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Susan Kilonzo  
*Maseno University, Kenya*

Kennedy Onkware  
*Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology*

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**Gendered Conflict Resolution: The Role of Women in *Amani Mashinani's* Peacebuilding Processes in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya**

***Susan Kilonzo, PhD.***

*Associate Professor, Department of Religion, Theology & Philosophy  
School of Arts and Social Sciences  
Maseno University, Kenya*

&

***Kennedy Onkware, PhD.***

*Associate Professor, Department of Emergency Management Studies  
School of Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance  
Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology*

**Abstract**

*The role of women in peacebuilding is acknowledged by many stakeholders central in peace work. While this is so, there are still concerns about what we know about women's involvement in peacebuilding structures established by non-state actors. Drawing from *Amani Mashinani (Peace at Grassroots)* peacebuilding model initiated by the Catholic Church in Kenya's North Rift region, we examine the role of women in processes of conflict resolution in Uasin Gishu County. Suggestions to support women's participation will be discussed.*

**Introduction**

The findings of this essay are part of a larger study, generously funded by the Templeton Foundation, through the Nagel Institute for the study of World Christianity, under the general theme of *African Theological Advance*, to examine the role of the Catholic Church in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes in Kenya's Rift Valley. We draw from *Amani Mashinani* grassroots peacebuilding model to examine the role of women in conflict resolution processes. Examining the role of women in *Amani Mashinani* entails analyzing the positions they hold, their roles in decision making and the activities they engage in that contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Specifically, we focus on the experiences of Kikuyu and Kalenjin women in Uasin Gishu County, where the model is in operation under the auspice of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret.

Theoretically, we are guided by Paul Lederach's (1999) approach of peace from below, and the relevance of looking at peacebuilding processes with the lens of those who experience conflicts, their stories, cultural contexts and their visions. Additionally, we are informed by literature showing that even though experiences of women in conflict-ridden areas exist, specific case studies (Guyo, 2017) that speak to their involvement in conflict resolution process is still lacking. In the following section, we review the history of women's role in conflict to develop a context to discuss their role in peacebuilding.

**The role of women in conflicts: Historical context**

The history of the involvement of women in conflicts is diverse. Women play both positive and negative roles in conflicts as victims; combatants; peace activists; formal peace brokers; coping and surviving actors; supporters of their fighting husbands and sons; and, as household heads, among other roles (Lihamba, 2003). During the Rwanda genocide, for instance, "women

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participated passively, by cheering killers on, looting property, and denouncing victims; or more actively, by working with attack groups and personally assaulting targeted individuals” (Andler et. al. 2007:222; also see Hogg 2010). On a positive note, during the Mau Mau war that led to Kenya’s independence, women were “co-opted to roles such as warriors, decision makers and judges” (Kanogo,1987: 79). Cook (2006) argues that, literature on women’s participation in conflict resolution and peace processes takes two approaches. First, their representation and participation at high political levels, and in decision-making mechanisms for conflict resolution, including the ongoing debates in international agencies for long-term conflict prevention. This requires investment in cultures of peace along with formal and informal institutions for non-violent conflict resolution. Second, a disparate collection on women’s grassroots peacemaking initiatives, which is likely to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of alternative solutions to conflict, and bolster actions addressing varying needs to help sustain and maintain peace over time. In Rwanda, after the genocide, women were active in: resettling the displaced; restoration and provision of security; provision of justice; active participation in Gacaca; and, spearheading socio-economic initiatives (Mutamba and Izabiliza, 2005; Schliesser, 2018).

Literature has also shown that women suffer more than the men who are able to run, fight, or masquerade as perpetrators to escape the effects of the conflicts. Cheldelin (2011) observes that women are most affected when sexual assault and exploitation are employed as tools of war. Moreover, women in the conflict zones suffer from victimization, alienation, prolonged emotional trauma and unwanted pregnancies. As culturally designated caregivers, women must struggle to support their families and keep their households together when conflict occurs. This is worsened by the fact that husbands and sons who are co-opted into wars are unable to provide for their families. Some die in the process. Given that women are the face of war and violence, is the same true of peacebuilding processes? In what ways, if at all, are women participants at the peacebuilding table? An analysis of the *Amani Mashinani* model will shade light on ways to understand the nuances of peacebuilding as far as women are concerned. But first, we comment on what has been documented about the role of women in peacebuilding.

### **The role of women in Peacebuilding**

Throughout history, women have played a big role in fostering peace in various communities. The 31<sup>st</sup> October 2000 International community recognized the importance of women’s participation in creating the conditions for permanent peace leading to the United Nations (UN) Security Council adopting the landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which acknowledged the critical role women, could play in preventing and resolving conflicts, negotiating peace, participating in peacekeeping and in humanitarian response and post-conflict peacebuilding. The Resolution underlines that women and men have different experiences both during and post-conflict, and that women have a unique set of challenges related to peacebuilding and security (Beever, 2010). As culturally designated caregivers, women struggle to support their families and keep their households together in times of crises, a role that exposes them to further abuses especially when their husbands and sons are caught up in war (Kambogah, 2011).

Pratt and Richter-Devroe (2011) argue that women contribute to peace at different levels in society including micro, meso and macro levels. At the micro level, women make informal

contributions, which have been highlighted and declared invaluable to resolving conflict and building sustainable peace. However, at the meso and macro levels that involve formal peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives, women continue to be ignored or marginalized and their involvement in formal missions and talks remains low (Diaz, 2010; Strickland and Duvvury, 2003). The trend needs to change given the impact of conflict and war on women such as loss of lives and property, displacement and exposure to gender-based violence. Widowhood for instance, exposes women to challenges of raising children single-handedly; and, to cultural practices including forced inheritance. It is undeniable that women suffer psychological trauma from all these atrocities (Kabongah, 2011).

Despite the odds, Kabongah (2011) sees women as resilient in the prevention and management of conflicts through their engagement in community dialogues, mediation, dissemination of civic education, and income generating activities. In this essay, we examine the structure and the role of *Amani Mashinani* in providing opportunities for women to participate in grassroots conflict resolution activities. This examination is key in explaining efforts of the non-state actors in peacebuilding, and more specifically, how these actors create spaces for women to take part in peace activities. We contextualize this effort within the understanding that the quest for peace in Africa is largely driven by the determination to prevent, manage, or reverse the traumatic and destructive effects of violent conflict by those who experience these effects. As Nnoli (1998) observes, conflicts are an everyday occurrence. Likewise, we believe involvement of women in the everyday activities in their communities should be part of finding solutions to conflict. As we engage in this work, we are cognizant of the fact that the effects of war on women and children are devastating and this is no different in Uasin Gishu. With a myriad of cultural, social, economic and political challenges, many women struggle to participate effectively in the affairs of their societies (Maina, 2012). Further, we are also aware that in places where women have been pivotal in organizing communities to collectively seek solutions to conflict and build strong communities, such efforts have not garnered the deserved prominence. As it is the case of the Igbo women of southeastern Nigeria, such efforts have not been accorded any formal or official recognition of peacebuilding nor have the women been adequately represented in official peace talks aimed at resolving any major communal conflict (Ngozi, 2015). It is important we note that our argument is not to blindly seek the prominence of women at the national level. We are arguing for the recognition of women as playing significant role in fighting all forms of structural violence at all levels. Could *Amani Mashinani* just be a model conduit for advancing the participation of women in peacebuilding?

We examine the involvement of women within the twelve steps that form the structure of *Amani Mashinani* grassroots peacebuilding model. Based on our discussions of the model, we will draw conclusions that move towards a conceptual understanding of women's empowerment agenda for conflict resolution. It is our hope that the findings will inform ways to support opportunities and limitations of women's participation in peacebuilding processes at community level.

### **Study Context and Methodology**

As earlier note, this essay utilizes data that is part of a larger study examining the role of *Amani Mashinani* grassroots peacebuilding model in Kenya's Rift Valley region. Specifically, we focus on Kikuyu and Kalenjin women in Uasin Gishu County. The study was conducted in 2018/19, largely among the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities, who have a long history of resource

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rivalry in the Rift Valley region (See Klopp 2001 and Lynch 2006). The history and nature of conflicts among the Kikuyu and Kalenjin around Eldoret is that these two warring communities are not strangers to each other (Mutua and Kilonzo, 2016). These two communities have lived together before independence, but later divided by the divisive nativist ideology of ethnic politics.

The Kikuyu are known to have largely occupied the Central part of Kenya, while the Kalenjin are largely found in the Rift Valley region. A number of Kikuyu however moved and settled in the Rift after purchasing land that the Europeans occupied Valley (Wachege 1992 and Wanjohi 1997). Unfortunately, this did not sit well with the original occupants of the region – the Kalenjin Valley. The Kalenjin, unlike the Kikuyu are regarded as pastoralists, although with economic challenges and climate change, some have resulted to farming. Among the Kalenjin, whereas women are relegated household chores, men are the custodians of community security, and are in charge of family and community property. Men and young boys graze cattle while women and young girls perform domestic roles. The Kalenjin are cattle keepers and the community has had a long history of conflicts resulting from cattle rustling and land conflicts over water and pasture for their animals.

The history of the Gikuyu is weaved around the myth of origin, where God gave the first man and woman, Gikuyu and Mumbi, nine daughters. There were no sons. It was only after prayer that they received sons who married the nine daughters, and from the nine daughters, the nine clans that we have to date were named (Kenyatta 1938). From this naming, the Kikuyu community was traditionally, a matriarchal society. In the traditional Kikuyu community, women were leaders. They are said to have domineered in a way that they even practiced polyandry. Consequently, “the men ousted them by impregnating them, and taking over power at the time they were expectant and physically weak to fight men” (Kenyatta, 1938:4). If this is the case, it does not seem to have diminished the power of a Kikuyu woman. They are known to be agile. The stereotype around them is that they work hard and they are known to punish husbands who are sluggish.

In view of the conflict between the two communities, Kambogah (2011) argues that there might never be a single source of conflict because of the multi-dimensional nature of issues. Nonetheless, existing literature about the main source of conflict in the region has been documented as land and cattle rustling (See Mahmoud, 2011; Scilling, Opiyo & Scheffran, 2016; de Vries, Leslie, and McCabe, 2006); and gender trajectories of the conflicts (Kaimba, Njehia, & Guliye, 2011; Kimaiyo, 2016). Generally, literature shows that the main causes of conflicts in the region are nativism, contentions about land ownership, and legitimization of willing-buyer and willing-seller.

The information discussed in this essay draws mainly from qualitative data that was obtained through ethnographic case studies that employed key informant interviews, observation and focus group discussions. The questions asked through these methods took account of forms of ethnic tensions, peacebuilding activities and women's involvement in such activities. We were also able to gather information on the histories and the efforts by the various actors to involve women in peace activities. Our research participants included women, community elders, caucus

secretaries, chiefs and church leaders. We held focus group discussions with the caucus committee members and women.

### **Peacebuilding at the Grassroots: *Amani Mashinani* Model**

We begin our analysis of *Amani Mashinani* model in context of other peacebuilding models. Coning (2013) argues that most peacebuilding models concentrate on addressing the remote causes of conflicts as a lasting solution to conflicts. This view is based on the presumption that peacebuilding is about dealing with the reasons why people fight in the first place. It is also about supporting societies to manage their differences and conflicts without resorting to violence. This means, a broad range of measures, which can take place before, during and after conflict should be taken into account to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict (Keating and Knight, 2004; Ponzio, 2007). Research shows that the priorities associated with orthodox recovery models have little applicability in today's conflicts and require a retooling of strategies (Keating and Knight, 2004). New models are therefore emerging for post-conflict economic recovery. Paris' (2006) "Institutionalization before liberalization" model and the early recovery approach (Chandran et. al., 2008) are based on filling the relief to development gap and seek to modernize post-conflict recovery efforts through use of sustainable and conflict sensitive methods. The *Amani Mashinani* model that we explore here, goes beyond these models because it is completely integrated into people's daily experiences, feelings, stories, and truthful desires to identify causes of the conflict and ways to manage them.

One cannot contextualize the *Amani Mashinani* model without understanding the origin and nature of the conflict that influenced its origination. The model is an initiative of the local church leadership at the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret and local communities impacted by conflict. Mutua and Kilonzo (2016:274) show that the *Amani Mashinani* model of community centered peacebuilding was initiated to bring peace among warring ethnic groups in the North Rift Valley. The journey to finding peace at the grassroots began at the start of the ethnic clashes that affected the region since the advent of multi-party politics in Kenya in 1992. Our study participants indicate that the politics of "*ondoa madoadoa*", Swahili for "remove or uproot the aliens", which since the advent of multi-partyism, was a political slogan aimed at evicting those who did not "belong" in certain regions of the Rift Valley and Central Kenya.

At the time, Kenya had about 42 tribes and the ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), led by the then President Daniel arap Moi, who was a Kalenjin, averted any form of competition through provoking the political leaders and masses to evict those who were seen as a threat to his continued leadership (Klopp, 2002). The politics of "*ondoa madoadoa*" was therefore meant to ethnically cleanse regions and destabilize any strong ethnic blocks that seemed to be a threat to the government survival during the elections. The slogan was also used as an instrument of instigating fear on the opposition. It is during this time that the first ethnic violence and cleansing happened Central, Nyanza and Rift Valley regions (Klopp, 2002; Lonsdale, 1994). Against this backdrop, we examine the twelve steps of the model to identify the role of women in grassroots peacebuilding. We extend the implication of the term *role* to mean, the decision-making powers women have within the activities they engage in, and the challenges encountered.

### **The Place of Women in the Amani Mashinani's Twelve Steps**

#### *a) Analysis, Intervention and Interruption; and, Protection, Sanctuary and Relief*

These two steps relate more to understanding of the conflict and humanitarian assistance. At this stage, the Church was largely in control. It took the initiative to analyze the nature, extent, intensity and causes of the conflicts; and, provision of humanitarian help at the time of crisis.

In the aftermath of the post-election violence in 2007/8, protection and sanctuary was offered to the internally displaced persons, mostly of Kikuyu ethnic group. The victims were mainly women, children and the youth. Though there were no official disaggregated statistics for men and women seeking refuge at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Eldoret, the mere presence of a large number of women at the Cathedral was indicative of women's victimization by the violence. The Church became a safe space for women to share their experiences of the violence, take care of the victims of the violence and displaced children and elderly. Once women were 'safe' at the Cathedral away from the violence in their communities, they helped with the cooking and serving in the tents erected to accommodate victims as the Church leadership began the negotiations for peace. In its first two steps, the *Amani Mashinani* Model exemplifies the importance of offering sanctuary to victims of violence and by so doing support them to participate in preparing them for peacebuilding efforts. In this stage, women have the potential to become key players in peacebuilding once there are given adequate support to deal with the trauma of violence.

#### *b) One-to-One Meetings; and, Small Group to Small Group Meetings*

The initial encounter with violence and the needs of the displaced people forced the late Bishop Korir to think through ways in which he could provide lasting solutions to the conflicts. One of the approaches used to interrupt the violence was the formation of *One-to-One Meetings* which morphed into Small Group Meetings. For the one-on-one meetings, Bishop Korir targeted the opinion and highly respected community leaders such as elders and chiefs. The meetings with these leaders were held separately initially until some trust was developed between the groups. The idea behind these meetings was to start off discussions that would lead to peace talks and chart a roadmap to help the two communities live in peace and harmony. Given the fact that the meetings were organized to involve elders and government administrative leaders, women were excluded because they did not occupy these positions. The position of elders in the two communities; and, chiefs is mainly held by men. We did not come across a woman representative to the Council of elders or a female chief. In these initial steps of the model, women were neither aware of the proceedings of the meetings nor part of the discussions.

The challenge that Bishop Korir and the peacebuilding team had to overcome was to disrupt patriarchal patterns that relegated women from peacebuilding activities. Bishop Korir seemed to understand that cultural observances and the respect accorded to men needed to be maintained if any meaningful resolutions were to be made in this volatile environment. At the same time, he was also aware of the traditional roles of women and their strengths in the peacebuilding process. This understanding is manifested in his efforts to negotiate with the male leaders for women's inclusion in the peacebuilding processes. This was done through persuasion and use of local cultural values that honor women as mothers, sisters, wives and caretakers of the family and community. Dismantling some aspects of patriarchy helped to draw a new peace agenda that

opened opportunities for men and the youth to collaborate with women in forming rehabilitation groups to conduct peace education along the border of the two communities.

In Kapteldon and Yamumbi, in the aftermath of 2007/8 elections, a meeting with leaders and a number of women and youth was held under a tree next to Lemook river that borders the two communities. This venue became a symbol of peace that the communities began to popularly refer to it as “the tree of peace”.

*c) Sharing of food*

In African and other world cultures, the act of sharing in a meal is revered as an act that unites people. Korir (2009:16) states,

Traditionally in our local cultures, when former enemies ate together it symbolized reconciliation and healing. Sharing a meal cemented an agreement to be peaceful to one another. For we do not like to eat with people we dislike, but if we do, it forces us to be civil, at least for the length of the meal.

This cultural value of sharing food revealed the importance of life over violence suffered by both communities. Our research participants in Yamumbi, Kapteldon and Burnt Forest agreed that one thing they had in common was their view of food as a symbol of life and peace. The participation of Kikuyu and Kalenjin women in preparing the meals for the communities to eat together reaffirmed the need for unity and reconciliation as illustrated in the statement that “You cannot prepare a group meal together quietly. You have to say things to each other – whether good or bad. You must talk. This talking is the beginning of peace”.

While the ritual of sharing food was viewed as a noble idea, nonetheless, the setting in which it was to be performed was marred with distrust. The effort to mediate the two communities into participating in the ritual and to build strong trusting bonds was facilitated by the Bishop and elders. Despite the challenges encountered including distrust, and issues of safety, women remained committed to the cause.

Some cases of women being ‘captured’ and forced to cook for the ‘warriors’ were reported. An example given was about a Kikuyu woman said to have negotiated for her daughter’s release from the warriors and in turn offered herself to join other women to cook for the Kalenjin warriors as they fought Kikuyus during the PEV. The meals, whether serving the purpose of reconciling the warring groups, or as negotiation strategy for the release of the captives, ultimately, all reveal a selfless commitment of women in the peace process.

*d) Intra-ethnic meetings; and, Airing of Grievances*

These two separate steps allowed the warring groups to each identify their grievances and then air them during an inter-ethnic meeting facilitated by Bishop Korir and his staff. The intra-ethnic meetings allowed community members to anonymously list their grievances on a piece of paper to be handed to the bishop in a sealed envelope. The indirect approach to managing the conflict was deemed necessary to avoid further direct confrontation between the warring groups. While the role of the Bishop, the elders and male community members was dominant at this stage, the participation of women was minimal even though they were invited to take part in the deliberations.



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Notably, the dominant role of men as the 'go-between' the communities and the church during the initial stages of the peace talks relegated the role of women. As our male study participants from Yamumbi/Kapteldon and Burnt Forest reckoned on this disparity, it was a man's responsibility to obtain a lasting solution to peace and to protect the community. This cultural expectation explains why men took it upon themselves to take part in the initial peacebuilding processes. However, this response is not to be understood as endangering the role of women in peacebuilding. Their active participation and commitment to the process is evident in peace connector projects, psycho-social support and monitoring processes as will be discussed later in this essay.

*e) Preparation of Agenda and Inter-Ethnic Meetings*

This step of the Amani Mashinani model is an invitation to engage warring communities in difficult conversations about their grievances and negative perceptions about each other. The preparation of the agenda about how to move forward as a community was based on discussions following presentation of the grievances identified and spoken openly during the inter-ethnic meetings. The major grievances identified by community members from both sides included the following: *land and settlement challenges; ethnic politics; cultural differences between the two communities; lack of employment among youth; poor local administration leadership; naming of places using ethnic-affiliated names in the disputed region; and, impunity of the locals based on beliefs they held about each other.* These 'problems' were discussed to define activities and roles that both men and women would play to make peace in the community. The active participation of women in the listing of the challenges that the two communities faced was lauded. Women were in no doubt silent about the issues affecting the community because they were victims of the conflict.

*f) Reporting Back and Caucusing with Communities*

This step of the Amani Mashinani model is significant in determining how the community moves forward. It requires community members to caucus about concerns identified during the interethnic meetings. The role of peace committees also called caucus committees is crucial in facilitating the reporting back process and the way forward. These local peace committees were constituted at village level, and coordinated by an elected person at the village level who liaised with the chief (leader of a location made up of different villages); and the Church to support peace activities. The purpose of these peace committees is to help in preventing retribution and promoting community/village dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation processes. In Yamumbi/Kapteldon, the peace committee helped coordinate members of both communities to collaborate in government's "Operation *Rudi Nyumbani*" ("Operation Return Home"). The communities worked together to build houses for people returning from the Internally Displaced People camps. This communal reparation – repairing and restoring the harm – shows us that while reconciliation is a symbolic effort, it is also a practical venture. In regards to the role of women in the process, we found that most participants in the meetings were male. The absence of women at the initial meetings was not clearly explained other than general attributes made about women as care-givers, nurturers and victims of violence.

However, the Olare Village peace committee- caught our attention because it was led and coordinated by a woman, Njoki (not her real name) who is also the secretary of all caucus groups at St. Patrick Parish, in Burnt Forest. The leadership by a female member of the community

revealed a revered place of women in the peacebuilding process. Njoki's aptitude to mobilize community members received accolades from both men and women. Male members of the community explained that at a time of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, all that the community needs is an able person who can lead the team towards a direction where they can find peace. Others likened it to the process of war. One said: "the peacebuilding process is like war. If you do not have a good leader when fighting, then you can expect defeat. Similarly, if there lacks leadership in resolving conflicts and building peace, then the process and efforts will be futile".

Lived experiences by Kikuyu women like Njoki reveal the complicated nature of the conflict and even more, factors that derail the peacebuilding process. For example, Njoki, a woman leader in her 30s was born and raised in Burnt Forest after her parents inherited a piece of land legally purchased by her grandfather. Her husband migrated from Central Kenya to settle in the Burnt Forest area where the Kalenjin claim 'ownership' of the land and accuse the Kikuyu of 'illegal' occupation. The tension between who 'owns' and 'belongs' to the land has resulted into loss of property and lives, and temporarily evictions as witnessed during the 2007/8 PEV

How then does the history of the land and its consequences impact the role of women in peacebuilding? We pose this question due to the fact that women seem to play a limited role in major decision-making processes including leadership. Njoki was the only woman in leadership position to respond to us about the involvement of Kikuyu and Kalenjin women in the peacebuilding process. She affirmed her position as a leader by embodying the determination of women to live in peace. In addition to sharing her own experiences of violence and desire for peace, she also told stories about women's experiences narrated during the peace committee meetings. For example, we heard a story about a Kikuyu woman who, after attending a peace committee meeting, refrained from using violence on a Kalenjin individual she suspected of fueling violent attacks towards Kikuyus. Her decision to seek reconciliation with her 'enemy' and the community at large is indicative of women's desire for reconciliation and peace. Thus the significance of women's leadership in peacebuilding lies in the desire for peaceful co-existence. In this step of the model, we see a positive response by women even though it is in small numbers. The few who are persistent for peace offer community members' lessons about courage, determination, humility, selflessness and commitment to the community.

#### *g) Peace Connector Projects*

From the name, these projects co-joined communities once divided by conflicts. They are the outcome of well-managed interethnic caucuses. The initial connector peace projects and activities initiated in the aftermath of 2007/8 PEV include sharing of planting seeds, food, goat's kids, and farm tools. Other activities targeted the whole community such as building bridges and roads and also those specific to improving women's socio-economic status in Yamumbi/Kapteldon and Burnt Forest. Popular women activities included merry-go-rounds, table banking and social events like weddings and dowry payments.

In evaluating the role of women in the peace connector project, one sees an increased participation in the coordination and implementation of activities supported by the Diocese. For example, the goat rearing project served as a way to break ethnic animosities among the Kalenjin and Kikuyu women. Women would share in the produce (kids and milk) of the goats. Similarly,

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in Timboroa, women were actively involved in agricultural activities where the harvest was shared among with neighbors, preferably of a different ethnic group. This was an indication of breaking ethnic barriers; and ultimately ethnic differences that brought animosity between the two communities.

*h) Social Contract; and, Monitoring and Ongoing Development of the Agenda*

These last two steps are meant to heal trauma, encourage continued dialogues, and monitor progress of activities. Social Contract allows for community members to enter into a pact that implies that they have gone through the conflicts, have resolved them to a certain extent, and are now willing to find a place for psychological and social support. In other words, social contract means that the community members are getting into some form of agreement that allows them to live in peace.

Women play a big role in providing psychosocial support for community members affected by the violence. In Burnt Forest, we learned that the psychosocial support groups, led by Njoki, worked to reunite several families that had been torn apart by the conflict. They helped re-establish relationships pulled apart by the displacement; enabled children to return to school; and at the same time, encouraged reconciliation and forgiveness among community members through the different peace connector projects and activities in the area. Equally, women were instrumental in the building of trust, not just among each other, but also among their families and the community at large. The Diocese's psychosocial support group in Kapsoya in Eldoret has become a safe space for women to share their lived experiences. Within these groups, trust is rebuilt and new healthy relationships begin to emerge.

The discussions in Burnt Forest showed us that there is still much more to be achieved under this last stage, and especially getting to a point where the members can confidently indicate that there is a social contract in place to hold the communities responsible to each other. Both communities seem to agree that performing traditional oath is symbolic of unity, an act that would not allow any of the members to "raise a hand against the other". However, there is a dilemma, will women be able to participate in the oath?

**The Place of Women in *Amani Mashinani's* Peacebuilding Processes**

Overall, women are aware of the consequences of the conflict inflicted on them, their families and community at large. Additionally, they know the disproportionate share of burden they bear during and after conflicts notably loss of family members, sexual violence and displacement. The 12 step process of *Amani Mashinani* does not extensively involve women. From the beginning, the model seems to favour men's participation due to the positions they hold in society as dictated by culture. As a result, women's participation in peacebuilding is relegated into traditional roles that is if women do not take the initiative to demand space in the peacebuilding processes. It would be expected that the Church and community leaders would make deliberate effort to have women in the decision-making processes of *Amani Mashinani*. Though in reality, women, in times of conflict seem to take the decision-making roles at home while taking care of the children, the sick and the elderly, becoming household heads (Kambogah, 2011), *Amani Mashinani* does not take into consideration these roles that could inform its peacebuilding processes. Perhaps, the patriarchal perspective of leadership within the community and the Church is to blame.

We noted earlier that the cultural context relegated women to traditional roles such as cooking, growing food, providing psychosocial care. Nonetheless, women like Njoki, and other women we met in Burnt Forest have taken up leadership roles in peace committees which would have otherwise been a reserve for men. If the local culture is to be blamed for the paltry participation of women in *Amani Mashinani*, then communities need to be reminded of the traditional roles that women played in protecting society and ensuring its prosperity. We learned about some cultural practices which we deem relevant in elevating women's recognition in peacebuilding processes in the region. For example, among the Pokot, if women do not want their men to go to war, they would untie the "*legetio*" - a belt that is used when a woman gives birth to reshape their stomach. When the belts are untied, the belief is that men are not protected and it would be too risky to start war. Among the Kalenjin, the women would carry green grass or leaves to communicate to their men that they did not want them to fight. In the two communities, respected elderly women played advisory roles in times of conflicts and misunderstandings. Even though the elderly women were not part of the decision-making council, their advice shaped the decisions made by men elders.

On the overall, the model is a great initiative that builds its strengths from the people's cultures, experiences, narratives and will. The challenge seems to stem from the ability of the Church and community members to strike a balance on the leadership and participation of women.

### **Conclusion**

The participation of women in *Amani Mashinani* may be not as active as the men but it is evidently an expression of their desire for peaceful co-existence in their communities. There is hope from the perspective of women who have so far been active in the peacebuilding processes. The cultural and structural hindrances that constrain women's participation can be addressed with more recognition of the traditional roles women played in protecting society. Also, *Amani Mashinani* has potential to include women in its different steps instead of relegating them to traditional roles. Opening up *Amani Mashinani* activities equally to women is a sure way of encouraging active participation and success of grassroots peacebuilding. This will take some effort on the part of women themselves, the Church leadership, and community elders. For future generations, the Church, local community leaders and the few women leaders have the opportunity to make *Amani Mashinani* a model of grassroots peacebuilding that is fully inclusive of girls and women. There should be roles created for girls and women to become key players in grassroots peacebuilding processes.

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