Role of the Church in Promoting Positive Ethnicity in Kenya: A Case of National Council of Churches of Kenya in Nakuru Sub-County

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study was to establish the role of the church in promoting positive ethnicity among different ethnic groups in Nakuru Sub-County. The study was based on descriptive survey design. The target population included the clergy and church leaders. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample size of 81 respondents from 27 churches. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively with the aid of the Statistical Package for social sciences (SPSS). The findings were presented in figures and tables. The study concludes that peace-building and reconciliation activities were mainly used by the NCCK churches to promote positive ethnicity in Nakuru Sub-County. The study recommends that the church be actively involved in activities that promote positive ethnicity.*

Keywords: Church, Ethnicity, Negative Ethnicity, Peace Building, Positive Ethnicity, Reconciliation

1. Introduction

Ethnicity is a fundamental issue in any society. According to MacGiolla (2003) ethnicity describes the differences among different groups of people. An ethnic group refers to a group of people who share a common culture (Mac-Giolla, 2003). Ethnicity can be positive or negative. Positive ethnicity appreciates the diversities among different groups of people and seeks to exploit their distinct strengths to complement each other. Positive ethnicity strengthens national cohesion and integration. However, negative ethnicity encourages antagonism between different ethnic groups (Klopp, 2002).

According to Wamwere (2003) negative ethnicity has undermined peaceful coexistence among tribes in the world. This is evident by the upsurge of ethnic discrimination, exploitation and conflict. In Africa, the Rwandan genocide is one of the worst forms of negative ethnicity and political intolerance (Melvern, 2000). In Kenya, negative ethnicity has contributed to ethnic tensions which have culminated into violence (Kagwanja, 2003). Although the church has been focal in articulating issues that destroy morality of the nation (Anderson & Lochery, 2008), a chronological events show that the church has been intertwined with issues of ethnic identities. The church leadership has not taken a united approach towards promoting positive ethnicity thus mixing religion and politics (Njonjo, 2008). However, the church has a duty to speak forceful on broader issues of justice yet this has not been evident. Thus, the church needs to do a lot more particularly in evaluating its own role in promoting positive ethnicity. In Nakuru County, there is a strong presence of the church yet the area has witnessed ethnic tension which has always resulted to tribal violence and ethnic killings in almost all election years. This could be an indication that the society has not received the voice of the church. During the post election violence in 2007/2008, some Christians withheld the biblical principles of love, peace and reconciliation and gave in to ethnic hatred and violence. According to the Kenya Human Rights Report (2008), even some clergy participated in the ethnic violence

and mobilized their followers to do the same. Therefore, there is a clear disconnect between faith (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy). A research geared towards addressing this disconnect, and particularly questioning the role of the church in promoting positive ethnicity among ethnic communities in Nakuru Sub County is considered long overdue.

Therefore, it is against this background that this study examined the role of the church in promoting positive ethnicity among diverse ethnic groups in Nakuru Sub County and Kenya as a whole. The objectives of the study were to explore the influence of peace building initiatives and reconciliation initiatives by the church on promoting positive ethnicity among ethnic groups in NCCK churches in Nakuru Sub-County.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Peace Building Initiatives

The role of peace building initiative is to prevent violent conflicts and to ensure sustainable peace (Aureli & Waal, 2000). A wide range of peace building activities can create a supportive environment for sustenance of peace. Through peace building activities, religious organizations are able to diffuse ethnic tensions and estrangement (Aureli & Waal, 2000). According to Otim (2009) faith based organizations are increasingly taking an active role in peace building in conflict prone societies. According to Habermas (2006) creating trust, understanding and bonding between previously warring factions is supremely essential in the process of building a lasting peace. The central significance of ensuring peace in the aftermath of violent conflicts is to make a sense of security, understanding, trust and confidence; the heart of nonviolent alternatives.

According to Hayman (2012) local peace building initiatives are usually more relevant to their target population, taking into account pressing needs. Local initiatives are accorded

high priority by citizens, and investment in them is often cost effective as they build on what already exists locally. Local peace building interventions often foster mutual self-help, relevance and sustainability (Mokua, 2013). Local peace building often brings visible changes and positive outcomes. By undertaking the peace building activities all by themselves the community owns the programmes and the benefits accrued from them. What is evident is that indigenous peace building mechanisms are anchored in customary-ethnic social structures, religious systems, local administrative authorities, state-customary mechanisms, and community forums (Spickard & Jeffrey, 2000). These approaches and efforts are crucial in mobilizing the people to act in unison, as one community, and to avoid violence in the future. In Kenya, the NCCK has engaged in different peace building activities in order to bridge the differences among ethnic groups. According to Kilonzo (2009) the NCCK organizes national prayer days, the peace charter and *Chagua Amani* campaign which aim at preventing violence.

2.2 Reconciliation Initiatives

The church has a prominent role to play in reconciliations all over the world. As the salt of the earth, Christians have a mandate from God to make the world livable. Church leaders have a duty to promote unity in the multiethnic churches. The church must understand its mission before God, not only to promote peace and reconciliation, but to develop structures that will sustain peace and overcome any incitement to violence. Whereas certain individuals can take partisan positions, the church as an institution should not be drawn into ethnic party politics (Romanucci-Ross, DeVos, & Tsuda, 2007). The church should teach the vanity of negative ethnicity and the value of unity in diversity by being guided by the Bible (Priest & Nieves, 2011).

In countries where ethnic conflicts recur, the church often strategically engage the citizenry with biblical lessons on creation and God's purpose for them to experience meaningful and selfless relationships (Hayman, 2012). As the salt of the earth, the church should always use its flavor to influence others to seek the value of harmony. The impact of the church in the society is the only hope of peace and reconciliation. Every person regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex, or age has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served but not exploited. The church needs to reconcile people to God and, in the same manner, reconcile people to people. In Kenya, the imbalance of wealth and power among ethnic groups is a great concern. The church has a great responsibility to sow strategic seeds of reconciliation to all Kenyans indiscriminately (Carew, 2007). In Nakuru Sub County, the church consistently encourages people to enjoy peaceful and healthy relationship with God, with their neighbors, and with the rest of the creation (Carew, 2007). As the body of Christ, Christians need to be more aggressive in pursuing reconciliation among the warring factions.

2.3 Theoretical Framework
This study was guided by the choice theory developed by William Glasser (Glasser, 1999). This theory postulates that human beings have choices on how to behave and that all acts are out of a choice (Sullo, 2007). The choices have an intrinsic motivation which are related to certain basic needs found in the genetic structures of all human beings (Glasser, 1999). These basic needs include the need to be loved and connected to others, to achieve a sense of competence and personal power, to act with a degree of freedom and autonomy, to experience joy and fun, and to survive (Crawford, 1993). Further, Glasser (1999) holds that to satisfy basic needs a person must behave, act, think and feel all of which are components of the total behavior generated in an effort to get what is wanted. A discrepancy between what an individual wants and what one has leads to activation of an internal behavior system. This theory was considered relevant in this study since it attempts to explain how the church needs to make conscious choices in order to have long lasting solutions in regard to promoting positive ethnicity. The role of the church in promoting positive ethnicity can be contextualized by first agreeing that individuals make rational choices. Thus, NCCK can rationalize on whether to play an important role in mitigating negative ethnicity (Kanyinga & Okello, 2010). This is because the church is made up of individuals who have needs to satisfy in regard to becoming rational. Any discrepancy between the individual's internal feelings and what they are forced to do often result into conflict, thus in trying to combat negative ethnicity, there is need for harmony between internal feeling that results into rational choices and the power relations as presented in the society.

3. Methods and Materials

The study was based on the descriptive survey design. The target population for the study was church pastors, deacons and lay readers of NCCK member churches in Nakuru Sub County. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 81 study sample Questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents. Permission to collect data was sought from Kenya Methodist University and from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were used with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Descriptive statistics used included measures of central tendencies, frequencies and percentages. Results were presented in tables and figures for ease of interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Role of Peace Building Initiatives in Nakuru Sub County

The study sought to establish the role of peace building initiatives by the church in Nakuru Sub-County on promoting positive ethnicity. The respondents were asked to assess the extent to which they agreed the selected indicators of peace building initiatives influencing positive ethnicity in Nakuru Sub-County. The mean response rate of 2.5 was considered as the average score. The findings obtained are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Influence of Peace Building Initiatives on Positive Ethnicity

Description of Indicators	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
As a member of NCCK, I teach against negative ethnicity	**78**	1	5	4.08	0.38
The Church closely monitors the process of peace building to ensure that it is genuinely aimed at achieving unity	**78**	1	5	3.71	0.98
Through peace building activities this Church has been effective in containing ethnic tension	**78**	1	5	4.24	0.44
This Church believes in interreligious forums as a mechanism to contain negative ethnicity	**78**	1	5	2.48	1
We have projects that we have started with an aim towards combating negative ethnicity	**78**	1	5	3.9	0.93

As shown in Table 1 majority of the respondents agreed that as members of NCCK, they taught against negative ethnicity as indicated by a mean value of 4.08. This shows that the respondents generally agreed that they preached against negative ethnicity in Nakuru Sub-County. In addition, the corresponding standard deviation of 0.38 shows that there was no much variation in the responses provided by the respondents. The respondents also agreed that the Church closely monitored the process of peace building to ensure that it was genuinely aimed at achieving unity as reflected by the mean value of 3.71. However, a significant standard deviation of 0.98 suggests high variation. Moreover, the results in regard to whether through peace building activities the Church had been effective in containing ethnic tension shows a mean response of 4.24, implying that the respondents agreed with the statement. This concurs with Aureli and Waal (2000) who observed that peace building activities can be used to address the root causes of potential violence and further societal expectations for peaceful conflict resolution and stabilization. Similarly opinion has been expressed by Githigaro (2012) particularly as it relate to the contribution of the NCCK towards peace building activities through involving in humanitarian assistance and building bridges among communities that were divided by violence in post election violence of 2007. Moreover, a standard deviation of 0.44 suggests no significant difference in responses regarding whether through peace building activities by the church were effective in containing ethnic tension.

The results in respect to whether the church believed in interreligious forums as a mechanism to contain negative ethnicity showed a mean response of 2.48. This is slightly below the mean average, implying that the respondents slightly disagreed that the church really used interreligious forums to contain negative ethnicity in Nakuru East Sub-County. However, a standard deviation of 1.00 reveals that the respondents had varied opinion in regard to this statement. The findings also show that there were projects that were started with an aim of promoting positive ethnicity as showed by a mean response of 3.90. Nevertheless, the corresponding standard deviation of 0.93 suggests that respondents had a significant variation in their responses in regard to whether the projects were started with an aim of promoting positive ethnicity.

4.2 Role of Reconciliation in Promoting Positive Ethnicity

To determine whether reconciliation activities were successful in promoting positive ethnicity in Nakuru Sub-County, the study looked at whether the respondents agreed or disagreed with the indicators of the role of reconciliation activities. The mean response rate of 2.5 was considered as the average score. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Role of Reconciliation in Promoting Positive Ethnicity

Description	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
We engage our church members on biblical lessons on creation and God's purpose for people to experience meaningful and selfless relationships	**78**	1	5	4.00	0.60
I encourage my church to appreciate the image of God indiscriminately and find pleasure in unity	**78**	1	5	2.55	0.92
The church always use its flavor to influence others to seek the value of harmony	**78**	1	5	2.79	1.06
The church reconciles people to God and people to people	**78**	1	5	3.13	0.84
As church a leader I promote unity in the multiethnic churches in Nakuru Sub-County Town	**78**	1	5	2.92	1.05

As shown in 2, majority of the respondents were in agreement that they engaged their church members on biblical lessons on creation and God's purpose for people to experience meaningful and selfless relationships as reflected by a mean value of 4.0. However, a standard deviation of 0.6 suggested slight variation in responses in regard to the same test. Moreover, the findings pertaining to whether the respondents encouraged their church to appreciate the image of God indiscriminately and find pleasure in unity shows a mean response rate of 2.25 which is below average. However, a standard deviation of 0.92 suggested a relatively high variation in responses. The findings also show that the respondents disagreed that the church always used its flavor to influence others to seek the value of harmony. This is revealed by a mean of 3.59. However, a standard deviation of 0.76 suggests a significantly high variation in the responses generated from the respondents. Moreover, the findings show that the respondents slightly agreed that the church reconciled people to God and people to people. This is revealed by a mean response rate of 3.13. The standard deviation of 0.34 suggests low variation in the responses generated. Results of the study in regard to whether the respondents promoted unity in the multiethnic churches in Nakuru Sub-County revealed a mean value of 2.92 with a standard deviation of 0.85 which suggests that in as much as the respondents tended to agree, they varied in their responses. This agrees with Carew (2007) who believes that the Christians' mission before God in churches includes the establishment of a kingdom community in which people enjoy peaceful and healthy relationship with God, with their neighbors, and with the rest of creation. Whereas certain individuals can take partisan positions, the church shouldn't

be drawn into ethnic party politics (Romanucci-Ross, DeVos & Tsuda, 2007).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that the main peace-building activity used by the church in Nakuru Sub-County under the umbrella of NCCK to promote peace was community outreach mission. Peace building activities used by the church were effective in promoting positive ethnicity in Nakuru Sub-County. As members of NCCK, the church taught against negative ethnicity and closely monitored the process of peace building to ensure that it was genuinely aimed at achieving unity. The church also contained ethnic tension in Nakuru Sub-County through projects that were started with an aim of promoting positive ethnicity. The study also concludes that the church promoted interethnic reconciliation through bible study, advocacy, sensitization, home visits and community based projects. The church engaged the congregation on biblical lessons on creation and God's purpose for people to experience meaningful and selfless relationships. The church used its flavor to influence others to seek the value of harmony and to reconcile people to God and to each other.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusions made, it is recommended that the church should be actively involved in activities that promote positive ethnicity. Elaborate strategies towards peace building that would incorporate all churches, other religious organizations, civil society, Christian professionals and politicians in Nakuru Sub-County is recommended. Church leaders should also promote the involvement of the members in activities that enhance interethnic reconciliation such as bible study, advocacy, sensitization, home visits and community based projects. The government, civil society and other leaders in the society should collectively be involved in peace building programmes that aim at fostering peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups in Nakuru Sub-County.

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