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**The Muted Voices in Peacebuilding and Implications on Conflict Resolution: The Fallacy that are Peace Committees (Pcs)**

By

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**Abstract**

Over years, in the realm of peacebuilding, there have been questions on what really constitutes peacebuilding. The central place of decision-making and the voices of the people at the lowest incidence of interventions have been contentious. After the 2007-2008 Post-election violence, Kenya embraced the state-centric National Accord and the Peace Committees that straddle the stratum of the regional administration from the Sub County level to the Regional and National level. This linkage formed the country's new peace infrastructure. The very nature of the transformation of the infrastructures for peace into a state-building project ought to be examined given the idea that in the post-Westphalian state system, the efficiency of the state is the requisite of peace, and 'building states' is seen as the panacea to peace. The methodology employed is a documentary review, In-depth interviews and narratives from fieldwork and the neo-Gramscian theory of domination is used as a theoretical framework. The official and grand entry of the international into the affairs of the Kenyan state created a meeting point for both illiberal and liberal frameworks of peacebuilding. Therefore, this study argues out that despite the assumption that the people have a stake in their making given their history, the power metrics between the international, the state, and the local means that there is a dominant script of the liberal ideology. The entry of international actors and the state into the micro-politics of Kenyans robs it of its inherent hue and essentializes a reengineering process.

**Key Words:** Peace Building, Infrastructures' for Peace (I4P), Voices, Liberalism, State-building

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**Introduction**

Kenya serves as an intriguing case study for the grassroots establishment of a peace structure, offering valuable insights into conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. This journey began in Wajir District in Kenya by a group of women, situated along the borders of Somalia and Ethiopia, initiated efforts to address the devastating cycle of violent conflict plaguing the region (van Tongeren, 2011). These conflicts were exacerbated by a lack of effective governance and the absence of state institutions capable of regulating disputes, ensuring security, and fostering development in the area (van Tongeren, 2011). The initial initiative, necessitated by the need for peace involved collaboration among civil society actors who aimed to raise awareness among the local population. They worked in collaboration with the elders bringing together different on the mediation table (van Tongeren, 2011). As the peacebuilding efforts gained momentum, civil society actors also involved representatives from formal authority structures, notably the District Commissioner and a Member of Parliament. Eventually, as the need for formalization became apparent, the process was integrated into the District Development Committee, evolving into the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, with the District Commissioner serving as the chairperson (van Tongeren, 2011).

In the long run, the positive outcomes from the Wajir Peace and Development Committee in establishing and sustaining peace in Wajir led to the replication of this model in other districts within the Northern Region of Kenya (Ojielo, 2007). In 2001, the Kenyan government took a significant step by establishing a National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management (National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (Final Version, June 2011). Working in conjunction with the Office of the President, this committee embarked on the development of a national policy, which was published in 2009 as the National Policy on Peace Building and Conflict Management. This policy incorporated the post-election violence lessons experienced between December 2007 and February 2008 (Interview Muslim for Human Rights in Chnagamwe (MUHURI)).

The National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008, in its recommendations called for the adoption of district peace committees across all of Kenya. Notably, districts with active district peace councils experienced considerably less violence during this period compared to those without such councils. Subsequent advancements were made through a plebiscite and promulgation of the Constitution in 2010. Before the referendum, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) played a critical role in national caucuses for a political armistice and consensus on a new draft constitution. Additionally, the UNDP, the government and civil society collaborated to establish and implement Uwiano Platform of Early Warning and Early Response (UNDP 2013). This system was successful in preventing multiple deaths especially in the epicenter of conflicts in the Rift Valley. Local Peace Committees (LPCs) were

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also reinforced in all districts, playing pivotal roles in peacemaking during the referendum. Remarkably, these committees ensured a violence-free referendum process, highlighting their significance in conflict prevention and resolution.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The establishment of grassroots peace structures, exemplified by the Wajir Peace and Development Committee in Kenya, demonstrates promise in addressing violent conflicts in areas marked by governance gaps. Despite positive outcomes in Wajir and its replication in Northern Kenyan districts, challenges persist with muted voices in peacebuilding and potential fallacies regarding the effectiveness of Peace Committees (PCs) (Ojielo, 2007). While the collaboration in Wajir involved civil society actors, elders, and formal authorities, the degree of inclusion of marginalized voices, particularly women and vulnerable groups, remains unclear. Additionally, the expansion of these efforts into a national policy, including district peace committees, necessitates scrutiny of potential fallacies linked to their presumed effectiveness. Examining the role of external entities like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and their collaboration with the government and civil society in implementing the Uwiano Platform of Early Warning and Early Response is crucial ((UNDP 2013). The effectiveness of these interventions in complementing local peace committees and addressing the concerns of marginalized communities requires thorough investigation. In summary, this research addresses the overarching problem of evaluating the inclusivity of marginalized voices in decision-making processes and critically assessing the presumed effectiveness of Peace Committees at both local and national levels.

### **Research Question**

To what extent do marginalized voices, particularly those of women and vulnerable groups, influence decision-making processes in peacebuilding initiatives, and how does this impact the perceived effectiveness of Peace Committees (PCs) in the context of conflict resolution, with a focus on the Kenyan experience?

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Necessity of Multi Stakeholder Dialogue on Peace Infrastructures**

In some instances, governments make the decision to establish peace infrastructures, but more often, it is local actors in marginalized regions, often overlooked by central authorities, who take the initiative (Field Interviews in Kuresoi, Kibera and Changamwe in 2021). In areas such as Kuresoi, Elders Council narratives as well as the local-based faith-based groups such as the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of Nakuru Diocese attested to leveraging traditional conflict management and resolution mechanisms and establish platforms for Peace dialogue. Subsequently, they reach out to engage government officials. This grassroots approach has proven highly effective, as it tends to have a ripple effect. Peace infrastructures originating in remote regions can gradually expand their influence throughout a country, ultimately shaping national policy (Githiaga, 2020).

Both Kenya and Ghana serve as illustrative examples of this approach, where intensive consultation processes involved stakeholders at national, regional, district, and local levels

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(Lederach, 2005, 2001). The establishment and expansion of peace infrastructures in numerous countries have been significantly facilitated by the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, working collaboratively with the UN Department of Political Affairs through programs aimed at enhancing national capacities for conflict prevention in various nations (UNDP 2013).

While a dialogue among diverse stakeholders is imperative for establishing national peace infrastructures, at the international level, such dialogues have been relatively limited. Engagement between governments, the UN, and civil society organizations on this subject has been sparse. Given the dalliance of this tactic, it becomes increasingly critical to foster and shape international dialogues regarding peace infrastructures. This is a relatively recent concept, and there is much to be gleaned from the experiences of other countries, Kenya and Ghana experiences are just about cross-fertilization. However, the Council of Elders in Ndefo areas and the Ogiek Council of Elders in Mau area attested to the Local peace Committees led by District Committees being dictats of the Provincial arm of the state (Interviews in Kuresoi in 2021).

A pioneering endeavor at initiating such a mechanism of negotiation was done by UNDP/BCPR in partnership with organizations like the West Africa Network on Peacebuilding, the Nairobi Peace Initiative - Africa, and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (Kumar, 2011). Together, they organized an experience-sharing seminar on building peace infrastructures in Naivasha, Kenya, in February 2010. This consisted of representatives from governments, political parties, civil society, and UN country teams from 14 African nations convened at this event (Kumar, 2011). While the exchange of country-specific experiences proved immensely valuable for participants, especially the dialogues among diverse stakeholders (Respondent 3, Interviews in Kibera, 2021, and Respondent 7 Kuresoi, Interviews 2021) This multi-stakeholder dialogue at the international level is a significant step toward enhancing the effectiveness and reach of peace infrastructures, allowing countries to learn from each other's experiences and promoting collaborative efforts to build lasting peace. However, at the local level, the number of local voices included in the peace process are significantly few (Interviews 12 Changamwe, 2021).

### **When Liberal Meets Illiberal: Informality, Formalization, and State-building**

International Initiatives for Peace (I4P) are often categorized in relation to the liberal peacebuilding approach, which reveals a persistent cultural bias. The liberal peacebuilding approach is defined as a comprehensive approach to building peace anchored in international norms, law, institutions, and the concept of the liberal democratic state with market-oriented principles (Richmond, 2013). On the other hand, the illiberal framework is defined in contrast to liberal values, as it does not prioritize human rights, the rule of law, or the liberal state from the Westphalian Conception. It is established on alternative cultures, values, and political systems, often represented by informal, local orders that are not well-known or controlled by the state (Interviews Kuresoi, 2020.). These informal systems are seen as auto-organized, autochthonous, spontaneous, and supposedly more legitimate, often symbolized by "insider mediators." (EEAS Factsheet, 2012). A case in point is where there are local committees such as the Kibera and Kuresoi Groups that as much as the Local Peace Committees try to integrate the locals, the major

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group is led by the national Government appointees and civil society groups. Therefore, the buy in by locals is always lacking (Interviews in Kuresoi and Kibera, 2021).

Infrastructures' for Peace (I4P) appears to provide a space where these two frameworks can intersect. Richmond describes I4P as a potential meeting point between the international liberal peace model and local forms of peace (Richmond, 2012a). According to Chetan Kumar and Jos de la Haye (2011) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), I4P bridges the gap between illiberal and liberal frameworks. The question arises about how these two frameworks can be bridged, particularly how liberal actors should engage with I4P. Richmond suggests that international peacebuilders should significantly constrain their presence in and control on informal peace structures within a society (Richmond, 2012a). International actors should support but refrain from intervening or exerting executive power over I4P that limits their decision-making role. They should be cognizant of local culture, systems of knowledge, and the legitimacy, and authority, as well as respect for them. Richmond's concerns are critical basing on the aspects of reports in peacebuilding mainly documenting the interveners contributions with less of a people's input. An interviewee opined that "training is done by the technocrats, training a few peace champions... how does that reflect our views? (Interviews in Changwe 2021). This perspective is supportive of UNDP's approach, which emphasizes assistance, advice, training, and support while recognizing the potential for development efforts to inadvertently worsen existing conflicts (UNDP 2013).

In the practitioner literature on I4P, major institutions like the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), which advises the European External Action Service (EEAS), acknowledge the EU's position as an entity that adds value and capacity, but deeply rooted in the liberal peace framework. They recognize the need to assess the compatibility or divergence of values between the EEAS, characterized by the market based, democratic, human rights, the rule of law and neo-liberal economic values and the specific I4P initiatives" (EEAS Factsheet, 2012). This assessment influences decisions regarding direct engagement, leveraging, political support, or funding for these institutions. At this level of analysis, I4P seems to offer the prospect of international actors and local contexts interaction on equal footing and respect, where values, and dynamics are unified while recognizing their own viewpoints. They can declare their role as humble assistants to locally-driven peace processes" (EEAS Factsheet, 2012).

### **Methodology**

The methodology covers the research design, research approach, selection of study respondents, data collection methods and analysis used.

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a case study research design. A case study is a qualitative method of inquiry. It was adopted for its strengths of an in-depth empirical study of a phenomenon in its context appropriateness (Yin, 2003). Lewis (2003) and Robson (2002) contend that research designs ought to demonstrate logical soundness between purpose, research questions, approaches, methods and the sampling strategy being employed. Deduced from this definitional understanding of a research design, adoption of interpretivism and a qualitative strategy, this

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study adopts a case study research design. The study carried out a detailed data collection encompassing several sources of data. It later carried out a detailed ‘thick description’ case by case and themes emerged from each case (within-case analysis), then a thematic analysis across the cases followed (cross-case analysis). This was critical to identification of the different voices (subaltern’s) that were ever involved in peacebuilding in Kenya.

### **Selection of Study Respondents**

Study respondents were selected purposively for it is effective in ensuring that only respondents who have desirable characteristics for the study are involved in the study. It is also effective in getting a representative number of respondents who can serve as the primary data sources as the case is with this study. Fifty (50) respondents were targeted using a purposive technique. Thirty to Fifty (30-50) is an appropriate sample for qualitative studies; for a researcher who will corroborate data by way of validation (Morse, 1994). Eventually, 59 respondents were reached. 20 women, 20 men and 19 youth (11 female and 8 male). For Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), respondents were selected by adopting both the snowball and purposive selection techniques. That was significant in avoiding respondents with similar characteristics. These characteristics in a historical study include age, ethnic background or cultural group, place of residence, gender, religion and occupation.

The study used an array of collection methods: these were documentary analysis, focus group discussions, oral histories and narratives; and interviews. This triangulation of methods was aimed at enhancing research rigor (Guba, 1981). The documentary review was critical in providing a rich reservoir of historiography of the general Kenyan peacebuilding process. This study employed in-depth interviews as a method and in-depth guides as an instrument that involved face-to-face interactions, building on knowledge in a context-specific scenario (Kvale, 1996). An in-depth interview guide was used as an instrument of data collection from respondents purposively selected in Kuresoi, Changamwe and Kibera. Both structured and semi-structured interviews were adopted. The semi-structured interviews were intended to elucidate answers with an emphasis on subjective meanings and interpretations of social reality. This permitted interviewer-interviewee interaction that revealed new data on the subject of peacebuilding. Given the polarity of most of the geographical sites of the study, the use of semi structured interviews, was critical in modifying the lines of inquiry for the collection of sensitive data on the state and non-state actors in peacebuilding.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **Inclusiveness and Legitimacy are Essential Factors for The Effectiveness of Peace Infrastructure**

Inclusiveness and legitimacy are essential factors for the effectiveness of peace infrastructure, as observed in various contexts. For peace infrastructure to be successful, it must be widely accepted as legitimate by all relevant parties (Hopp Nishaka, 2012). However, achieving inclusiveness can be challenging, especially in the initial of peace processes. Whereas local-level infrastructure can facilitate collaboration among communities and garner support from influential stakeholders like businesspersons, it often struggles to incorporate hardline opposition groups (Vezert, 2011). Some argue that, in certain cases, it may be necessary to establish peace

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infrastructure without involving difficult stakeholders, such as “spoilers” who can obstruct its functioning, particularly when these organizations have high visibility and symbolic significance (Focus Group Discussions, Kuresoi, 2021). For instance, in complex decision-making processes related to initiatives addressing human rights violations and conflict victims, excluding relevant stakeholders can hinder reconciliation and potentially lead to conflict escalation at a later date (Brett, et al, 2007).

Inclusiveness and legitimacy in peace is not solely a political matter but also a technical one, as it pertains to the composition of governance bodies within peace infrastructure. Studies conducted in various conflict contexts, such as South Africa, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, emphasize the importance of having an inclusive staff composition ((Hopp Nishaka, 2012). Managing multi-partisan staff within these organizations poses an extra challenge in conflict resolution. Furthermore, the pursuit for inclusiveness extends to incorporating marginalized perspectives, including those of regional or ethnic minorities, impoverished communities, lower caste groups, women, children, and victims of human rights violations. In some instances, decision-making processes related to memorial sites, like those established in Peru, have been criticized for not adequately involving local stakeholders and focusing too heavily on elite interests (Weissert, 2012). Similarly, Nepal's local peace committees, in spite of the fact that they were tailored towards meeting the needs of the grassroots people and transformation of peace, have faced criticism for being skewed in dominance by political parties' interests and neglecting the needs of the grassroots people (Bhandari, Ram 2011).

**Connecting Different Aspects of Peace Infrastructure** Effective peace infrastructure typically relies on establishing connections between various societal levels and ensuring both vertical and horizontal links. Multi-track engagement in peace infrastructure often involves bridging the gap between national and local administrative units. For instance, in the case of the South African peace process, a concerted effort was made to engage all levels, assigning distinct roles to each track. This approach was also observed in Nicaragua, where regional commissions played a pivotal role in informing and enhancing national peace efforts. They achieved this by involving stakeholders of regional significance and by conveying the diverse local and regional needs to national decision-makers, thereby shaping national priorities (Marks, 2000). Just as Track 2 peace approach is significant, regional capacities are crucial for information dissemination, synchronization, and capacity building (Ojielo, 2007).

In effect, however, the sub-national regional level often becomes the weakest linkage relating to the local and national organizations. Attention tends to be directed either towards grassroots efforts at the local level or at the national level, while regional activities are sometimes treated as mere intermediaries, receiving insufficient attention and funding. Strengthening the regional level is essential for it to play a transformative role (Interview respondent from Midrift a civil Society group on Peace building in Nakuru 2021). To achieve this, certain peace infrastructures establish a national "help desk" or support unit, frequently integrated within a ministry or sector. This unit serves as the initial starting point as well as a focal point for external capacity building and coordination with the engagement of peace infrastructure. In Ghana, for example, the Ministry of Interior has organized such support by appointing regional Peace Promotion Officers based on nominations from regional governments. Additionally, the ministry through the Peacebuilding Support Unit offers support in tandem with

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other government agencies (Interview respondent from Midrift a civil Society group on Peace building in Nakuru 2021).

However, it's important to note that such support efforts can only promote integration if there is a genuine disposition to involve all segments of society. Whereas, peace infrastructures may seem to incorporate various levels and tracks on paper, practical limitations in capacity and coordination challenges can often limit the exchange of information resulting in a predominantly one-way flow. In political cultures dominated by elites, even this one-way communication might not be prioritized. In such situations, relying solely on a national assistance may not effectively resolve the fundamental issues effectively.

### **Conclusion**

In examining the discourse surrounding local peace committees as an integral part of Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) promoted by institutions like the UNDP and the World Bank, Mac Ginty's, critique of the "technocratic turn" in peacebuilding appears relevant to I4P as well (Mac Ginty's, 2012). The technocratic approach often emphasizes a one-size-fits-all solution, following the principles of good governance and state-building. This paper has argued that when I4P initiatives are internationally or state-designed, they tend to align with a liberal peace approach, where the state-building process precedes peace-building. However, there is an alternative perspective to consider: building peace structures from the bottom-up to create a legitimate and sustainable state. This approach would focus on peace formation processes rooted in the specific values, norms, and rules of a society, potentially leading to a state that differs from the Western model.

### **Recommendations**

This study recommends that while acknowledging the good intentions behind the promotion of local peace Committees, the significance of external actors engaging in self-assessment and learning. Local Peace Committees development represents a part of the broader process of peacebuilding that is gradually moving away from solely liberal perspectives. Despite the often-technocratic language used, I4P initiatives indicate that peacebuilders in local peace committees are increasingly recognizing the importance of specific capacities and structures for fostering peace. As such, this should mark as an improvement from viewing peace as an abstract outcome dependent on other state functions or individual behavior. Peace, understood as the ability to transform conflict nonviolently and creatively, is an ongoing process that requires sustained efforts of the community. In the realm of peacebuilding, structures geared towards facilitating this process and fostering a peace-oriented culture can enhance their contributions when they are conceived as instruments for peace implementation, rather than being seen as integral parts of a state building machinery.



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