

## **Assessment of the roles played by men and women in peace building among communities in Tana River County, Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Increasing conflicts in many parts of the world are responsible for many losses of lives and destruction to property. Men and women have been cited as experiencing conflicts in unique, diverse and dissimilar ways. In Tana River County of Kenya, conflicts have persistently occurred among the Pokomo and Orma communities with no durable solutions. The study specifically assessed the roles played by men and women in peace building. The study was guided by social conflict theory. The study adopted descriptive research design. The target population was male and female heads of households; managers of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); managers of Community Based Organizations (CBOs); youths and, administrative chiefs. The sample size was 384 comprising of 182 female and 202 male heads of households and 22 key informants selected randomly from NGOs, CBOs and area administrative units. The study used both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to select participants who responded to questionnaires, interview and focus group discussions. Expert judgment was employed to determine content validity of data collection tools, and reliability determined by test-retest method. Qualitative data was edited, coded and grouped into meaningful and relevant themes, categories and patterns and interpreted to give meaning. The study employed descriptive analysis of quantitative data, and presentation was done using frequencies, tables and charts. The study found out that women were not equally involved in peace building roles as the male counterparts. The study concluded that socially constructed ways of thinking and behavior in conflict management influence peace building

processes among communities in Tana River County. The study recommends: riddance of patriarchy; involvement of both gender in peace building roles; and, embracing of a gendered approach to peace building. (276 Words)

**Key words:** gender, gender dimensions, peace building, gender roles in peace building.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The global state of conflicts and failed peace building processes is alarming. Goldstein and Pavehouse (2018) aver that, the effects, in the last few decades, have been felt in huge losses of lives, destruction of property and displacement of persons. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) survey on worldwide displacements of persons due to conflict and violence related issues revealed that the highest levels of human displacements had been reached by the end of 2017 with staggering figures of 65.6 million compared to 51.2 million in 2014 and 37.5 million a decade ago and the situation was feared to worsen with time (UNHCR, 2018). According to the Armed Conflict Survey done by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the World Bank estimated that around 2 billion people, which is about a quarter ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) of the world's population, had been affected by some form of conflict and insecurity by the year 2017 (IISS, 2018).

A study d by Oxford University between 2015 to 2016 focusing on the changing character of conflict in the 21st century done in countries in the global South found out that the conflict situation was increasingly worsening (Oxford University, 2016). This was due to the shift in actors of warfare where the state was ceasing from being the principal actor in the wake of non-state groups who were beginning to take over the conflict situation. Sivard (2012) observes that these non-state groups and individual actors are spread across many parts of the world. They include: militia-groups; intolerant politicians and groups of people opposed to government regimes; and communities competing over scarce resources.

The Africa continent has for many years played host to numerous conflicts happening among communities. The devastated and vastly underdeveloped newest state of Southern Sudan, for instance, has suffered decades of civil war that has claimed lives of over 2.5 million people with millions of others displaced and spread over the neighboring countries as refugees (UNMISS Human Rights Report, 2014). Despite her independence, South Sudan's political space continues to be constrained by persistent rebellions by splinter militia groups and community conflicts that contribute to unrelenting conflicts in the country (Center for American progress, 2014).

The study by Sambou (2016) on understanding the Genocide in Rwanda unearths that Rwanda experienced the most unfortunate face of conflict during the Genocide when the country witnessed close to a million deaths from a total population of seven million people. Likewise, the Democratic Republic of Congo has been embroiled in inter-community conflicts that ended in hundreds of deaths, thousands of women rapes and millions of people displaced and fleeing their homes as averred by Kavanagh (2010). Kenya like most Sub-Saharan countries has been enmeshed in community conflicts whose origins are traceable back to the colonial administration (Kenya Red Cross Report, 2014). However, Kenya's worst experience is the 2007/8 Post Election Violence (PEV) that claimed over 1000 lives and 600,000 people displaced. Kenya has since then witnessed

unparalleled spiral of conflicts in her history (UN Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2016).

According to Rummel (2010), this turbulent conflict scenario continues to present varied challenges for men and women in handling conflict for peace building. The situation is further exacerbated by the manner in which the society describes and assigns gender roles to men and women in conflict handling and peace building (Klare, 2010). This study undertook to assess gender roles played by men and women in peace building among communities in Tana River County, Kenya.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

For a long time, inter-ethnic conflicts between communities in Tana River County have been a reoccurring problem with no durable solution (Kenya Inter-Agency Rapid Assessment, 2015). The sporadic conflicts between major communities in Tana River County namely: the Pokomo and the Orma, date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and took place mainly during the dry seasons. Goldsmith (2012) observes that, the conflicts have increased in frequency and intensity over the years. In a span of less than six months in 2012/2013, for example, unresolved conflicts claimed over 150 lives while 112,000 persons were displaced and over 700 animals were raided (Kenya Red Cross, 2013). The conflicts have also become more complex with the entry of new and numerous actors. The actors have come into the conflict enterprise with multifaceted motives which have aggravated conflict in the area making peace building efforts more difficult and the conflict handling more complicated as observed (Guyo, 2009 and Weiss, 2012).

Conflicts of the kind experienced in Tana River County contribute to: social breakdown; reduction of peoples' quality of life; and loss of lives and property. If appropriate approaches to peace building were adopted, this would promote reconciliation; prevent relapse to conflict and contribute to harmonious living which is good for sustainable development. In the processes of conflict management and peace building, men and women are affected in uniquely and different ways hence the involvement of each gender category is vital as upheld by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (Kofi, 2012). This resolution recognizes the importance of men and women having equal participation and involvement opportunities in conflicts resolution and peace building because their roles are different. The current study sought to examine the roles men and women play in peacebuilding towards conflict management. The study felt that, clear understanding of these roles would lead to the community allowing each gender to take its rightful place in conflict management hence reduce the conflicts.

## **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The study sought to assess the roles played by men and women in peace building among communities in Tana River County, Kenya.

## **1.4 Relevant Theory to the Study**

The study adopted social conflict theory by Karl Marx (1818-1883). The main tenet of this theory is that the society's dominant and subordinate groups engage in unending power struggles in order to maintain control over specific resources and means of production (Bartos & Wehr, 2013). This assertion relates to the situation in Tana River County where the dominant male category of the society seems to push the subordinate women to margins in peace building roles.

## 2.0 Literature Review

Peace building is a process of getting together all the affected parties in a conflict situation to work together in activities that aim at bringing harmony between conflicting groups of people (Haig, 2011). It includes addressing the underlying root causes of conflict; profiling the main actors and their multifaceted motives in conflict in order to transform them to prevent relapse to conflict. Men and women play vital roles in activities that lend success to peace building and re-establishment of the social fabric in the post-conflict era (Barbera, 2015). Some of the key activities undertaken by men and women to bring about success in peace building include: advocacy; peace negotiations; reconciliation work; policy making; and, resource management Keiffer (2010).

Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group which aims at influencing decisions within political, economic and social systems of institutions (Obar, 2012). Further, advocacy undertakes to engage as many people as possible to push and influence policy and decision makers to effect service and practice changes in order to take care of the needs and concerns of persons who would otherwise be easily forgotten or pushed to the margins of the society.

Peace negotiation will seek to bring together two or more hostile and conflicting parties to resolve their own differences (Strasser, 2015). Negotiation is distinct from other similar approaches like mediation and arbitration. Mediation seeks the assistance of a neutral third party while arbitration gives powers to an arbitrator to hear evidence and make binding decisions. Reconciliation is important in peace building because it seeks to bring harmonious living among people by consolidating peace, breaking the cycle of violence and strengthening newly established co-existence agreements (Keiffer, 2010).

Policy formulation as a role in peace building develops guidelines that direct particular courses of action in a political, social or business community (Hayes, 2014). The United Nations Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security which advocates for gender equality in all processes of peace should include men and women as indicated by (Hayes, 2014). Besides, resource management in an environment where men and women find fairness and evenly leveled ground to access and own property can enhance peace building as averred by Barrett (2015). The study undertook to assess the roles played by men and women in five key peace building activities among communities in Tana River County.

## 3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Shields and Rangarjan (2013) observe that descriptive survey design describes the characteristics of a phenomenon as they naturally occur without changing or manipulating them and helps with information about the attitudes, behaviors and specific details of the subjects being studied. Through the method, information was obtained using questionnaires and interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The study population comprised of 202 male and 182 female heads of households as well as key informants drawn from managers of community based organizations (CBOs); managers of non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and administrative Chiefs. There were 7 FGDs drawn from the youth, women, and village elders, each with 10 participants.

The study adopted multi-stage sampling strategy. Trochim (2012) argues that in multi-stage sampling, the entire population is divided into naturally occurring clusters and sub-clusters from which the study selects the sample. This study had seven cluster stages in sampling. These were:

sub-counties; locations; villages; households; heads of households; managers of NGOs; and, managers of CBOs. To determine which characters to be selected, both probability and non-probability strategies were used. In probability sampling, samples are randomly selected in such a way that each unit has an equal chance of being selected as argued by Kerlinger and Lee (2011). Non-probability sampling technique does not use random selection of units but selection is rather done based on subjective judgment of the researcher and it is useful in cases where random probability technique may not adequately yield the desired results (Orodho, 2010).

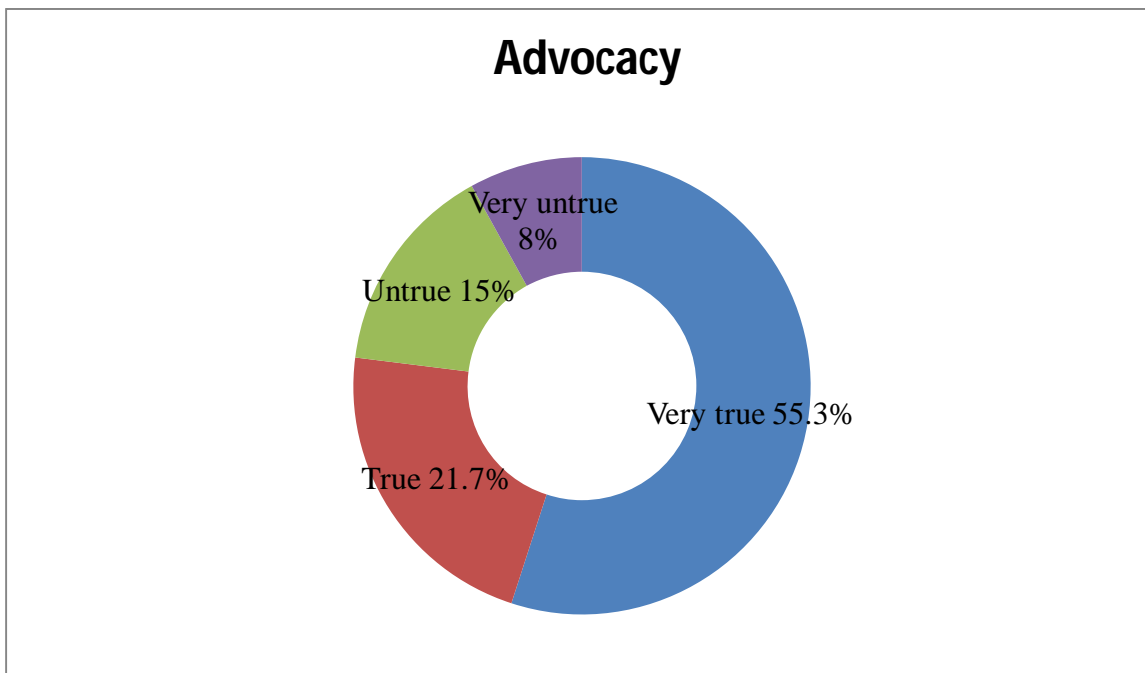
The study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches in data analysis. Qualitative data was coded and grouped into meaningful and relevant themes, categories and patterns as guided by orderliness (Gibbs, 2009). Descriptive statistics was used to summarize quantitative data and find patterns. Variables were described using characteristics distribution frequency ranges and percentages. Data was interpreted and presented using frequency graphs, tables, charts and percentages.

#### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study assessed the roles played by men and women under five key themes namely: advocacy; negotiation; reconciliation; policy making; and, resource management. Participation of men and women under each was analyzed.

##### 4.1 The role men and women in advocacy for peace building

The study sought to find out the involvement of men and women in advocacy for peace building. Respondents were asked to say whether they had been involved in peace caravans with others to demand peace. These responses are summarized in Figure 4.1.



Source: Researcher (2019)

Fig.4.1: Involvement in advocacy in peace building

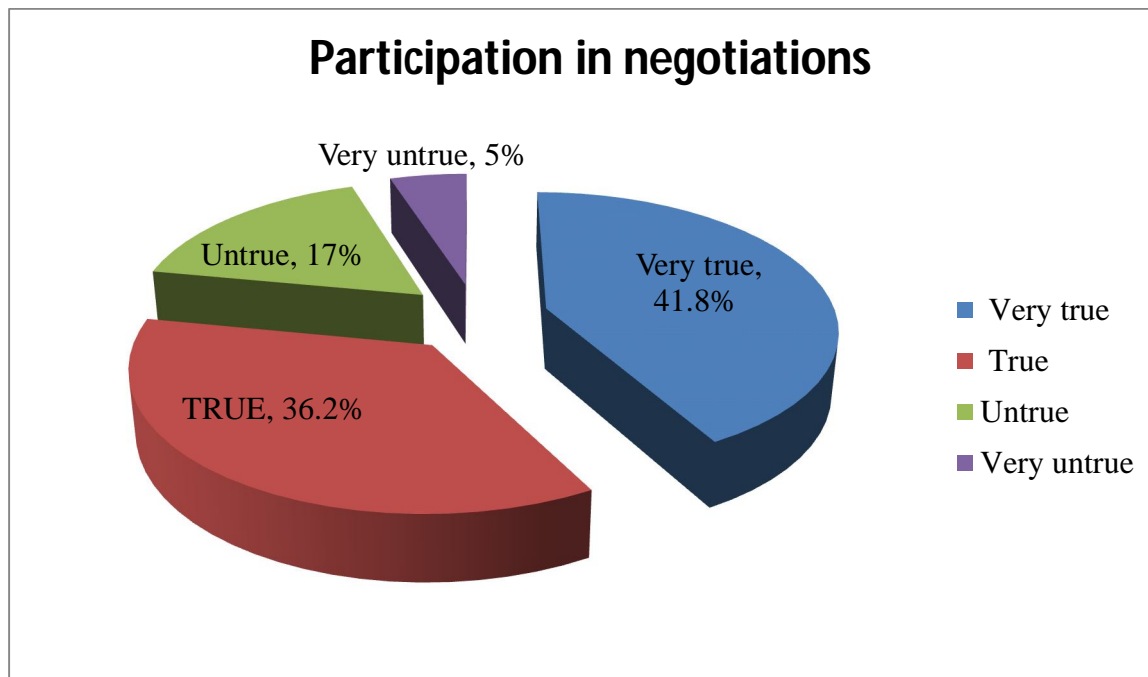
From figure 4.1, a cumulative 296 (77%) respondents stated that they had been involved in advocacy for peace building. Further, responses from the women focus group discussions revealed that women had undertaken peace building through peace caravans. Brown (2010) posits that, peace caravans serve as advocacy activity to create peace awareness. Interviews with administrative chiefs explained the peace caravans involved urging the warring communities to stop fighting and consider harmonious coexistence.

While it was generally admitted that both men and women had opportunities to participate in advocacy for building peace, women particularly argued that they had to push their way to have their voice heard and space provided in the advocacy for peace. Women maintained that it was not easy to be recognized and be part of the caravans and advocacy work when one operated as an individual. It was crucial that women operate in organized groups for easier visibility and recognition.

The study argues that, women need not push to have their voice heard in order to participate in advocacy for peace because their contribution to peace building is as important as that of men. Women's ability to contribute meaningfully in peace building is asserted by Jordan (2010) in her work on the role of women and men in rebuilding Southern Sudan. She averred that women pushed their way to remain in armed conflict despite the atrocities that faced them. They were very useful as combatants and also as support providers to fighters including feeding and caring for the sick and wounded soldiers. They also took a leading role in creating networks for solving inter-ethnic conflicts which resulted in many grassroots peace accords.

### 1.2 Role of men and women in negotiations for peace building

Respondents were asked to state whether they had participated in meetings to negotiate for peace. The responses are summarized in Figure 4.2.



Source: Researcher (2019)

Fig.4.2 Participation of men and women in negotiations

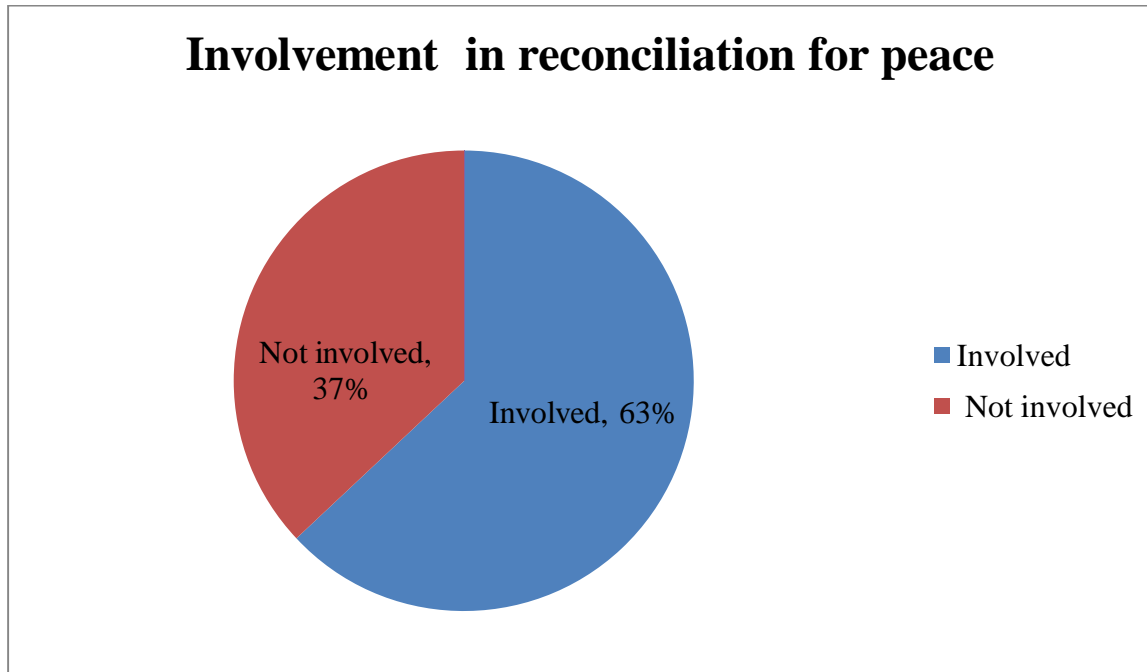
Figure 4.2 shows that majority, 300 (78%) respondents stated they had been involved in negotiations for peace in the County. Whereas the majority of the respondents said they were involved in negotiations for peace building, it emerged from the women focus group discussions that women were less represented in the negotiation meetings compared to their male counterparts. Women further pointed out that, even when they were present in the negotiation meetings, their contributions were rarely valued. Focus group discussions with the village elders suggested mixed views about men and women involvement in negotiations for peace building among communities in Tana River County. While they agreed that women voices had been blurred and overshadowed by male dominance, it also emerged that women in most cases did not demonstrate competence needed to take up negotiation meaningfully.

Women were said to get engulfed by fear and unwillingness to take up leadership roles in the negotiation for peace. This observation by the village elders points to the fact that women participation in negotiation for peace is minimal. This is irrespective of whether the minimal involvement is as a result of being discriminated against; sidelined; and, ignored by their male counterparts or simply because of being shy and unwilling to take up roles due to their cultural orientation. The observation also resonates with Courtwright (2011) who averred that many societies of the world have downplayed women presence and contribution in decision making processes yet they have potential to influence peace building outcomes Keiffer (2010) adds that female-male gaps in negotiation for peace continue to exist while the ideal situation should be a gendered approach where men and women find equal opportunities to participate in negotiation processes for peace building.

The study argues that, women absence in negotiation for peace and the reluctance of men to value their contributions ends up excluding women's needs, concerns, and expectations. This exclusion of a section of the society's needs and concerns has been viewed by scholars like Roy (2011) and Narasaiah (2012) as a potential cause of conflicts and explanation for failed peace efforts. Exclusion of some people in the processes of peace building means exclusion of their needs and concerns. The end product is a possibility of reverting to violence. This is likely to be reason Tana River County continues to be embroiled in cycles of conflicts.

### **4.3 Roles of men and women in reconciliation work for peace building**

Respondents were asked to state whether they had been members in committees that helped to reconcile people. Bloomfield, Barnes and Huysse (2013) argue that, reconciliation is best done in committees and membership to these committees is usually seen as an indication of having participated in reconciliation work. The responses are shown in Figure 4.3.



**Source: Researcher (2019)**

**Fig. 4.3: Involvement in reconciliation committees for peace building**

Figure 3 reveals that majority, 242 (63%) respondents had been members of the reconciliation committees while 134 (37%) stated they had not been involved. However, the study sought further information from the women FGDs to establish their views on gender ratio in the reconciliation committees for peace building. Women in FGDs said that there were more men in the committees than women. The youth FGDs concurred with the women FGDS. Youth FGDs added that, it was normal for women, in their culture, not to participate in committees because that was perceived to be a role for men.

This argument from the youth FGDs is reflective of how the society perceives women and men in relation to their roles in reconciliation work for peace building among communities. This thinking and attitude of the society towards women and how they should be treated goes against the ideal spirit of reconciliation work. The ideal reconciliation work for peace building that is said to be effective is one that gives opportunities to all aggrieved parties to engage constructively in handling the issues that caused conflict between them as they find a way to live together harmoniously. Rama (2012) and Lederach (2015) posit that men are not the only aggrieved parties in a conflict situation so that they can have the audacity to push women to the margins during reconciliation work. As it were, conflict affects women as well as men in unique and different ways hence the need to have both of them involved reconciliation work for peace building.

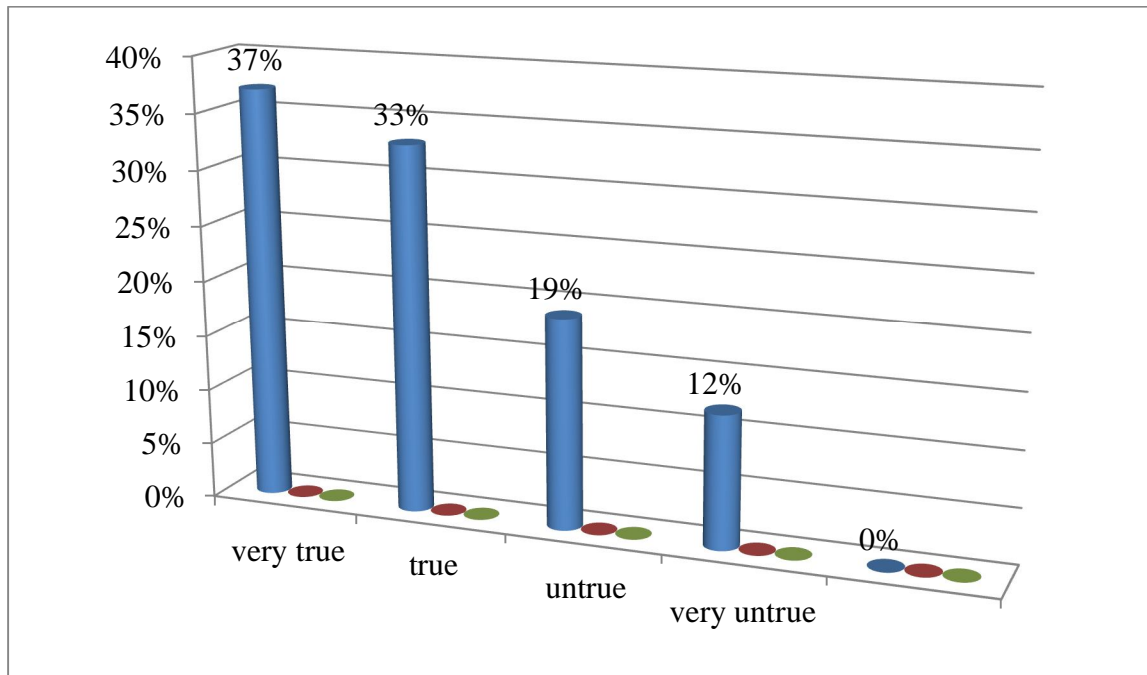
The study argues that reconciliation work for peace building should be a role for both men and women. Leaving women out in reconciliation work for peace building among communities in Tana River County undermines the spirit of collective responsibility.

**4.4 Role of men and women in policy making processes for peace building**

The study sought to find out how men and women had been involved in policy making processes for peace building. Presence of both in decision making forums is seen as a way of participating in



peace building. Respondents were asked to state whether they had been part of decision making forums. Figure 4.4 summarizes the responses.



Source: Researcher (2019)

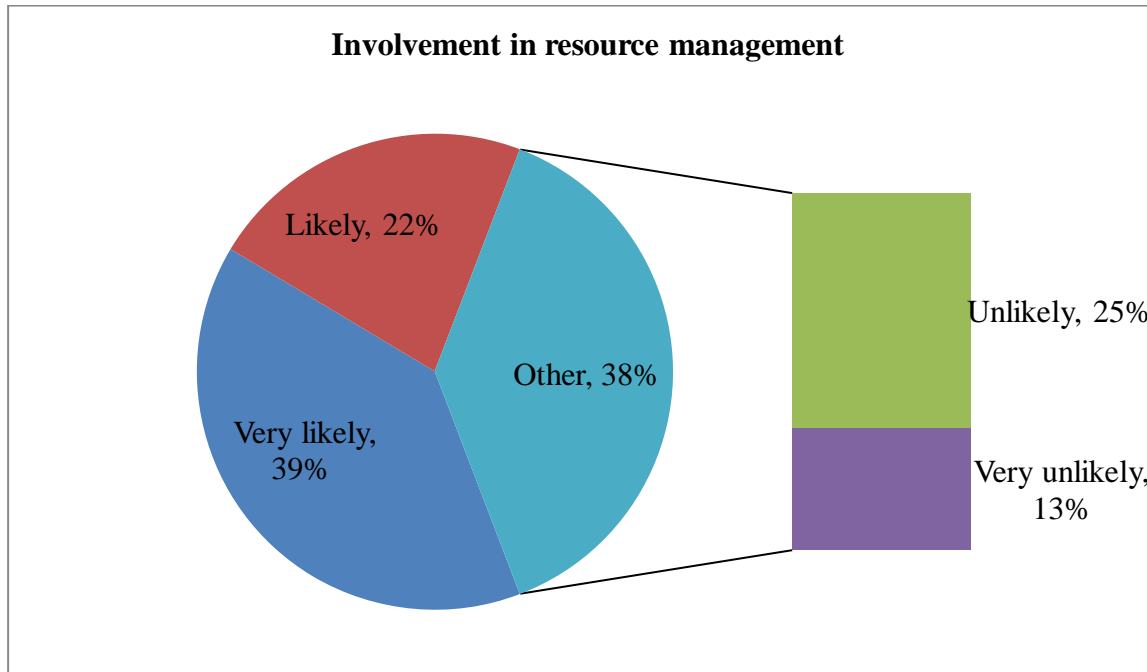
#### Fig. 4:4 Presence of men and women in decision making forums

Figure 4.4 indicates that 269 (70%) respondents were involved in policy making processes for peace building while 115 respondents (30%) were not. Whereas majority of the respondents said that they had been involved in decision making forums for peace building, there were dissenting voices from the women who felt that they had been left out. From FGDs with women, the study established that there was non-proportional representation of men and women in forums like: peace building, political leadership and in resource management.

The above views from the women indicate that peace building processes among communities in Tana River County were not keen to include women in decision making committees. These views correspond to what Juma (2010) who avows that the presence of women in policy making forums in most parts of the world was only kept at marginal levels while men took the center stage. The exclusion of women from decision making is a contrast to the aspirations of the UNSC Resolutions on women, peace and security which advocates for their active and full participation in the processes of peace building and matters of their security.

#### 4.5 Men and women in resource management for peace building

The study undertook to examine the participation of men and women in resource management for peace building. Respondents were asked to state whether they had been involved in resource management. The findings are shown in Figure 4.5.



**Source: Researcher (2019)**

**Fig.4.5: Involvement in resource management**

Figure 4.5 displays 234 (61%) respondents admitting that they had participated in resource management activities for peace building and 150 (38%) respondents denying having been involved. This indicates that majority of respondents were involved in resource management for peace building. Whereas the findings show that many of the respondents participated in resource management for peace building, the women focus group discussions revealed that the ground was not level for men and women in these undertakings. Women said that they did not have the same privileges as men in accessing resources, owning property and determining how those resources needed to be distributed to aid peace building. One of the woman claimed:

We have never enjoyed similar privileges as men when it comes to resource ownership and management. The practice is that men claim ownership of property almost in every sector of life. The farms and graze lands belong to them; they own livestock; proceeds from the farms are theirs; and, even land ownership title-deeds are in their names. What really does not belong to the men? Even our very own children, the fruit of our labor, and they are called by the men's names. May be what women can own are insignificant properties like chicken and a few goats here and there (Field data, 2019).

From this argument, it is clear that the ground is not leveled for men and women to access and use of resource management for peace building among communities in Tana River County. This situation is similar to what Tino (2016) observed about communities living in Gulu area of Uganda. Men and women in that area did not have equal opportunities in accessing and using land resources as a way of spearheading peace building after a period of war. This further agrees with the findings of the Minority Rights Group International (2011) that patriarchal systems in East African communities are responsible for women marginalization in accessing, using and managing resources. The study observes that men and women did not have equal opportunities in managing resources for peace building among communities in Tana River County.

## **5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Summary**

Findings from the five key themes on the roles of men and women in peace building in Tana River County showed that: (i) a cumulative 296 (77%) respondents (Fig. 4.1) stated that they had been involved in advocacy for peace building; (ii) majority, 300 (78%) respondents (Fig. 4. 2) stated that they had been involved in negotiations for peace in the County; (iii) majority, 242 (63%) respondents (Fig 4.3) had been members of the reconciliation committees while 134 (37%) stated they had not been involved: at least 269 (70%) respondents (Fig. 4.4) admitted that they had been involved in policy making processes for peace building while 115 respondents (30%) said they had not been involved: and (iv) among 234 (61%) respondents, there was admission of participating in in resource management activities for peace building while 150 (38%) respondents denied involvement (Fig. 4.5). this shows involvement of both genders in peace building activities. The FGDs however showed variance in the proportional representation of men and women in the activities in favour of men. Women were fewer in the activities and their roles were inferior compared to those of men. Women mostly undertook support roles not decision making and lead.

### **5.2 Conclusion**

The study concludes that socially constructed patterns of thought and behavior in conflict management influence peace building processes among communities in Tana River County. This socially constructed way of life legitimizes dominance of men in conflict management and peace building undertakings as the women remain suppressed and their needs, concerns and valuable contribution ignored. The exclusion of women as a section of the society from meaningful conflict management and peace building processes as established in the study explains why the County continues to struggle with cyclic conflicts.

### **5.3 Recommendation**

The study recommends that peace building approaches should incorporate the participation of both men and women. Women just as men need to be allowed to make meaningful contribution in the peace building processes. Men need to wake up to the reality that ,women inspite of being viewed by the culture and religion as powerless and weak, have the capability to contribute to peace building agenda in a manner that could help end the cycles of conflict.

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