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Ameru Indigenous Peace Building Approaches Used in Mitigation of Intra-ethnic Land Conflict

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Abstract:
The purpose of this study was to assess the Ameru indigenous peace building approaches used in mitigation of intra-ethnic land conflict. The study was built on Psycho-cultural conflict theory that incorporates both individuals and identity groups of individuals as the units of analysis, aimed at creating sustainable and long-lasting peace in the midst of intra-ethnic land conflict among the Ameru people. The study adopted a cross section design approach and systematic random sampling method used to select a sample of 251 congregate leaders. Synod Bishops as well as leaders of the Njuri Ncheke council of elders were interviewed. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The study revealed that all Njuri Ncheke elders were aware of intra-ethnic land conflicts in Meru region. The conflicts were as a result of Incitement from politician to the people of their tribe, land grabbing, border disputes among sub-tribes, corruption in the land offices and lack of correct procedures of titling and cattle rustling among other issues brought land conflict issues in the region. Njuri Ncheke uses negotiation and dialogue as a method to settle land conflict. The findings of this study will help the policy makers to come up with policies that can stop the conflicts, NGOs and other peace actors in addressing land ethnic conflicts and other related issues. The study findings will also contribute to theory and practice in intra-ethnic land conflict mitigation which most scholars will write a conflict theoretical perspective rather than psycho-cultural perspective. This study treats psycho-cultural perspective as important way of establishing Methodist church peace building approaches and mitigation of intra-ethnic land conflict at grassroots level due to autochthony and identity knowledge of Ameru people of Meru County in eastern Kenya.

Keywords*: peace building approaches, indigenous, intra-ethnic, land conflict, Ameru people*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Ethnic land conflict is an intrinsic component of the socio-political realities of multi-ethnic states in the World. Ethnizing of politics and politicization of ethnic communities are common and have diffused mutual tolerance, and sharpened ethnic consciousness among various communities. The processes of socio-economic change, the ethnic dimensions of the power structure, and the policies, strategies as well as tactics adopted by various governments in response to the urges and aspirations of different ethnic groups provide a ground for a clear understanding of ethnicity, ethnic conflict and their dimensions (Mohammed, 1996). The concept of ethnicity has also become a critical variable in the formation and reformation of states. In fact, some scholars such as Jeffrey (1986); Austin (1994) and Phadris (1989) have argued that even the partition of colonial India into the two new states of India and Pakistan had its roots in the ethnic distinctiveness of the two nations.

Ethnic land conflicts according to Weiner (2003) are common phenomenon in most countries around the world. In Sri Lanka for instance, ethnic land conflict has been ongoing and has existed as part of a linear historic process. Weiner asserts that, ethnic land conflict has been a common phenomenon in India, since India is characterized by more ethnic and religious groups than most countries in the world. The Assam ethnic conflicts in India attracted large attention where three cultural groups have been in collision; the Assamene, the Bengalis and the tribal, which are the localized communities.

Land issues in Africa have been a primary source of conflict for decades (Kangoi, 1974). The varied socio-cultural perspectives and ethnic differences are associated with the causes of some of the land ethnic conflicts in Africa. Studies by

scholars such as, Solenberg (2000) and Eriksson & Wallenstein *et al* (2004) pointed out that the majority of land ethnic conflicts has been witnessed in Countries in Africa. The Great Lakes region (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and Democratic Republic of Congo) and the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eriteria and Somali) have witnessed ethnic-related conflicts with Rwanda having the largest share. In Rwanda in 1994, for example, more than half a million people lost their lives and more than three million were forced to flee to Zaire (Kinoti, 1994). This was a result of ethnic tensions caused by accumulation of land by the Tutsi chiefs led to the rise of the Hutu power, an ideology that stressed that the Tutsi intended to enslave the Hutus and hence had to be resisted at all cost.

In Kenya, there have been a number of ethnic conflicts over time (Ogot, 1997; Rutto, 2000; Maina, 2000; Gecaga, 2002; Kahumbi, 2004). The Rift Valley region, for instance, which is the largest region in Kenya is inhabited by different ethnic groups, including, Agikuyu, Kalenjin, Pokot, Abaluyia, Samburu, Maasai, Turkana and Marakwet among others. The region has witnessed ethnic related conflicts from the 1980s in several of its former districts, in particular Nakuru, Laikipia and Mt. Elgon. Occurrences of such conflicts have been largely connected with competition for political power, prestige and resources such as land (Otunnu, 1997; Maina, 2000). This has resulted to deaths, lack of peace, injustice, displacement of persons, and loss of property, underdevelopment and general disorientation of people's living patterns (Kinoti, 1994).

The land conflicts among the Ameru community are one of the most intrinsic social-political components in Kenya. The Ameru Community has experienced intra-ethnic land related conflicts, since 1992 and resurgence in 2006. Meru County is located in the Eastern Parts of Kenya that borders; Isiolo, Tharaka Nithi, Nyeri and Laikipia Counties. Intra-ethnic land conflict in Meru is majorly due to the physical features that exist on the borders of different tribes in the area which are; Imenti, Igembe, Tigania, Tharaka and Chuka sub-tribes.

The conflicting regions are Tigania with Isiolo bounder and as well as Tigania and Tharaka bounder, who clash over the territorial boundaries of their people in the Meru region (Justino, 2008). Additionally, the people from these regions reject the borders demarcated by physical features such as rivers and hills and instead have preferences of where boundaries should pass so as continue enjoying the resources around or along the physical features. Leaders from the warring communities argue that the current boundaries that created new districts separated families in that Tigania people encroached Isiolo bounder taking their land. Also Tharaka people were placed in Tigania district and some Tigania people moved to Tharaka district thus fueling the intra-ethnic rivalry over the borders (Rimita, 1988).

1.2. Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study was to assess the Ameru indigenous peace building approaches used in mitigation of intra-ethnic land conflict.

1.3. Research Questions
The study answered the following question:
What has been the Ameru indigenous peace building approaches used in mitigation of intra-ethnic land conflict?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Empirical Review

2.1.1. Indigenous Insitiutution (Njuri Ncheke) Council of Elders Peace Building Approaches on Intra-Ethnic Land Conflicts in Meru
In order to have a clear understanding on how Ameru resolved intra-ethnic land conflict, this part of the study will evaluate the concept of land among the Ameru people and their indigenous methods used by Njuri Ncheke council of elders in resolving conflict. This will assisting in answering the question there is a need to synchronization the indigenous approaches with those of the Methodist Church for a purpose of proper mitigation of intra-ethnic land conflict.

The land of ancestry is a deep concept of identity that informs the politics of land in Meru. The Ameru people view land as a precious commodity and this raises conflicting interest as they fight to possess it. They tend to protect land as they claim ownership and belonging. According to Geschiere (2009), the idea of autochthony is an expression of the local born from the soil, which represents the most authentic form of belonging. The Ameru people and their attachment to land define their concept of identity, ownership and territorial rights. This leads to conflict whenever their land is interfered with. Intra-ethnic land conflict calls for intervention and mitigation. According to Kangoi (1974), Ameru people of Meru County had an indigenous institution called Njuri Ncheke council of elders. Rimita (1988) noted that Njuri Ncheke handled day to day matters of the communities and specifically paid attention to settlement of land conflicts arising from border disputes, criminal cases and all matters of justice .The Njuri is the only traditional judicial system which is recognized by the Kenyan government. This council of elders deals with cultural issues like land and properties within the county. It is therefore considered legitimate and influential especially on issues of political decision making amongst the Meru people (History of Meru on Blog). The Njuri is also a custodian of Meru traditional law and order which deals with land and property issues (ibid).   The Njuri Ncheke council formed an effective government that kept law and order and settled disputes among the community. The mechanisms used to resolve disputes under traditional justice forum include negotiation, mediation, conciliation, settlement, consensus approach and restoration.

These mechanisms focus on restoring peace and maintaining social bonds. Since traditional or primitive societies have complex relationships, the social bonds and social capital help dispute resolution institutions with the help of council of elders.

The respect bestowed by the people to the council of elders has shown an appropriate way to provide an advice to the people. According to Maseru (2008), among the communities the council of elders is respected, thus creating an opportunity for the decisions to be made to the people without having to use different sources of negotiations. Thus, agreements kept in the traditional history of the people are respected by the generations that come and hence providing an easy way to convince the generations on the appropriate way of settling the agreements on the conflicts that arise. Schirch (2001) pointed out that one of the common Indigenous methods of peace and reconciliation was use of rituals. Ritual functions relating to identity are important to the process of reconciliation since, Rituals can transform people's identities, create new shared identities for people in conflict, and heal the wounds that may result from conflict. Moreover, rituals regulate relationships in communities. They serve as ways of defining identity and providing the social lubricant to relate to others and to the surrounding world. Therefore, rituals are special contexts conducive to the symbolic transformation of identity and reframing of conflict towards sustainable and coexisting relationships. The mention of rituals raises a question on the spiritual aspect of Indigenous peace building approaches methods and hence raising the need to evaluate the Methodist Church peace building approaches and mitigation of conflict.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Psycho-cultural Conflict Theory

The psycho-cultural conflict theory emphasizes the role of culture in a deep-seated disposition of human actions of enmity and opposition of 'we' versus 'they' stemming from earliest development and social relationships (Ross 1993; 1995). The theory postulates that identity is the most important need in the hierarchy of human needs and when denied, this results in conflict. Identity is the key aspect in the evolution of psychological processes resulting to psycho-cultural dispositions of shared perception based on people's ethnic origin that frame the belief about self and others resulting to groups being in conflict. Ross (1995), argues that psycho-cultural theory gives a central role to culturally rooted social and psychological processes which produce dispositions of shared images, perceptions of external world and motives for individual and group behavior. The theory postulate that deep seated threats to identity and security fears serves as powerful barriers; which prevent groups from addressing the competing interests which divide them. Psycho-cultural conflict theory argues that identity based on intra-ethnicity explains the main reason for conflicts in society.

This theory provides a framework for understanding and explaining the linkages among perspectives on land ownership, ethnic or intra-ethnic identity, belonging, territorial rights and conflict. Conflict in Africa revolve around the question of community identities in relation to land administrative matters and political constituency concerning land, which are built on matters related to territorials right and ownership of land. The location of a territory is a social act of registration of a place in the specificity (Mazurek, 2006). So, territory gives people a sense of recognition of that place through the identity, governance and the notion of belonging and citizenship. Among the Ameru people, conflict based on intra-ethnic land boundaries and land ownership are attributed to political influences with land becoming the common battle ground.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The population under study was the residents of Meru County who are Church members and leaders of indigenous institution. The finite target population comprised members of the Methodist Church within Meru and representatives of the Njuri Ncheke council of elders. The researcher worked with a total sample of 251 congregate leaders. This study adopted systematic random sampling to determine the specific congregates to participate in the study. This study used questionnaires for the purpose of obtaining quantitative data, and the interview schedules for the qualitative data. Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was coded before running the analysis. The calculated percentages, standard deviations and Pearson's product moment correlation were used for the analysis purposes. The Pearson's product moment correlation was evaluated to determine the strength of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Finally, the value of the determinant of coefficient was used to explain the proportion of the dependent variable that is accounted for by the independent variable. A simple linear regression model was fitted on the data to predict the dependent variable given the independent variable in the form.

4. Findings, Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. General Information

4.1.1. Response Rate

Table 1 shows the analysis of the total number of questionnaires that were given out to the respondents and the number that was returned for analysis. A total of 251 questionnaires were distributed to the targeted 251 respondents. Out of these, 200 questionnaires were returned, accounting for 79.6 per cent, while those not returned were 51 and accounted for 20.4 per cent.

	No. of respondents	Percentage
Returned	200	79.6
Not returned	51	20.4
Total	51	100.00

Table 1: The Response Rate of Respondents

4.1.2. Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

The study sought information on the distribution of the respondents by gender. The findings were presented in Table 2 showing gender distribution of the respondents.

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	84	42
Female	116	58
Total	200	100.0

Table 2: Gender distribution of the respondents

As shown in Table 2 there were a 58% of female respondents compared to 42% male respondents. Therefore, the distribution of the respondents of gender was sufficient to help the study find its conclusion without basis of gender bias.

4.1.3. Distribution of the Respondents by Age Brackets

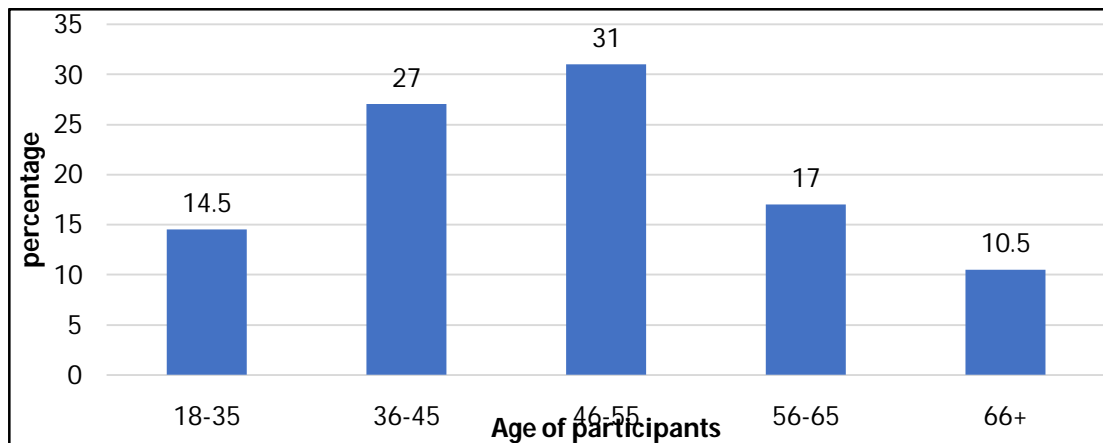The study sought to find out the distribution of respondents by age and the results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Majority of the respondents 31% were aged between 46-55 years. There were only 21 (10.5%) participants in the study who were more than 66 years.27% of the respondents were aged between 36-45 years while 17% of the respondents were aged between 56-65 years of age. There was an equal and sufficient distribution of the respondents' age to determine Methodist church peace building approaches and mitigation of intra-ethnic land conflicts in Meru County.

4.2. Ameru Indigenous Peace Building Approaches

Further the study wanted to ascertain how the indigenous Njuri Ncheke has played a central role in resolving intra-land conflict. The study asked the respondents if the indigenous Njuri Ncheke has played a role in resolving intra-ethnic land issues. The figure 2 below shows the results.
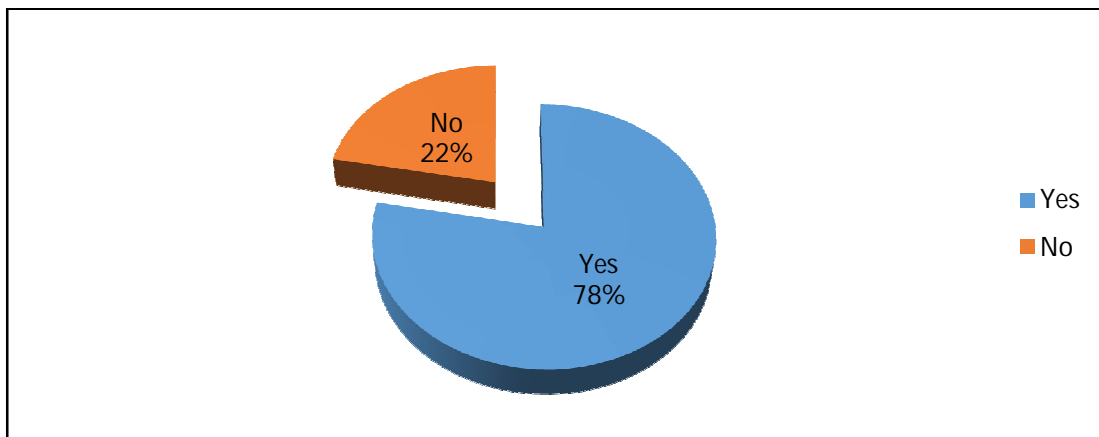
Figure 2: Role played by Njuri Ncheke in resolving intra-ethnic land conflict

The study sought to get information from, Council of elders from the meru region, first the study wanted to know the name and mandate of your organization. The respondents said that Njuri Ncheke elders means "panel of judges" this is because Njuri council member among other elders is one who is selected full of wisdom and knowledge to perform definite social roles in the society. Elder 2 claimed A Njuri elder is a member of Njuri Ncheke full of wisdom, mature, composed, respected and incorruptible elders of the community. Further Leader 3 said

We are referred to us Njuri Ncheke elders. A Njuri Ncheke elder is a member initiated to the council group and pays a fee to the group inform of a bull and the bull is slaughtered and consumed in a ritualistic feast. Our mandate is to settle disputes and more importantly to secure our land and our people's property. (Leader 3).

The mandate bestowed Njuri Ncheke elders is to unit people through settling disputes and punishing the offenders in the society and more importantly to secure our land and our people's property. All the respondents were in agreement that there were intra-ethnic land conflicts in Meru region. They argued that issues on grazing land affected both the individual and the entire Meru community, especially with neighboring communities. Also, they said cases of intra-ethnic conflicts were rampant during the election period.

The study wanted to know according to the elders what caused the intra-ethnic conflict on land issues. The elders sighted Incitement from politician to the people of their tribe, land grabbing, Border disputes among our sub-tribes, corruption in the land offices and lack of correct procedures of titling and cattle rustling among the issues that bring about land conflict issues in the region.

Border disputes among our sub-tribes, corruption in the land offices and lack of correct procedures of titling (Elder 2

On their involvement on its methods of peacebuilding and reconciliation in settling land disputes the elders believe that Njuri people are the law custodian in Meru because they deal with settling land disputes and restores peace among our people. They are said to have varied methods which depend with the offense; these are disciplining and oath-taking.

The Njuri Ncheke elders have many roles that they do perform in this land. Apart from issues of land dispute, we also deal with settlement of disputes like; creating and executing tribal laws, acting as custodians of tribal culture, regulating the use and conservation of open grasslands, salt-licks, sacred sites and forests.

 We actually take care of our natural resources, where do make decisions regarding protection of indigenous tree species of our land. We use method like dialogue and negotiation as a way of reconciling the parties in conflict. (Elder 5).

Again, they argued that they are usually ready when called to listen and show and mark the land boundary, either among the individuals, clan or community. Njuri Ncheke elders believed that majority of people in Meru trust Njuri methods of settling land disputes, also because they are not corrupt and their systems are transparent, finally mechanisms they believed mechanism used by council of elders in peacebuilding and reconciliation helped in foster reconciliation among the people of Meru region because they are not corrupt and their systems are transparent thus getting a lot of trust from the residents. Out of the five interviewed three elders agreed that church have something to embrace from the indigenous institution. Only two elders who were for different opinion. Njuri Ncheke leader 2 said church and Njuri Ncheke have almost common role to preach peace. Therefore, church leaders were able to reach more people than us. He continued to state that if churches embrace indigenous methods of peace and reconciliation by involving them, they would be able to minimize conflict tension.

Leader 5 urged church to avoid being involved in politics and not to allow corruption that divides her people. This will in future bridge the gap of intra-ethnic land disputes.

The respondents were further asked to state the extent to which they agree with the following methods employed by indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke) in resolving intra-ethnic land conflict. The study used the following parameters to measure the extent; SD=Strongly Disagree (1) D=Disagree (2) U=Undecided (3) A=Agree (4)   SA= Strongly Agree (5) Table 3 presents the results.

Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	STD
Indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke) use negotiation as a method to settle land conflict	19	40	16	106	19	3.33	1.178
Indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke) use dialogue as a method to resolve intra-ethnic land conflict.	17	37	1	136	9	3.42	1.104
Indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke) is able to settle land dispute by instilling discipline to the offender.	21	37	-	122	20	3.42	1.204
Peace is achieved through border demarcation drawn by indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke).	10	32	4	138	16	3.59	1.013

Table 3: Indigenous Peace Building Approaches

Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents 53 %(106) agreed that Indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke) use negotiation as a method to settle land conflict.20 %(40) and 9.5 %(19) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. This Mean of the responses was 3.33 and a standard deviation of 1.178. The results also indicate that majority of the interviewees 68%(136) agreed that Indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke) use dialogue as a method to resolve intra-ethnic land conflict. The mean of the responses was 3.42 and a standard deviation of 1. 104.When asked whether Indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke) is able to settle land dispute by instilling discipline to the offender majority of the respondents agreed to that. However, 10.5% and 18.5 % of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. Majority of the interviewees 69% agreed that Peace is achieved through border demarcation drawn by indigenous institution (Njuri Ncheke).The mean of the responses was 3.59 and standard deviation of 1.103.

4.3. Summary

The study revealed that all Njuri Ncheke elders were aware of intra-ethnic land conflicts in Meru region. The conflicts were as a result of Incitement from politician to the people of their tribe, land grabbing, Border disputes among sub-tribes, corruption in the land offices and lack of correct procedures of titling and cattle rustling among other issues brought land conflict issues in the region. Njuri Ncheke uses negotiation and dialogue as a method to settle land conflict. This is in line with a study done by Rimita (1988) which noted that *Njuri Ncheke* handled day to day matters of the communities and specifically paid attention to settlement of land conflicts arising from border disputes, criminal cases and all matters of justice

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

In conclusion the study found that all Njuri Ncheke elders were aware of intra-ethnic land conflicts in Meru region. The conflicts were as a result of Incitement from politician to the people of their tribe, land grabbing, border disputes among sub-tribes, corruption in the land offices and lack of correct procedures of titling and cattle rustling among other issues brought land conflict issues in the region. In addition, the Njuri Ncheke uses negotiation and dialogue as a method to settle land conflict.

5.2. Recommendations

The study recommended that there is need to replace the traditional institutions like Njuri Ncheke which seems to be fading and the gap should be filled up by the church in order to address the matters affecting the society.

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