

Media Initiatives and the Promotion of Peaceful Coexistence among Communities in Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate the media initiatives in building peaceful inter-communal relations in Kenya, taking a case study of Uasin Gishu County. The study established that as the Fourth Estate, they provide checks and balances on the activities of the three arms of government. Media initiatives in the society cover political, economic and social issues. The study recommends the training and retooling of media practitioners so as to re-orient them to framing and reframing their presentations and interpretation of messages so that those likely to ignite tension and conflict can be avoided. It further recommends that the concept of conflict sensitive journalism as a course in the training of media practitioners be made mandatory.

Keywords: Media Initiatives, Promote Peaceful Coexistence, Communities, Kenyan

1. Introduction

Media plays a very important role in society. It constitutes a space in which the conflicts that arise society can be articulated and are inevitably in themselves actors in that conflict. This is succinctly explained by Mahatma Gandhi, who said that:

One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand the popular feeling and give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments; the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects (Gandhi, as cited in *World Development Report 2002*).

The influence of the media, particularly the electronic media, continues to grow with time. This is demonstrated by the increasing number of media outlets, such as radio stations. The internet as is also a prominent medium of mass communication (Kroker & Weinstein, 1994). Because of the influence it has over society, the media can play a significant role in fostering peace. For instance, media events can be used in times of conflict to build confidence, facilitate negotiations or to break diplomatic deadlocks to create a climate conducive to negotiation. In any society, youth are the primary consumers of media services, thus media events targeted at them such as music concerts, or radio programmes can facilitate peace agreements and negotiations.

The interest generated by media events may help to promote and mobilize public support for peace agreements, as was the case in Burundi, where Studio Ijambo used radio to promote constructive dialogue between previously antagonistic groups. Studio Ijambo was initially established with a team of twenty Hutu and Tutsi journalists whose mandate was to promote dialogue, peace, and reconciliation. The commitment of Studio Ijambo to the promotion of peace between Hutu and Tutsi is demonstrated by their prolific production rate: they produce about a hundred radio programmes per month in a continuous campaign to build peace (Gilboa, 2002).

The media also has a significant initiative as a gatekeeper which sets the agenda for public discourse, filters the issues which promote peace, against those that don't, and tries to maintain a balance of views. However, such a gatekeeper initiative is undermined by the fact that the media likes to portray themselves as 'balanced and fair,' even when they privately seek to promote a particular ideological set of ideas and limit the public's exposure to a wide array of information. This aspect of balance and gate-keeping is only possible in a media facility that is understood and followed by both sides in a conflict. However, in the North Rift, as in many other parts of Kenya, there are a variety of ethnic stations which make no pretence of objectivity; as their listeners are drawn from a single ethnic group, so they do not attempt to moderate their views, but instead can incite ethnic hatred.

Thus ethnic radio stations need to recognize their role in society if the media is to live up to its peace building role. This is because radio is the most widely disseminated form of mass media in Uasin Gishu County.

O'Sullivan and Flanagan (2003) observe that because it is so influential, the media can be a two-edged sword; it can be negative for the society if it is selective, biased, sensational and inclined to propaganda and media vices (pornography, violence and many more). Some of these characteristics are visible in the so-called "gutter press." Although the ideal situation would be for the media to be free and independent, in order for them to effectively play their role in peace building and development, the double-sided nature of media influence calls for a certain degree of regulation, to limit hate speech and other vices. Media freedom is a crucial aspect in the performance of the media, but this freedom is not boundless.

Another important and influential initiative played by the mass media is that of being a bridge between government and the people (Wolfsfeld, 2004). The right of the people to choose their leaders is a fundamental human right, expressed through free and fair elections. Leaders have to be made accountable to the people they serve, and since fully representative democracy – in which all people have direct access to their leaders – is not a practical possibility, the media have to play the role of intermediary between the governors and the governed. By so doing, the media ensures transparency in governance; recognition of public opinion in the policy formulation, and offer citizens an opportunity to discuss policies and issues without fear of intimidation, and thereby they help to create the foundations of good governance.

The media is also a principal means through which the public can address social development challenges such as corruption, violence, crime, communal strife, public health and related issues. It is significant that these problems form a big part of the daily news agenda, all over the world, as evidenced by topics like racial violence in urban America; ethnic rivalry and religious intolerance in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and prejudice and discrimination against national minorities. Some of these conflicts may escalate into full-scale war, as was the case in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. In both of these instances, the media failed to play its mediation and peace building role, and instead elected to purvey ethnic bigotry. Thus the media is ideally required to foster balance over bias, communication over confrontation and insight over ignorance, when reporting events on conflicts. This is an important responsibility for the media, as absence of bias in reporting can enhance political stability and national integration, especially in multi-ethnic, multi-religious heterogeneous societies like Kenya. The media must, therefore, have their fingers on the pulse of the people because they have an obligation not to jeopardize or harm the welfare of the society (Reddy, 2002).

Peace building means reinforcing the prospects for peace and minimizing the chances of further violence. The aim of peace building is to develop society's ability to sort out its conflicts in a peaceful manner. The media is well placed to facilitate peace building. It can advocate for the protection of human rights which are likely to be abused during conflicts, including protection of women and children against abuse; health and control of epidemics; law and order, specifically exposing and preventing arbitrary arrests, torture and inhuman treatment, and so on. Furthermore, the media's role, if well executed, includes the creation of an environment conducive for free and fair elections through voter education and a defusing of political tensions.

Media freedom is the foundation of an open society and an accountable government. It grants the public an opportunity to participate in their society by discovering and forming opinions in response to the ideas and attitudes of political leaders, and thereby the media checks corrupt leadership. This is shown by a correlation between press freedom and corruption. Conversely, the media benefits political leaders by giving them the opportunity to reflect and comment on the public opinion, which helps them make better decisions. Media freedom thus enables everyone to participate in free political debate, which forms the basis of a democratic society. When governments deny media freedom by deciding what to be published or broadcast, arresting media practitioners or by outright revocation of media licenses, the absence of free expression of ideas and opinions harms the development of society. However, media freedom must go along with responsibility. Media practitioners must exercise high standards of objectivity, professionalism and refrain from undue personal attacks because of the resources at their disposal.

The media initiative is amply demonstrated by its influence on Kenya's political processes. The media is placed at a central position to guard the society against state infringements.

During Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election violence, a democratic media encouraged dialogue, tolerance and interaction among communities hence reducing ongoing conflicts and building lasting peace. But media can either report negatively on political opponents or raise the legitimacy of those supporting peaceful negotiations (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p. 12).

According to Bratic (2006), if the media is often found to support forces that lead to violent conflicts, it should also have power to support forces to peace. Therefore, any discussion that examines the role of the media in promoting specific types of behaviour must consider how the media affects audiences. The media is a public platform where citizens can exchange diverse issues and foster productive debates in the society. Essentially, the media is the contemporary equivalent of the Greek *agora* which was a public square in which the population gathered to discuss affairs of governance (Watson, 1998). Public discourse, disseminated through the media, shapes the way governance is conducted and also influences policy-making within institutional frameworks. Thus the media contributes to public good by articulating, defending, protecting and promoting human rights. Thus the media has a duty to defend the public discourse and consensus against state oppression, and to highlight abuses of the law and human rights by corporate powers. This initiative is often referred to as that of the watchdog (ICHRP, 2001). However, caution is required in exercising the watchdog role, as government and other centres of power have used human rights themes in the past to manipulate or inflame public opinion, especially during periods of conflicts or political ventures.

According to Manoff (1998), an independent media has an advantage which is not enjoyed by other media, in the sense that they are unrestricted in their capability of contributing to peace building. In addition, the functions of media are ideally suited to peace building and conflict resolution, because the traditional functions of the media are similar to those of conflict resolution, namely providing information to correct misperceptions; analyzing issues to frame the context of the conflict; identifying the interests of conflicting parties; defusing mistrust and providing outlets for self expression.

This initiative is further explained by Susan (2009) who compares the fields of journalism and conflict management and notes how each profession should be making more use of the other's expertise. Conflict management experts need to "tell their story" to the media so that the stories of successful conflict management actually reach the public. The author also argues that the emerging role of citizens as eyewitnesses and reporters of conflict through new media (such as mobile phone cameras which can upload photos and videos to social media) might provide a new avenue for peace building.

Similarly, Reuben (2009) notes that the media could play a role in the constructive escalation and de-escalation of conflict but notes that the very controversial "peace journalism" movement is rendered irrelevant when people find solutions to conflicts. For this reason, Gilboa (2009) asserts that rather than just looking at the media initiatives before, during and after conflict, there is a need to look at it as a set of phases and initiatives. In this case, the media can be involved in conflict prevention, management, resolution and reconciliation. He examines the functions and dysfunctions of media, news, interpretation, cultural transmission, entertainment and mobilization in light of these stages. He also came up with the issue of layers into his analysis of additional factors, including the level of media, type of media, type of conflict and level of conflict intensity.

However, the media initiatives in peace building can very easily be reversed. Euwema and Verbeke (2009) write about the shocking initiatives that the media played in bringing the Flemish-Walloon conflict in Belgium to surface. The authors note that Belgium with its two different languages and groups has completely different French and Flemish – language newspapers and television broadcasts. A joke news report started a firestorm, as it claimed that the Flanders region had withdrawn from Belgium to create its own state. This ultimately resulted in a national crisis, as both sides' reactions to the report generated mutual hostility and mistrust. The fact that the Belgian media portrayed many Belgians' worst fears and arguably caused a constitutional crisis is an example of how the media further worsened a deep seated bloodless conflict. From the above observation, it is discernible that communication may be disrupted during conflicts and other emergencies and using media is often the only way to reach a large number of people. Different forms of humanitarian emergency can require very different kinds of media intervention that can play important roles in conflict reduction imparting essential humanitarian information and in building a stronger civil society. This can best be achieved by creating partnerships between donors, humanitarian agencies and both local and international media practitioners. Since mass media has the ability to reach large number of people effectively and cheaply, it is best suited to play this intermediary role.

Puddephatt (2006) opines that journalists should regularly be updated on contentious issues that are potential recipes for conflict both nationally and at the grassroots. A general knowledge of this will equip journalists to enable them to warn, advise or highlight the resultant conflict before they eventually break out without fuelling them. Although journalists as citizens have a duty to ensure that peace prevails in their country, it is their obligation too to highlight conflicts just the way they are. Revealing the conflicts, however bad, is one way of enabling a nation to appreciate weaknesses in its society and to take steps to rectify them.

Therefore, having prior knowledge of explosive issues should not mean the journalist will self regulate. It means the journalist will report accurately without concealing any aspect of a conflict. A journalist should thus be acquainted with various factors which influence public discourse in Kenya.

Discrimination which can be executed through tribalism and politics is one of the major factors as argued by Creco (2012). If certain sections of society feel excluded in key national areas, their perception of national issues will be affected. Similarly, in the event of conflict, they are not likely to have a similar view as other segments of society. Centralization of power is another factor that affects the process of peace building by the media. If power is not decentralized, the control of the country's resources is vested on a few and this is cause for dissent. Single-party dominance also suppresses alternative voices and this may breed conflict. Long incumbency, in which officials in public offices extend their tenure, causes the populace to easily get tired of the status quo and conflict may arise if the officials cling on to office for far too long.

A weak local government that does not satisfy the demands of the majority rural populace will shift focus and exert pressure on the central government. This dissatisfaction is a recipe for civil disorder, especially if it is heightened by mistrust due to ethnic or economic factors. Scarce resources are also a factor in the media's role in peace building. For example, while accepting her Nobel peace prize, the late environmentalist Wangare Maathai noted that scarce resources in Africa were one of the major causes of conflict on the continent. Kenya, as an African country, has its fair share of brewing conflicts arising from scarce resources, particularly land. Employment and distribution of wealth is skewed, resulting in a nation that has its majority population without employment while wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few. Thus Kenya is sitting on a demographic time bomb. Attacks on well-to-do individuals in parts of central Kenya by *Mungiki* youths are a testament to this. The youths break into homes and steal property with impunity because of a sense of unfairness in job and wealth distribution.

Uneven regional development is also a potential cause of conflict. If a government discriminates against a region due to political or ethnic tendencies, then that may be a ground for brewing discord. The explosion of violence in the Rift Valley during the post-election violence was a testament to this. Locals felt that their people were hounded out of government jobs for tribal reasons, had uneven educational opportunities, or when a section of the citizenry is discriminated upon in education, may also be a reason for the affected citizens to cause conflict as observed by Creco (2012).

By having knowledge about these and many other issues, the media can then act like an early warning system to warn about these potential causes of conflict. By so doing, citizens can be aware of issues and anticipate the real conflicts. Hopefully, the citizens can then pile pressure on those in power to rectify the problems. They too can take it upon themselves to adopt precautionary steps to avoid the eruption of violence. They can do this by holding public forums to address problems between communities before they degenerate into full blown conflict. This view is supported by Bratic and Shirsch (2007).

These could include politicians who may incite their constituents to rise up against each other. The media has the responsibility of managing diverse dialogues; for instance, by politicians who incite the masses and what government officials are saying about issues that can result in conflict. Managing diverse dialogues is an ethical option for media, and journalists should be careful not to take sides. Kelyango (2008) notes that the media should highlight dialogue between disputants accurately and fairly to avoid a situation where one side feels that the media is biased. The media should instead deal with issues in conflict situations by educating parties and communities involved in conflict, thereby changing the information environments of disputes, which is critical to the conflict resolution process. They can also identify the underlying interests of each party to a conflict. The media should prevent the circulation of inflammable rumours and counteract them when they surface. Identification of the core values of disputants, something that is often critical to helping them understand their own priorities and those of their rivals, is crucial.

This means the explanation of underlying material and psychological needs of parties to a conflict, clarifying the issues that are perceived to be at stake, and framing the issues involved in conflict in such a way that they become more susceptible to management.

When the conflicts go out of hand like was the case in Kenya during the post election violence; the media ought not to suspend their services. In the Kenyan situation, majority of citizens assumed there was an illegitimate government and therefore cared little about what it said. Media was heavily relied upon for the way forward. In such instances, the media should take advantage and help restore peace by identifying resources that may be available to help resolve conflicts, or to mobilize outside assistance in doing so. They should promote and help enforce national or international norms regarding the conduct of war, the treatment of minorities and other conflict related issues. They should relay negotiating signals between parties that have no formal communication or require another way to signal.

Koven (2004) observes that media should also focus the attention of the international community on a conflict, and by doing so bring pressure on the parties to resolve it or on the international community to intervene. Media should also establish the transparency of one conflict party to another, and circulate information concerning conflict prevention and management activities that have been successful elsewhere. Publicizing what should be public and privatizing what is best left private in any negotiating process is in the greater interest of restoration of peace. Private information can be revealed later when peace has been attained. Media should also avoid stereotyping parties in a conflict and provide an outlet for the emotions of parties, the expression of which may be therapeutic.

Once it has helped in forging peace, the media ought to participate in the process of healing, reconciliation and social reconstruction following a conflict. Politicians in Kenya have a total grip of citizens' minds. Whatever they say and do at the national level affects peace at the grassroots. There is thus need to build structures for peace building from the national level to the grassroots. Peace building has been left to police, chiefs and village elders. The government is quick to send police to quell violence but does not bother to resolve issues that cause the conflict. This is where the role of the media is invaluable. Indeed, many advocates of conflict prevention are convinced that the media can play a critical initiative in defusing tensions and forging peace. But most media representatives are opposed to becoming actors in the developments they have to cover. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for them to be won over to the cause of conflict prevention.

For instance, the Centre for Conflict Resolution and the Media Peace Centre in South Africa started the Mediation Project for Journalists, a series of workshops imparting conflict resolution skills to those in journalism as noted by Bratic (2006). At first, one of the founders, Melissa Baumann, stated that many of the journalists we invited to attend declined, totally unconvinced that learning about managing conflict had anything to do with their profession. Their job was to "report the truth, the facts", they said. It wasn't the business of journalists to intervene.

According to Baumann, this response was 'highly ironic', given that at that time the media in South Africa was engaged in a general propaganda war, with different media representing different sides (Rachwani, 2010).

In the late 1990s, the theory and practice surrounding the issue of 'media and conflict' took on a life of its own. "The cynics persist, of course, in great number", said Baumann (as cited in Bratic, 2006): there are still "people working in the media who claim they must stay 'objective' at all costs and that any sort of advocacy compromises the standards of journalism." However, a growing number of professionals argue that the 'media and conflict' debate is not about taking sides in reporting conflict – except the side of peace and peace building – but about journalists already being a third party in any conflict they are covering. Consequently, the argument that there is a moral imperative to use that access constructively is steadily gaining ground.

The media can potentially play a big role in helping prevent conflicts from escalating. Positive journalism is necessary - according to John Marks, president of the Washington-based NGO, Search for Common Ground - by "Asking questions like: 'Where do you agree?'" instead of focusing only on the disagreements." Most journalists react to statements like these by pointing to the importance of responsible coverage of conflict situations: "That's a big contribution already." And journalists from the poorer parts of the world point to the fact that a lack of money and time prevents them from covering conflicts at all. According to them, "Talking about media and conflict prevention is a luxury" (UNICEF, 2004).

Conflict sells; but cooperation, or the process of resolving conflict, does not. It could be argued that, because of this assumption, the media tends to dramatize conflicts (either openly or tacitly) by focusing on irreconcilable differences between the parties, extreme positions and inflammatory statements, violent or threatening acts and win-or-lose outcomes. Furthermore, most news media ordinarily only turn their attention to conflicts at points of high public interest, such as dramatic escalation phases, unusually violent incidents, peace treaties, or other events considered especially newsworthy.

John Marks from the Search for Common Ground is one of a growing number of conflict mediators and humanitarians trying to convince journalists that, in situations of conflict, they can play an important role in helping to stop its escalation. The Australian NGO Conflict Resolution Network (CRN) even developed a 'Toolkit' consisting of practical suggestions for journalists on how to bring parties in a conflict closer to one another. According to Bratic (2006), some of the recommendations given include: "Avoid simplistic representations of baddies and goodies" and "Report areas of agreement as well as disagreement as it encourages the problem-solving process to continue".

Most Western journalists are sceptical about the recommendations highlighted by Bratic (ibid.). Should they, for the sake of conflict resolution, downplay conflict, avert their eyes from the ugly facts of hatred and violence, or 'cry peace when there is no peace'? 'Of course not,' writes Joann Byrd, the *Washington Post's* ombudsman, 'but they should realize that conflict is not the whole story.' In covering conflict stories, Byrd suggests, journalists should add an 'S' for Solutions and a 'C' for Common Ground to the traditional 'five Ws' formula (Who, What, When, Where, Why). She urges reporters to go beyond describing a conflict merely in terms of poles of opposition.

According to Mira Oklobzija (2000), programme advisor at Press Now, a small NGO which supports independent media in Bosnia, good journalists already do these kinds of things. She feels the negative image painted of the average journalist and editor is too much of a generalization and singles out for special praise the role of independent, local journalists in conflict situations. 'It requires an enormous amount of courage and knowledge to keep one's independence in a situation like that,' she says. In a climate where the official press is frequently the mouthpiece of those in power, it's certainly not easy for a journalist to articulate critical opinions. Oklobzija (ibid.) also praises foreign correspondents that go looking for the news in conflict areas. Their information often plays a decisive role in preventing any further escalation of a conflict. But Oklobzija is very critical about editors who write on conflicts from behind their desks, using only the news files of the leading press agencies. 'At least,' she says, 'they should look for more, independent sources, especially from inside the country.'

'Editors seem to work from the premise that conflict is interesting and agreement is boring', Marks laments. 'A conflictual approach may attract listeners and sell newspapers, but it definitely has a negative impact on society as a whole.' To offer an alternative, Marks started Common Ground Productions, with the aim of stimulating media productions which emphasize peaceful resolution of conflict, collaborative problem-solving and identification of common ground. He defines the central idea behind the initiative in the following terms: 'Conflict prevention is about heads, conflict is about hearts. So, with your activities you have to reach the hearts of people.'

Another example of the way NGOs can themselves step into the shoes of the media is by producing their own television or radio programmes, or commission journalists or documentary-makers to do so. This has been done by the organization Internews. In cooperation with the International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch, Internews created mobile television crews equipped with satellite communications systems that can be deployed in volatile regions such as Kosovo or the Sudan. The crews provide coverage of 'pre-conflict' situations at below-market cost to news agencies around the world. 'We take the financial burden of covering pre-conflict situations off the broadcasters and agencies', Internews explains, 'because the economics of international news agencies do not support the coverage of impending conflict. It is simply too expensive.'

The Centre for Conflict Resolution in South Africa, Internews and Search for Common Ground are among a growing number of NGOs and mediators which are trying to convince journalists, in the western world and beyond, that it is not only conflict that can be sold to their audience. While these organizations had great success in developing and broadcasting conflict prevention programming on local media within zones of conflict, they have however rarely been able to get listening and viewing audiences, but that conflict resolution can be an equally marketable concept. Successful conflict resolution, they claim, can get good ratings.

'We see a real lack of information in the West about conflicts that have not yet turned violent but could in the near future', says Paul Greenberg, Internews' director of International Co-productions. 'We also see the international media regularly ignoring conflicts that have supposedly 'ended' but in fact have continued to fester because international assistance was too rapidly diverted.

The constructive role that the international media could play in raising public awareness of impending-conflict and post-conflict situations is too often subverted by the economics of the media business. The blood and guts of an actual conflict bring rating points and profit whereas programming that focuses on preventing conflict is often too abstract to attract public attention.' NGOs, private foundations and media professionals, have to look for innovative projects that can begin to change the economics of electronic media in the West, says Brown (1993).

Working with local media in areas of conflict, either through cooperation with existing media organizations or by setting up new media organizations with local journalists, has so far been the core business of 'preventive journalism'. In a majority of cases, this approach amounts to western organizations working with non-western counterparts, usually in poorer countries. It is considered as counter-acting the so-called CNN-effect, where governments feel compelled by television-generated public opinion to intervene in overseas conflicts, often creating more problems than opportunities.

NGOs agree that training local media, tailored to local needs, is one of the most valuable instruments to keep media organizations from contributing to the escalation of a conflict. There is also a strong case for recruiting and training local trainers, who can, in the long-term, continue to build local media capacity adapted to the specific conditions. Another prerequisite for successful media projects is that they should be planned as long-term enterprises, which means that donors also have to remain financially committed for longer periods of time. 'It's nice to have training,' said a journalist working for Cameroon television, 'but we prefer to have the money to pay for the bus fares so we can reach the conflict area.' In her opinion, the lack of money and time to investigate the issues at stake are the main obstacles preventing African journalists from properly doing their job. 'It is this situation which makes journalists always vulnerable to the bribery of the government.'

Special, sophisticated programming increases the potential of generating constructive movements in a divided society. But in many cases, conflict prevention is already enhanced once a decent media organization is established which follows the simple rules of good journalism. In areas where access to information is limited, providing any accurate, balanced information already constitutes a huge step towards promoting peace.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Majority of the literature on conflict prevention and peace building (Bratic, 2006; Hamelink, 2002; Wolfsfied, 2004) holds a dismal opinion on the role of media initiatives in the peace building processes. Existing literature portrays the media as vital in reporting and generating discussion on conflicts (Bratic, 2006). Scholars on the conflict prevention and peace building phenomenon conclude that the crisis is deeply rooted in political and ethnic violence and based on negative ethnicity that is fuelled by politicians. However, media initiatives in the conflict, as well as its ability to mediate in peace building are not adequately tackled. Much has been done on its role in escalating conflict than building peace.

There are still serious inter communal conflicts in Africa leading to loss of lives, destruction of property and thus economic stagnation. There are many examples from Kenya, including the Tana Delta, Massai and Kisii Border, Kericho/Kisii, Baragoi among other inter-communal conflicts. In most of these cases, the media has been accused of facilitating these conflicts and not using its privileged position to prevent conflicts between communities. Based on Kenya's post-election violence of 2007/2008 following the release of the disputed results, IMS (2009) opines that three views emerged over the role of media that it failed to stoke the violence by failing to report media actually fuelled the violence. It showed the roles of media as both positive and negative and provides a linkage between media freedom and human dignity. However, if it is possible to use the media for a bad purpose, then it should also be possible to use it for a good purpose. No wonder the state censored live news coverage immediately conflict erupted in 2008.

Uasin Gishu County being cosmopolitan experienced violence in the previous elections cycles and had serious conflicts resulting in deaths, displacements and loss of property. In the field of Communication, it is of interest to know empirically the role of media in peace building considering the continual escalation of conflicts, particularly, in Uasin Gishu County and even globally.

1.2 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are specific to the context of inter communal relations in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The possibility for the general applicability of the findings is limited by the scope, the sample, and the cultural context of this study. Although there could be common features, the findings may not have general applicability to other systems. Despite these limitations, it should be noted that a research study of this nature would hopefully contribute to the generation of new ideas and perspectives about conflict prevention and peace building. The study will be a further step in the scientific analysis of role of media in conflict prevention and peace building.

2. Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in Uasin Gishu County that lies in the mid-west of Rift Valley Province in Kenya. The County borders six counties, namely Elgeyo Marakwet County to the East, Tranzoia to the north, Kericho to the south, Baringo to south East, Nandi to the south west and Bungoma to west. The County derived its name from the Illwusin-Kishu, a Maasai clan that used it for grazing their animals. With the coming of the colonialist the name was coined as Uasin Gishu. The County is largely a cosmopolitan hosting the Kalenjin who are the majority. Other communities with notable presence include the Kikuyu, Luo, Lughya, Kamba, Kisii among others. It has a population of 894,179 according to 2009 census report.

This study was guided by the mixed methods approach that combines both the quantitative and qualitative research. This study adopted an integrative mixed methods design which affords a rigorous and integrative analysis of qualitative textual evidence and quantitative numeric data as observed by Schwandt (1994). The study utilized descriptive case study design. This is because a good research design ensures that the information collected is consistent with the objectives of the study and that the procedures regarding data collection is accurate and efficient (Kratwohl, 1998).

The target population for the study included editors and journalists from Radio, Television and Newspapers, public that is made up of citizen's opinion leaders and religious organizations and policy category includes media analysts drawn from academia, NGO and KNCHR. The study adopted the stratified and simple random sampling procedures in selecting the required sample for this study. A sample size of 210 respondents representing 50% of target population made up of media representatives (composed of editors and journalists from radio, television and newspapers) in Kenya, public made up of (opinion leader and religious organizations) and policy category includes (media analysts drawn from academia, NGO and KNCHR) were selected for the study. The sample covered both gender in equal representation of the study area.

The study used the following instruments to collect the data: Questionnaire, Interview Schedule, Focus Group Discussions, personal observations and Survey of documentary records methods. The data for the study was coded for completeness and accuracy of information at the end of every field data collection day and before storage. Data capturing was done using Microsoft Excel. This is a study of relationship of various variables. After the data collection a correlational analysis was performed to ascertain the existence of relationship between the variables. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution was used to describe the characteristics of the media in conflict prevention and peace building as well as to profile the respondents' personal information.

3. Results

3.1 Media Initiatives in the Society

The study sought to identify the media initiatives in the society. Consequently, respondents were asked to indicate their agreements/disagreements to conceptualized roles of the media. Nine items were proposed to measure media initiatives. The underlying factor structure of the given variables was assessed using exploration factor analysis (EFA) with principal components. The study differentiated three main roles that the media principally plays in the society, namely communicator, informer and entertainer. The media as a communicator was characterized by initiatives such as being the voice of the voiceless, advocating for peace, acting as a watchdog, and contributing to general communication mechanism. Media as an informer played roles such as provision of information, provision of an alternative view, and translation of political and technical information for the common man. Finally, as an entertainer, the media plays the role of general initiative of entertainment (Table 1).

Further, respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions on media initiative in the process of conflict prevention and peace building.

As shown in Figure 1, highlighting cases of conflict (47.7%) and promoting peace building (45.9%) were identified as the major initiative played by the media in conflict prevention and peace building.

When asked to state which media has quantifiable impacts on conflict prevention and peace building, 58.5% of the respondents indicated the radio, 30.6% identified the TV, while a small proportion identified posters and newspapers (See Figure 2).

The results of the media initiative found from the questionnaire were corroborated by the results from the interviews conducted with media analysts, NGOs and KNCHR. When asked to state whether or not the media in Kenya reflects the power to create and influence public awareness and concern of salient issues, most of the respondents agreed. While most of them just indicated yes, some however went on to enumerate some case examples of proactively of the media in this case. Some 4.6% gave the example of *Jicho Pevu* TV documentary which highlights cases of drugs and crime. Another 3.6% pointed to the role of the media in exposing the Tana River Delta conflict thereby leading to resolution initiatives. They also note that the media addresses public issues for Kenyans to know. One even noted that during the last general elections, the media persuaded members of the public to maintain peace.

Results, however, showed conflicting views regarding the role of the mainstream vis-a-vis the ethnic media role in conflict prevention and peace building in Uasin-Gishu County. While most of the respondents lauded the initiatives played by the mainstream media in peace building especially after the 2007/2008 post-election violence, they were of the view that ethnic media fuels conflict in the area.

4. Discussion

The study sought to identify the media initiatives in the society. The principal component factor analysis extracted three factors which explained close to two third of the total variance in the media initiatives in the society. All factor loadings were greater than 0.6 and loaded highly on the three factors which were designated as: communicator; informer; entertainer. The media as a communicator was characterized by roles such as being the voice of the voiceless, advocating for peace, acting as a watchdog, and contributing to general communication mechanism. Media as an informer played roles such as provision of information, provision of an alternative view, and translation of political and technical information for the common man. Finally, as an entertainer, the media provides general entertainment. Cases of conflict and promoting peace building were identified as the major roles played by the media in conflict prevention and peace building. On media impacts on conflict prevention and peace building, majority of the respondents indicated the radio and the TV, while a small proportion identified posters and newspapers.

The findings in this study regarding the media initiatives are consistent with findings by others. According to Mahatma Gandhi (*World Development Report, 2002*), the newspaper as a media has a role to understand the popular feeling and give expression to it as well as arouse among the people desirable sentiments and to fearlessly expose popular defects. Wolfsfeld (2004), on the other hand, notes that an influential role of the media is that of being a bridge between the government and people. The finding regarding the media's role in promoting peace building supports finding by Reddy (2002), that the media has an obligation not to jeopardize or harm the welfare of the society. The finding from the interviews indicating that ethnic media was likely to fuel conflicts lends support to findings by Wolfsfeld (2004) that the media can either report negatively on political opponents, or raise legitimacy of those supporting peaceful negotiations.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provided an opportunity to understand the media initiatives in society. As the Fourth Estate, they provide checks and balances on the activities of the three arms of government. Media initiatives in the society cover political, economic and social issues.

In economic development, the media provide the enabling environment for businesses and investments to flourish. In addition, they assist in empowering economically disadvantaged groups in the society; at the same time contribute to societal economic growth. In social development, the media can help fight corruption, prevent communal conflicts and provide useful information on disasters. The media are particularly useful for public health campaigns, especially against children diseases, communicable diseases, and in favour of a healthy environment.

The media should use these emerging issues to challenge, warn and advise those in authority to appropriately deal with the time bombs. By highlighting them raw, the media will by extension also equip the masses on potential causes of conflicts.

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Table 1: Underlying Factor Structure of Media Initiatives in Society

Factor Structure of the media initiative Variable	Loading	Eigen values	Variance explained
Media as a communicator		3.947	43.856%
Voice for the voiceless	.654		
Advocate for peace	.665		
Act as a watchdog	.838		
Contribute to building a culture of peace	.857		
Serve as a communication mechanism	.714		
Media as an informer		1.432	59.760%
Provide information	.872		
Provide alternative view	.755		
Translate political and technical information for the common man	.677		
Media as an entertainer		1.098	71.971%
Entertain	.851		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin MSA	.684		
Bartlett's test of sphericity	.000		

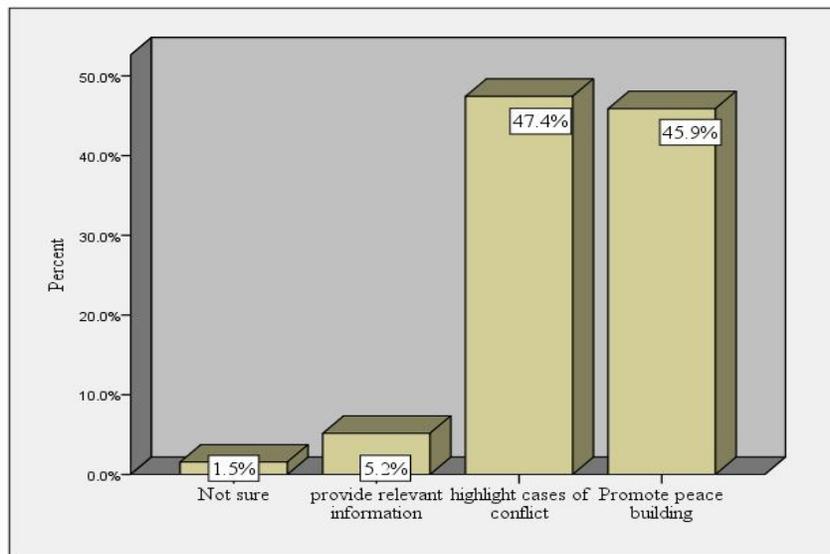


Figure 1: Media initiative in Conflict Prevention and Peace Building

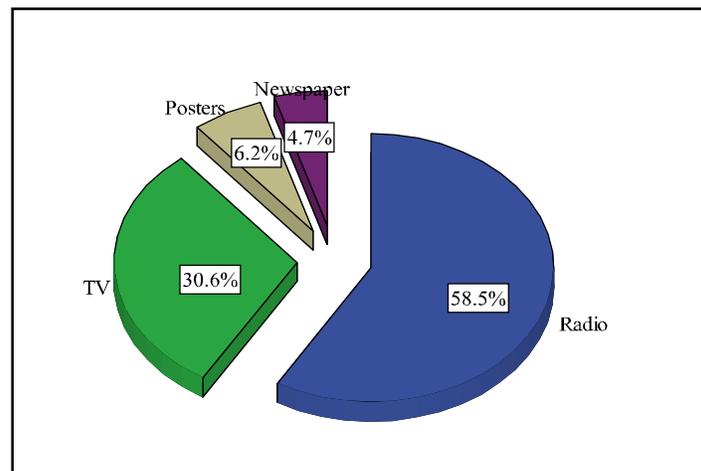


Figure 2: Media with Quantifiable Impacts on Conflicts Prevention and Peace Building