The implication of this argument is that peace initiatives should be able to engage people affected by conflict in peacebuilding efforts while taking into consideration the history and other causes of the conflict. How does this relate to peacebuilding efforts in response to the inter-ethnic conflicts in the North Rift region of Kenya?

Amani Mashinani takes into consideration local contexts and utilizes local resources to bring together warring communities faced with deep seated differences and tensions. The Catholic

Diocese of Eldoret in collaboration with local community elders exemplify ways to engage community members to promote peaceful co-existence. These efforts take into consideration the need to offer answers to some questions about why, who, how and what of conflict (see Conteh-Morgan, 2005 and Hagg & Kagwanja, 2007). *Amani Mashinani* begins from the point of view that the cause or causes of any conflict must be voiced, understood and agreed upon by all parties in order to move forward with possible resolutions generated by the communities themselves. This approach seems in line with Lund's (1996) view that attributes peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict societies to justice and peace. In the context of *Amani Mashinani*, justice is about talking together with integrity, trust and truthfulness for the purposes of reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. *Amani Mashinani* engages communities to address concerns that lead to conflict and how to work together to prevent resurgence of conflict. Each community's concerns are brought forward for discussion. Both sides craft an agenda to indicate how to co-exist with one another in a manner that seeks to promote collaborative decision-making. The collaborative spirit enables communities to address issues such as follows: What are the concerns leading to conflict? Can each group identify its concerns about the other? Can both sides sit together to craft an agenda for moving forward in peace? How can the community work together to ensure peaceful co-existence? By so doing, *Amani Mashinani* takes precedence of the fact that peacebuilding process is owned by the local community and not outside players. The organizational structure allows for participation and ownership of community members. This approach is unlike the Burundian experience where peacebuilding efforts became difficult because the locals did not own the process (Breed, 2008).

Amani Mashinani promotes the relevance of community involvement in building a strong common identity among warring inter-ethnic communities. It recognizes the value of the rich culture and history that resides in Kenya as a source of pride for a shared identity while still recognizing unique differences among diverse ethnic groups. In this regard, it becomes a model for everyday life based on unity and harmony. It teaches diverse ethnic groups about building a culture of peace among themselves by valuing dialogue and co-existence over violence. It does so by adopting indigenous peacebuilding approaches based on the premise that peace can be initiated and sustained at the grassroots level (*Mashinani*). Butler (2005) argues rightly that traditional forms of justice and peace are crucial in post conflict reconciliation and supports the idea of communities talking to one another to reach an amicable solution to their problems. *Amani Mashinani* emphasizes traditional values of community dialogues to mitigate conflict. With support from the CDE, local elders and opinion leaders organize forums that welcome participation of community members to address causes of the conflict and how to manage it. At the same time, *Amani Mashinani* adopts wisdom from scripture and traditions to pursue peace. The sermon on the mountain in Matthew 5:9-10, 13-14, Mark. 9:49-50, Luke. 14:34-35 is an example of indispensable pursuit for peace. Balegamire (2000) places Christ's declaration, that blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called sons of God, as the indisputable command for the Church to act now for peace instead of waiting for 'tomorrow'. Christ made peace between God and humanity by commanding Christians to go do likewise, meaning we should go into our neighbourhoods and seek to realize peace. Bishop Korir exemplified Christ's declaration by posing questions to communities he encountered during the conflict: Do you really have a neighbour? Am I your neighbour? These questions that Bishop Korir posed to members of the warring communities were intended to help them reflect on the need for peaceful co-existence. Moreover, the responses were intended to motivate communities to seek deeper understanding

about what the Church teaches about good neighbourliness. A proper understanding of good neighbourliness is important since reconciliation with God is attached to one's relationship with others. Bishop Korir promoted strong relationships among neighbours as a prerequisite for peace and harmonious co-existence among the ethnically diverse communities.

Moving Warring Communities Forward: *Amani Mashinani* **Approach**
This section begins with a review of literature that broadly speaks to the role of the church in adopting peacebuilding approaches that move communities forward. For purposes of this essay, I discuss *Amani Mashinani* as a reflection of the expected role of the Church at times of crisis. In any given society, such expectations exist that compel institutions to respond to the exigency to support peace during conflict situations. *Amani Mashinani* underlines the role that institutions such as the church play in fostering peace and reconciliation in society. We know that ineffective conflict management methods can lead to resurgence of conflicts (Wafula, 2014).Thus it is important for communities to collectively work together to prevent resurgence of conflict. Wafula (2014) identifies three methods for brokering peace namely submission, confession and peace visits. In a number of ways, *Amani Mashinani* models ways that the three methods of brokering peace work during conflict situations. We will see in this section how Bishop Korir's methodology of grassroot peace initiatives succeeded. Additionally, examining the efforts made to manage conflict is also an opportunity to show how the role of an effective church leadership within conflicting communities is indispensable.

According to Boal (1995), grassroots approaches to peacebuilding fit well with traditional conflict resolution processes since they encourage participation, stimulate dialogue and liberate the participants resulting in healing. Boal (1995) emphasis on healing augurs well with the pastoral agenda of the Church to be at the forefront in peace building. Fathers of the Church have for a long time invited members to be part of the public life by working together for peaceful co-existence. Butler (2005) emphasizes community involvement in an open dialogue, in other words, genuine engagement with neighbouring communities. This emphasis on engagement of the community in the healing process resonates with the Post-genocide Rwanda experience. Breed (2008) discusses the healing process that transitioned Rwanda into reconciliation after the 1994 genocide. Church leaders in Rwanda went out to teach communities to acknowledge horrors of the genocide as a way to move forward. The perpetrators of the genocide were encouraged to accept their wrongdoings and victims to show willingness to forgive in order to open opportunities for dialogue. In this regard, the role of the Church is to extend healing after the community has owned their mistakes. Breed (2008) sees this healing process as a product of genuine and public confession and forgiveness. As discussed, dialogue evokes communities to seek reconciliation and finally forgiveness.

Amani Mashinani **Approach**
In the North Rift, efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation focused on utilizing local cultural traditions. Bishop Korir encouraged warring communities to utilize local traditional conflict management styles to foster strong relationships. Because *Amani Mashinani* operates at the grassroots level to address local needs, it utilizes local traditions that value the participatory sit-down and dialogue technique among the Nandi speaking people known as *Ketebe kok*. This model of neighbourhood dialogue helps the community elders to analyse and understand the causes of their conflict while at the same time acknowledging abuses against one another. *Ketebe*

kok allows members to sit and face one another eye to eye and confront wounds that make their relationship so difficult. By looking at the effects of the conflict in the community, they are able to talk through the causes of the conflict. By sitting together at *kok* (neighbourhood) the community members identify ways to make peace.

Lederach's (1997) notion of relationships building through dialogue offers relevant insights about participatory techniques for use in grassroots peacebuilding. Peacebuilding that has a base rooted in the peoples traditions and experiences has greater potential of lasting than one that has been exported from outside. For example, the opportunity for communities to dialogue together enables them to develop a shared narrative about their experiences of conflict and ways to manage it. *Amani Mashinani* grassroots operation engages communities to talk and listen to one another, acknowledge evils and atrocities done, and take responsibility to develop meaningful relationships. Community members who are trusted with leadership roles ensure that resolutions about proposed plan of action reflect a shared vision of the community. The collective process of identifying problems and solutions through *one-on-one meetings, intra-ethnic* and *inter-ethnic caucuses* exemplify the relevance of building meaningful relationships to advance collaborative peacebuilding (Korir, 2009).

So far, the vision of *Amani Mashinani* as a holistic peacebuilding model is evident in ways it fully immerses itself in many aspects of life of the communities it serves. Dominant peacebuilding theories provide a very systematic dimension of peacebuilding process but rarely integrate cultural and practical indigenous methodologies (Amollo, 2008). As a result, mainstream peacebuilding initiatives tend to ignore the input of local cultures and indigenous knowledge when they adapt top-bottom approaches. Shank & Schirch (2008) observe that empirical literature on models of peacebuilding exists but little is known about informal avenues for peacebuilding in form of art-based techniques such as use of films, music, spoken word and drama. To counter this, *Amani Mashinani* emphasizes a participatory approach that uses a bottom-up process that takes into account indigenous knowledge and practices of the communities known as *Atebetab biik*. These cultural traditions evoke social synergy that binds members who live close to each other to cultivate respect for each other. *Atebetab biik* dictates that what is good should be embraced and any negative energy leading to conflict shunned. I agree with view that peacebuilding work must start from people themselves narrating the past events and perhaps the cause of the conflict (Lederach 1997). The moral teachings of *Atebetab biik* cultivate optimism that when community members' stories are acknowledged, it becomes easy to attain healing and find lasting solution to conflict. *Amani Mashinani* uses strategies that allow warring communities to dig deep into issues that aggravate the conflict.

Communities are encouraged to engage in open communication which is embedded in compassion, sense of community and care in order to bring to the forefront what needs to be addressed publicly. A good example is the Bishop's visit with elders in a remote village called Ketut in Elgeyo Marakwet County. During the visit, elders were invited to speak out their hearts about factors leading to cattle rustling and eventual conflicts. The causes of the conflicts described as 'dumbfounding' (Korir, 2009, p.7) turned out to be the catalyst to stirring warring communities towards the healing process. Additionally, the opportunity given to survivors to tell their own stories and express their feelings about the past, the present and the future bolstered the healing process.

Butler (2005) describes this process of healing in terms of self-narration, self-recognition and self-crafting which elevates how the aspect of 'self' is dependent on others around. This is typical of the Hegelian idea of reciprocal recognition of self that cannot exist without the other. Accordingly, the acknowledgment of the warring parties' stories or perspectives validates their experiences paving the way for critical progress in conflict resolution. The stories that come from the narratives shared during the inter-ethnic meetings are used to construct premises and resolutions that are binding for all the affected parties. Human stories reveal both that which is already known and what could be hidden. *Amani Mashinani* embraces the art of conversations where communities endeavour to talk to and with each other rather than at one another.

Grassroots involvement helps communities to cultivate trust, acceptance and courage towards forging lasting peace. Bishop Korir (2009) recounts that there were moments when survivors of the post-election conflict did not want to let their past hold them from moving forward. *Amani Mashinani* provided an opportunity for genuine dialogue. It enabled them to open up about challenges encountered in the communities. That is explained by the fact that the peace process succeeded when the victims of conflict appreciated the use of sacraments such as penance and reconciliation. The commitment that penance brings in the life of a penitent is always binding and evokes fear to do evil again. For example, during a peace meeting at Ketut, a multi-ethnic community that had for a long time been in conflict was able to identity poverty and joblessness among the youth as one of the causes of conflict. The community found a solution from within and collaborated with CDE to start local income generating activities. The youth were financially supported to start *'Bodaboda'* business (informal form of transportation using small motor bikes and bicycles). In this community, a shared vision to acknowledge the importance of identifying problems and solutions contributed to brokering peace on terms agreed upon by the concerned community members. The community learnt about the benefits of collaboration among themselves and with other parties in this regard the CDE. Engaging youth in constructive service to the community keeps them from participating in violent acts.

Another example relevant here is the role that Bishop Korir played in brokering peace by holding peace meetings among warring communities on neutral grounds. For example, the meeting held at Kapchemutwa in July 2008 was applauded as a major accomplishment due to the fact that all avenues had been exhausted to broker peace. On many occasions, Bishop Korir was successful in his endeavours with the local communities, He embodied his role as a Church leader, and community member as well as his awareness of local traditions to introduce the importance of community involvement in grassroots peacebuilding. He did not enter the community with the intent to impose his religious views about peacebuilding without getting input from the community. This non-denominational approach positioned *Amani Mashinani* as a safe space that enabled communities to become part of solutions to challenges encountered.

Community Involvement
When communities work together towards finding solutions to their problems they also learn to communicate for peace. This entails communicating about the importance of community involvement in defining effectiveness of grassroots peacebuilding. Stein (2001) argues that communities play a critical role in participating in processes to find binding peace agreements. As already noted, *Amani Mashinani* facilitates the sense of community by creating unique

opportunities to seek agreements. The uniqueness of the model lies in ways it recognizes the fact that warring communities have the capacity to explore possibilities for finding alternative solutions to their challenges. Even in their deeply rooted differences, people still find value in cultural traditions and religious values as well as give respect to the elders including religious leaders. So far, it is evident that relational and interactive aspects of *Amani Mashinani* enable communities to address their circumstances as guided by local cultural and religious values. Bishop Korir's involvement with communities from diverse ethnic, religious, economic and cultural backgrounds offers lessons about the non-partisan role of religious leaders in peacebuilding. We learn that religious persons have great potential to be conflict managers and, if well harnessed, can help generate lasting solutions to conflicts (Republic of Kenya, 2008).

Processes of peacebuilding must encourage warring communities to envision healing and reconciliation as intertwined. There are many players who can perform different roles in facilitating a deliberate plan for healing and reconciliation. These players can be local, national or international depending on how conflicting parties agree to proceed. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, *Amani Mashinani* is an invitation to the community to become the change they wish to see in their community. As a grassroots peacebuilding model, it encourages locals to make commitment to positive change without necessarily involving external players in order to prioritize healing and reconciliation from within the community. The philosophy of *Amani Mashinani* resonates with Lederach's (1997) view that the church has a special place in building relationships to promote healing and reconciliation. In this case, the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret committed itself to creating an enabling environment where warring communities can create meaningful relationships. It fulfils the mission of the Church as defined in *Nehemiah*12:25 to provide hospitality in the face of conflict. *Amani Mashinani* embraces both local cultural traditions and rituals as well as Catholic traditions to support ideals of grassroots engagement for peaceful co-existence among communities. Through its participatory approach to peacebuilding, community members are encouraged to make a commitment to each other and their community. The best practice that the Catholic tradition brings into peacebuilding is the sacrament of confession. The Catholic sacramental theology makes a rich connection between confession and healing. The sacrament is about genuine commitment to making amendments of past personality, attitude, perception character and behaviour. The process that goes into making commitment not to sin again means for the penitent a complete departure from wrongdoing and commitment to righteousness. *Amani Mashinani* serves as a space for religious actors in the peacebuilding process to locate these teachings within the context of healing and reconciliation as understood in the local cultural setting. Consequently, religious actors in the post-conflict context are key in facilitating rituals that symbolically communicate a sense of transformation for peace and reconciliation. *Amani Mashinani* welcomes rituals to help warring communities to collectively work towards healing and reconciliation. For example, the Kapsait Heights peace initiative which is held every first day of the year re-affirms Communities' commitment to peace. At the Kapsait peace meeting, the whole community is taken through confession of all the people present. At times individuals are encouraged to find ways of making peace on their own, with themselves and their neighbours. A person is helped to arrive at new truths through self-examination and self-evaluation.

In most cases, conventional methods imported from outside are never well-received in all post-conflict contexts. Boege (2011) laments that although western models have become so

predominant, indigenous knowledge that can assist people to heal continues to be ignored. This trend can be changed. So far, I have discussed some activities of *Amani Mashinani* that demonstrate the relevance of indigenous ways of knowing in creating an atmosphere that motivates communities to work together towards peaceful co-existence. Most of the communities where *Amani Mashinani* has engaged transformative community-centred approaches to healing and reconciliation have benefited immensely from the rich tradition of the local culture and religious values that promote peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion
The *Amani Mashinani* is an example of grassroots peacebuilding model that compliments collective efforts that combine indigenous wisdom of peacebuilding with sacramental theology and scripture to bring about healing of relationships. The culture of communities in Elgeyo Marakwet and Uasin Gishu counties makes it possible to coalesce rich cultural traditions and Catholic theology for healing and reconciliation. Traditional rituals and ceremonies performed by the communities were intended to appease God and the ancestors so as to restore order and harmony. Overall, one major lesson learned about the uniqueness of *Amani Mashinani* as a grassroots peacebuilding model is that as long as the pursuit for peace comes from the people at the grassroots level it is bound to succeed.

Amani Mashinani highlights the role of Bishop Korir as a prophet of peace. In this sense the prophet is not necessarily one that predicts the future but one who has a gift to read the signs of the times under the light of the Holy Spirit. The Bishop exercised his duty and the privilege of proclaiming peace through a grassroots approach supported by local culture. Though this was not easy, as seen from the likes of Prophet Jeremiah who was thrown into a pit, the process of peace will continue to remain the task of the Church in which the community forms a part.

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