

Sporadic Violence Amongst Communities: The implications of Inter-ethnic Conflicts in Nyakach and Sigowet Sub-Counties of Western Kenya

James Omondi Juma

*Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, P.O BOX, 190-50100
Kakamega, KENYA*

Abstract: The recurrence of inter-ethnic conflicts in Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties has had major implications for almost three decades now. The two main ethnic groups in the area namely the Luo and Kipsigis ethnic groups have been involved in sporadic incidences of violent conflicts over the years. This study puts into perspective some of the major impacts of these conflicts and how they affect intercommunity relations in the two sub-counties. The study utilized descriptive research design. Both primary and secondary data were used during the study. The findings of the study were based on the social, economic and institutional impacts of inter-ethnic conflicts between the two major communities living in the two sub-counties. The implications of these conflicts have been such that they created a vicious cycle of violence that has strained intercommunal relations.

Key words: Inter-ethnic conflicts, Recurrence of conflicts, Violence

I. INTRODUCTION

The post-cold war era has seen the rise in internal conflicts at the global front, especially in Africa. A number of countries including DR Congo, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Namibia, Mozambique and Liberia just to mention a few have been in conflicts for years with devastating consequences including human toll and displacement of people (Mair, 2009).

Kenya has had its own fair share of internal conflicts. Before independence, the Mau Mau engaged the colonial government in serious fighting in effort to gain independence. Between 1963 and 1967 the Kenyan Somalis engaged the government in fighting with the aim of reuniting with the Greater Somalia (Oyugi, 2000). This conflict became known as the Shifta and was the ethnic conflict pitting ethnic Somalis against the Kenyan government.

The advent of political pluralism in the 1990s saw a new rise in ethnic conflicts in Kenya (Musau, 2008). The Multiparty politics revamped the idea of ethnicity in various communities (Klopp, 2002). This coupled with other factors including competition for resources mainly land, political manipulations on the basis of ethnicity, colonial legacy, electoral fraud, weak institutions and heavy handedness of security personnel, greatly contributed to the many conflicts that have been

recurring in Kenya since the 1990s (Oucho, 2008). Most of these conflicts have been common during election periods, although some conflicts have been going on even when there are no major political events.

The defunct provinces of Rift valley, Coast and Western have experienced the most conflicts since the 1990s. The Rift valley and Western provinces recorded over 4000 deaths and displacement of 600, 000 people between 1991 and 2001 (KNHCR, 2001). Since the outbreak of violent conflicts in the 1990s, the impacts of the conflicts have been sobering with the worst episode being the one witnessed in 2007/2008 hence the need for a deeper understanding of the consequences of these conflicts on communities living in Nyakach and Sigowet Sub-counties of Western Kenya.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by relative deprivation theory. The proponent of this theory was Ted Gurr (1970). Gurr contends that ethnic conflicts are due to ethnic group's competition and struggle to have access to economic resources and power (Gurr, 1970). The Competition for scarce resources is due to poverty, scarcity and marginalization which different ethnic groups have to grapple with in many parts of Africa (Ikejiaku, 2012). According to Osinubi & Osinubi (2006) socio-economic factors are closely linked to ethnic conflict, they argue that; the way economic forces work in many cases results into tension between different ethnic groups that have similar and competing interests.

The process competition for scarce resources leads to conflicts especially from groups that feel deprived and marginalised which then leads to devastating impacts including deaths, displacements, other devastating impacts that the study seeks to unravel.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed descriptive research design. According to Silverman (2009) and Kothari (2004) descriptive survey can be used to collect information about people's attitude, opinions, habits or social issues. The research was conducted in Sigowet sub-county of Kericho County and

Nyakach Sub County of Kisumu County. The study population comprised of the following categories of respondents within the two sub-counties: household heads, Government officials: Members of county assembly; Sub-county administrators; chiefs, police officers (Administration Police and Anti-Stock Theft Unit); Community members who included: District Peace Committee of Peace committee; elders; women; youths; and Civil Society Organizations including NGOs, CBOs and FBOs also formed part of the target population. The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The sample size was determined using Fisher's formula for sample size determination (Fisher *et al.*, 1983 cited in Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Based on the formula, a sample of 384 was used during the study to represent as study population of more 10,000 people as recommended. Both primary and secondary data were utilised during the study. Primary Data was collected using questionnaires, Interview guides and Focus Group discussions. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 17 software to obtain descriptive statistics particularly frequencies and percentages and qualitative data

was analysed using thematic techniques to support quantitative data. Quantitative data was presented using tables, graphs, and charts while qualitative data was presented in form of narrative reports and verbatim quotations. Additionally various documents such as research publications, policy reports, government reports, reports by various commissions of enquiry and other relevant minutes from meetings such as records from chief's office, website searches, newspaper and magazine publications and other relevant literature were reviewed as secondary data. These provided essential information that guided the study and helped in discussing the research and interpreting the variables appropriately

IV. STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Lack of Shelter due torching of houses

The study sought to establish whether torching of houses during inter-ethnic conflict was common in Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties of Western Kenya. The results were as indicated in Figure 4.1.

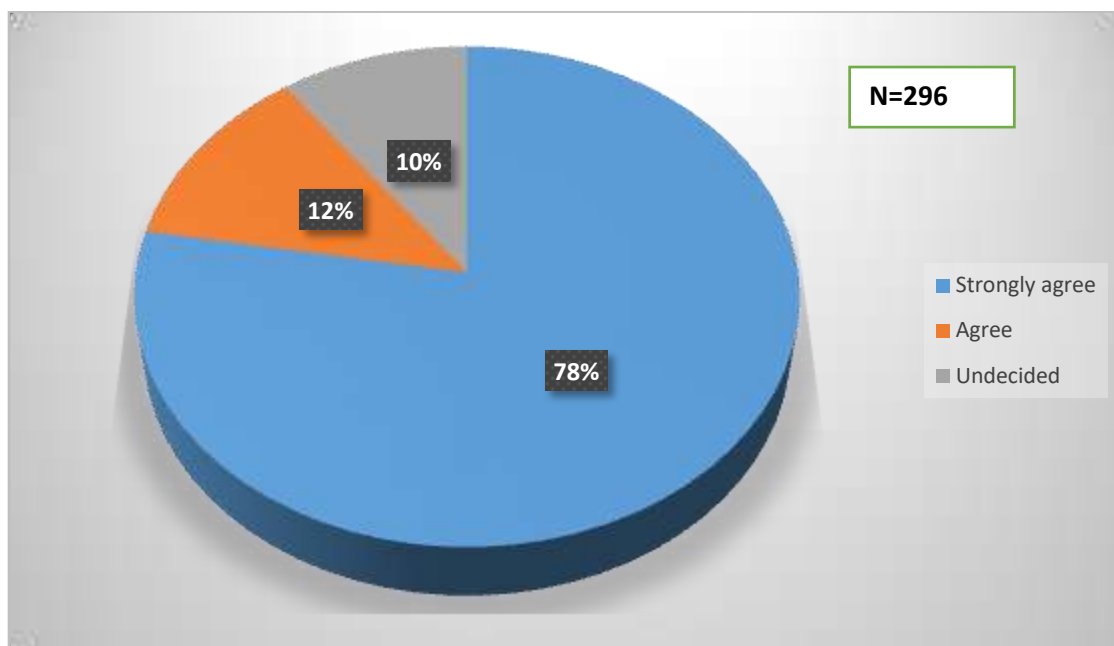


Figure 4.1: Lack of Shelter due to torching of houses

Source: Field Data (2017)

The results in Figure 4.1 reveal that, cumulatively 266 (90%) of the respondent agreed that lack of shelter due to burning of houses in the study area, was one of the most serious impacts that emanated from the conflicts in the area, while 30 (10.1%) were undecided. The results from household heads were supported by 9 out of 10 (90%) of the FGD participants from the Luo women in Cherwa who opined that, people whose houses were burned were displaced and had to look for alternative places to stay such as schools, churches, chief's camps or police stations where they felt safe. They further

indicated that displacement due to insecurity and lack of shelter interfered with the social-economic lives of the people as they had to depend on aid to survive and could not continue with their social lives as usual.

These results were also supported by findings from interviews as one of the key informants opined;

Burning of houses is a common act that is used by conflicting parties when they attack villagers in this area. This has been

witnessed in almost all conflicts that have been experienced and has often created a situation where many people are rendered homeless in the areas affected by the conflicts (An interview with a representative of World Vision Nyakach, 17th March 2017).

These results were supported by statistics from an assessment conducted by the Kenya Red Cross (2014) which indicated that during the conflicts that erupted in the area in March 2014, 67 houses were burnt and another 20 houses were looted. The conflict also led to displacement of 588 households. The conflict affected communities living in Jimo East, Pap Onditi, North East Nyakach (Cherwa camp), Sigot, Koguta and South East Nyakach.

One of the biggest impacts of ethnic conflicts in Kenya is displacement of people due to the violent ethnic conflicts. The most common aspect of these conflicts is burning of houses which normally live many people homeless and destitute. Between 2010 and 2014, over 180,300 people were displaced in Kenya due to ethnic clashes, the total number of houses that were burnt in the process were 845 (KNCHR, 2014). Therefore, thousands of families have been left homeless and extremely poor as a result of these ethnic clashes.

4.2. Deaths and Loss of Family Breadwinners

The study sought to establish the implication of deaths and loss of family breadwinners on families affected by conflicts. The results were as indicated in Figure 4.2

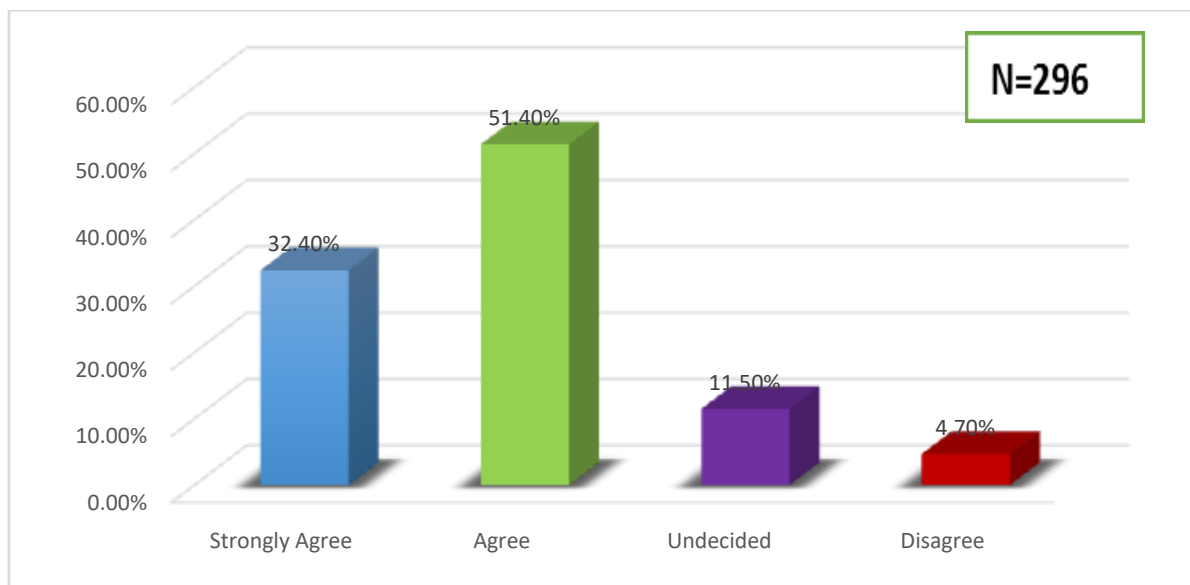


Figure 4.2:Deaths and Loss of family breadwinners negatively impact families

Source: Field Data, 2017

The study also revealed that the loss of family bread winners was another key factor that had serious implications on the people who were affected. The results in Figure 4.2 indicated that 248 (83.4%) of the respondents agreed that loss of family bread winner was a major economic impact of the conflict on the community, while 14 (4.7%) were of the contrary opinion.

The findings from household heads were further supported by results from key informant interviews. The a chief from Nyakach sub-county opined that;

When cattle rustling occur in the border areas, one of the most devastating impacts is the killings that normally take place during these conflicts. Most of the people killed are who go out to stop cattle rustlers from stealing the livestock, or the youths who help with tracing of stolen livestock. Most these people are normally adults who are

household heads and family bread winners (Interview with a chief on 17th April 2017).

The findings are further supported by findings of Akinyi-Dar *et al* (2011) who specified that one of the major impacts of the recurrent conflicts in the study area was killings; people were either killed during raids for cattle or during revenge attacks in either community which led to loss of family breadwinners in various communities. Loss of family breadwinners as a result of the ethnic conflicts has further driven the communities affected deeply into poverty which has been a major factor that has always facilitated the recurrence of the conflicts.

4.3 Reduced chances of Inter-marriage and Family breakups

The study sought to establish whether ethnic conflicts led to reduced chances of Inter-marriage and family breakups. The results were as shown in Figure 4.3.

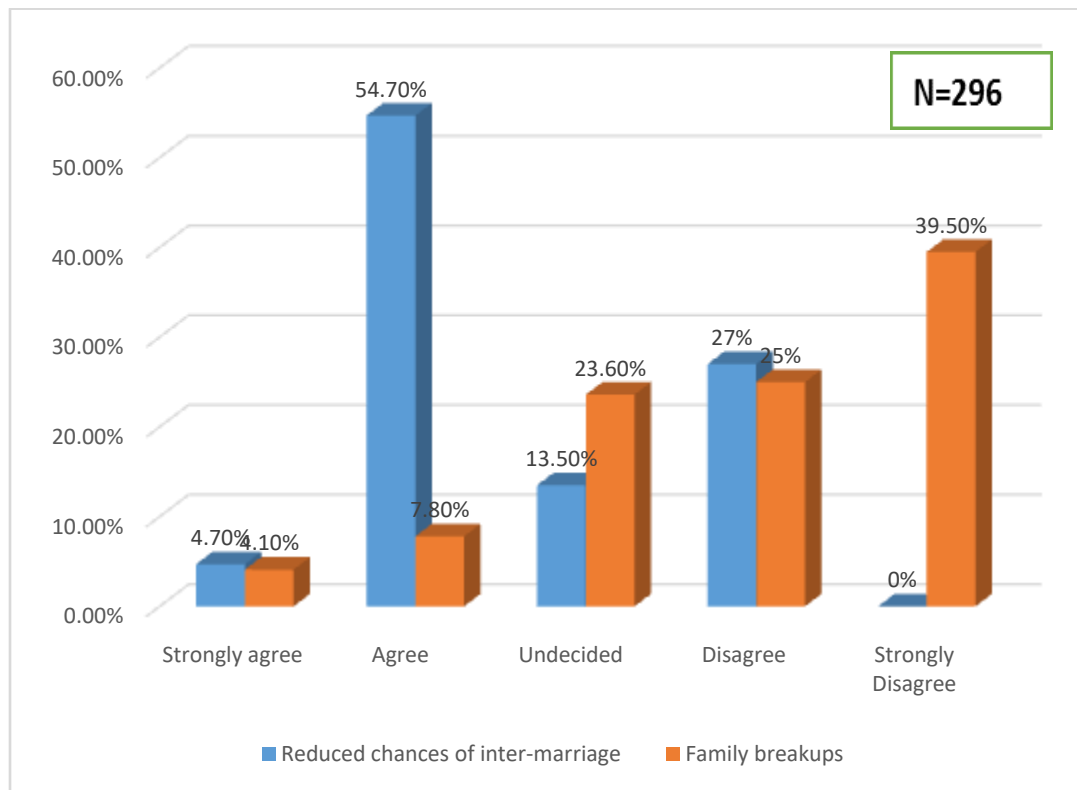


Figure 4.3: Reduced chances of Inter-marriage and Family breakups

Source: Field Data, 2017

From the results in Figure 4.3 it emerged that, chances for inter-marriage between the communities were by affected recurrence of conflicts in the area of study. The results show that 176 (59.4%) of the respondents indicated that they agreed that the conflicts led to reduced chances of intermarriage between members of the community, while 80 (27%) were of the contrary opinion. The incessant violence that was a common characteristic of the conflicts led to mistrust between community members leading to a situation where people from either community shy away from getting married or allowing their daughters to get married or sons to marry from the other community. The continued mistrust between communities can therefore be considered as affecting lasting peace in the study area and hence increased incidents of violence.

The study also sought to determine if there were family breakups as a result of divorce by women married in a different ethnic group. The results in Figure 4.3 showed that 35 (11.9%) agreed that there were family breakups while 191 (64.4%) did not agree. This shows that many of the families remained intact regardless of the conflicts. Women from Luo or Kipsigis communities who were married in a different community from their own did not leave their homes because

of the conflicts. Therefore, the conflict did not affect families in any way or cause family break ups.

These findings were supported by results from FGDs where all respondents from all the four FGDs stated that they have never seen an incident where a woman from their community has been chased away from her matrimonial homes because of the conflicts. Contrary to the findings of the study, Nyikuri (1997) argued that as a result of inter-ethnic conflicts in Kenya, there were real consequences of ethnic conflicts on inter-ethnic marriage, family and social life which resulted in breakdown of marriage and family life.

Interestingly, in as much as the conflicts discouraged intermarriage, it did not cause family breakups. Considering the importance of the family as the basic social unit, the unity shown by families at the time of the conflicts could translate into unity of different ethnic groups hence lead to sustainable peace.

4.4 Closure of Schools during conflicts

The study sought to establish whether schools were closed due to the recurrent ethnic conflicts in Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties. The results were as indicated in Figure 4.4

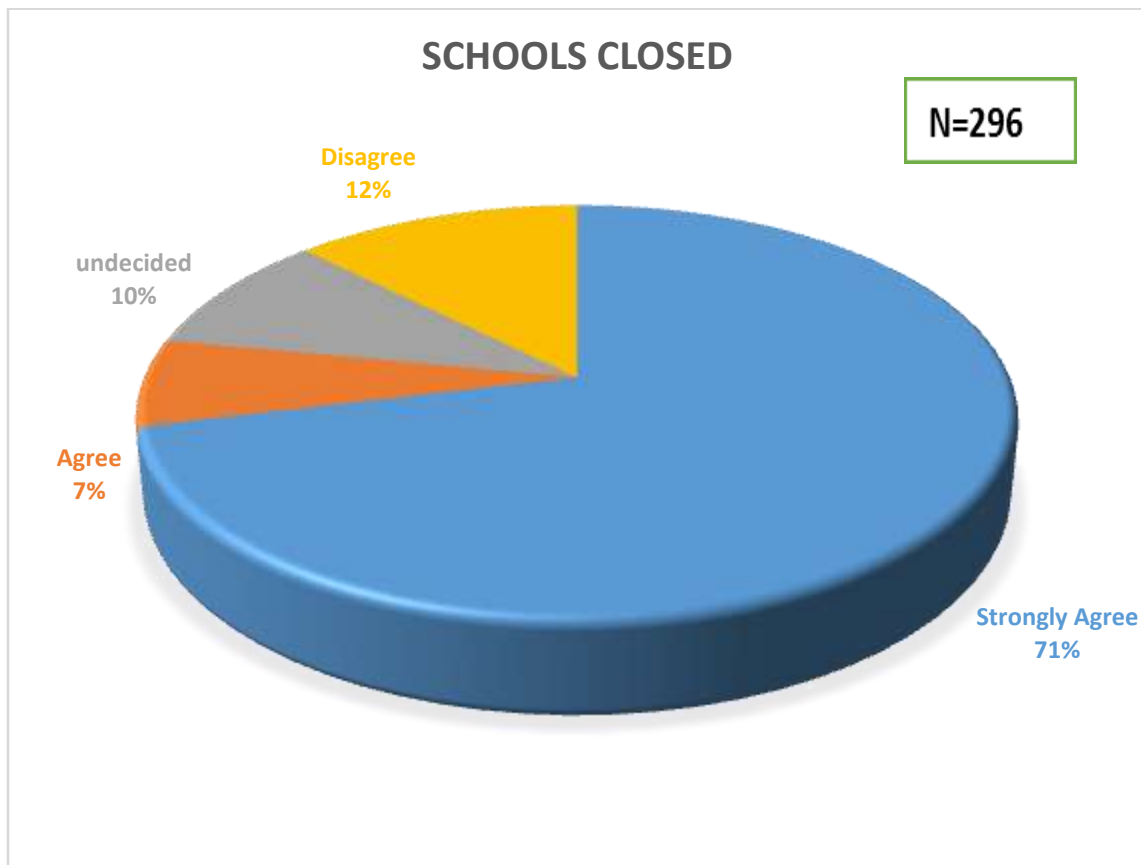


Figure 4.4: Schools were closed due to conflicts

Source: Field Data, 2017

Based on the results from the study, as shown in Figure 4.4 it emerged that 231 (78%) agreed that schools were closed as a result of the conflict while 37 (12%) were of the contrary opinion. The results therefore indicate that conflicts in Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties have often disrupted education in the study area whenever they occur. These findings were consistent with the results from interviews and FGDs. In an FGD that was held in Cherwa SDA church, one of the respondents opined that;

Every time conflicts occur in this area schools are closed for at least one or two weeks as tension remains high. During the conflicts teachers and pupils often stay out of since schools some time turn into IDP camps where families that have been displaced from the conflict seek refuge (An FDG participant in Cherwa, Nyakach Sub-county, April 9th 2017).

School closure and education disruption is apparent in most conflicts cases as supported by a study conducted by

Schilling *et al.* (2012) in which conflicts were found to have led to the closure of schools in Lokiriama and were temporarily closed as the conflicts between the Pokot and Turkana communities intensified. Teachers and pupils stayed away from schools in the area as bullet holes were seen on the walls of the classrooms. He further argues that cross-border inter-ethnic conflicts have serious implications on learning facilities. During conflicts there is normally a problem of communities accessing schools that are found in the areas beyond the borders. Learners from the “other” community find it difficult to cross the borders and attend schools on the other side if the border thereby affecting education standards and attainment in areas affected by these conflicts.

4.5 Lack of market for Agricultural Products

The study sought to establish whether recurrent ethnic conflicts affected market for farm produce in Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties. The results were as indicated in Figure 4.5.

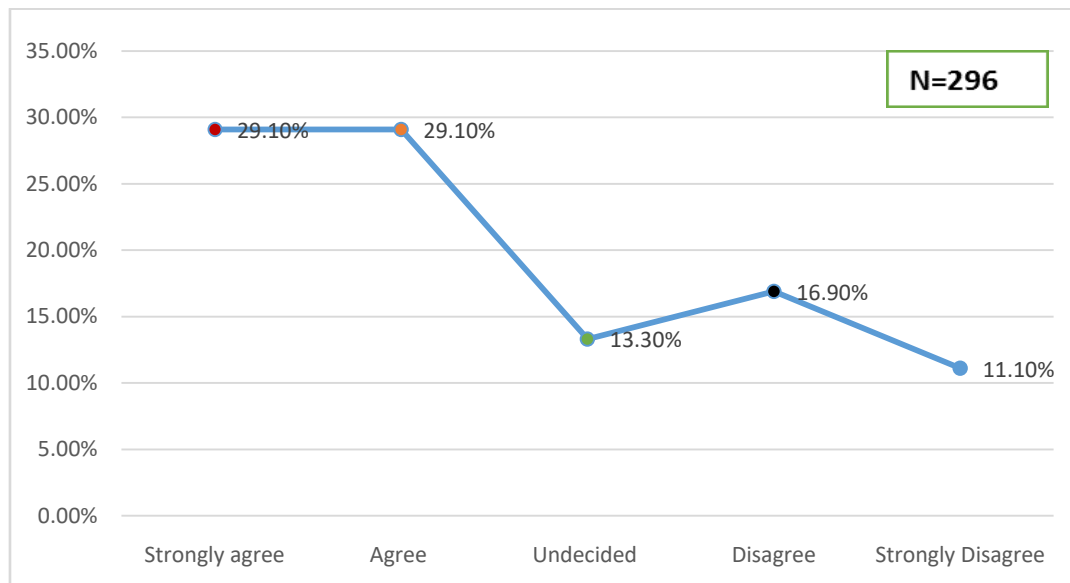


Figure 4.5: Lack of market for Agricultural Products

Source: Field Data, 2017

Considering that the main economic activity in Western Kenya is farming, it emerged from the study that conflicts had serious implication on the economy and livelihoods of the people living in Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties. According to the results in Figure 4.5 cumulatively 172 (58.2%) of the respondents agreed that the conflicts led to lack of market for farm produce farm produce while 83 (28%) were of the contrary opinion. This was mainly attributed to the fact that during these conflicts, movement is limited and traders would not go to the market to sell their goods. Conflicts also impact negatively on agricultural production and other income generating activities thereby affecting livelihoods and increasing poverty.

The results from FGDs concurred with the findings from household heads. Participants in the an FGD in held inSondu market opined that conflicts greatly affected important economic activities in the area, mainly agriculture and trade. Sondu market which is the major market in the area and which is situated in the border of Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties was largely affected due to the disruption of transport on the roads as well as the fear of looting which made many people stay away from the market.

The findings are consistent with a study by Masakaet al. (2017) in which he argues that cross-border conflicts in Kenya and Rongo sub-counties have a great implication on the economic activities of the communities living in the area. According to the study frequent inter-ethnic violence affects the livelihoods of the border residents in many ways. It affects the livelihoods of small-holder farmers in the sense that when clashes break out most of them are unable to access their farms to cultivate, plant or harvest their crops .The conflicts also cause inaccessibility to nearby Rongo, Riosiri and Kilgoris market centers. These conflicts have led to increase in poverty levels in these areas.

4.6 Implications of the conflicts on the Trust for law enforcement Agencies

The study sought to establish whether the recurrent conflicts had an impact on the level of trust that people had on law enforcement agencies. The results were as indicated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: There is reduced trust for the law enforcement agencies due to the recurrent conflicts

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	70	23.6%
Agree	75	25.3%
Undecided	81	27.4%
Disagree	50	16.9%
Strongly Disagree	20	6.8%
Total	296	100%

Source: Field Data, 2017

The findings of the study shown in Table 4.1 indicated that 145 (48.8%) of the respondents believed that there was reduced trust for the law enforcement agencies due to the recurrence of the conflicts while 70 (23.7%) were of the contrary opinion, 80 (27.4%) had mixed reactions on this thereby indicating that they were undecided. It further emerged from the FGDs that people had mixed feelings about how much they trusted the law enforcement agencies to deal with the conflict fairly. During the FGD held in Tabaita, One of the Participants signposted that

The Police are the only ones who can protect our property. The habit of people blocking and stoning vehicles heading to Kericho is a common habit in Kisumu and

parts of Nyakach. So we trust the police to restore order by all means possible (Tabaita FGD Participant 20th April 2017).

In contrast, respondent from SonduFGD stated that;

The police are often more brutal when dealing with the Luo as compared to when they are dealing with Kipsigis youths. We cannot trust them as they are compromised (Sondu FGD Participant 1st April 2017)

The results from the interview by the Chiefs in Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties on the other hand agreed that the police were doing their jobs in accordance with the law and that it was important for the members of the public to trust and support the work of the police so that the problems facing the two communities in the area could be resolved. The perspectives of the Chiefs were supported by the Police officers who were interviewed from the Administration police and Anti-stock theft Police Unit.

The findings were in agreement with Ogada (2016) who argued that in Kenya, the relationship between the police and civilian has been poor due to the history of mistrust between the two sides, emanating from the police's historical role as a repressive institution. He further argues that despite the recent creation of public relations desks in some police stations, police personnel continue to be perceived as hostile towards the public, displaying a "them-versus-us" approach. In further support of the findings, KNCHR (2014) occasional report indicated that, the use of police in quelling ethnic conflicts was not effective in Kenya due to the runaway corruption that was prominent in the police services as well as the use of coercive methods and sometimes brutal methods to restore peace. The methods used by the police have created a rift and lack of trust for the police therefore making it difficult for the police to be serious actors in conflicts management.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that conflicts that interethnic conflicts have long standing and long-lasting implication on communities in Nyakach and Sigowet sub-counties. Generally, these consequences lead to more suspicion and mistrust among members of the society hence negatively affecting social cohesion among the two ethnic groups living in the region. These implication not only affect the normal functioning and the daily lives of the society but also creates wounds that make those impacted by these conflicts desire revenge which is likely to create a vicious cycle of conflicts.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusion, this study recommends that a variety of home-grown solutions should be put in place to avert ethnic conflicts so as to avoid the implications that emerge from

these conflicts. One particular way to do this is by embracing indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms led to credible personalities from the two ethnic communities, this will most likely have a positive influence in reducing the negative implications of the conflicts.

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