THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE LIVES OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT PRONE AREAS HAVE BEEN AFFECTED: A CASE OF WEST AND NORTH POKOT SUB COUNTIES, KENYA

Lenah J. Sambu
Eldoret, Kenya

ABSTRACT: *There is no doubt that war affects women and men differently. Whenever there has been conflict, women and children have been known to be the most that are hard hit. This paper is a focus to determine the extent to which the lives of women in West and North Pokot have been affected by conflicts. The study was carried out in Kanyarkwat location, Katikatmor sub-location and Kopulio location, Nakuyen sub location of West and North Pokot respectively. Participation involved a random sample of two hundred women from each of the two study locations. A survey research design was used employing questionnaires and interviews as major data collection tools. Observation was also used to provide information and aid in observing actual behavior of the respondents. The findings reveal that women are largely affected by conflicts reporting displacement, sicknesses due to lack of hygiene, losses of family members and property, poverty, lack of schools and lack of medical facilities as being prevalent. The women end up living in a state of hopelessness and helplessness because of conflict related issues. Peace building capacities should be advocated for with women being fully involved. The government and other stake holders should also look for ways of alleviating the illiteracy rate in such areas at the same time creating awareness on the importance of being involved in peace building campaigns*

KEYWORDS: Extent, Women, Conflict, Effects, Affected, West Pokot, North Pokot.

INTRODUCTION

Many writers have offered different definitions of conflict. Some have defined it simply as struggle for status, others as struggle for status and scarce resources and significant social change. Himes (1980) defines social conflict as purposeful struggles between collective actors who use social power to defeat or remove opponents and to gain status, power, resources and other scarce values. Kriesberg (1998) indicates that conflict exists when two or more parties have incompatible objectives. Other writers defined conflicts as perceived divergence of interest and intentional mutual exchange of negative sanctions. This paper defines conflict as a situation in which actors use conflict behavior to attain incompatible goals and to express hostility. Hostility is defined as the non-rational behaviors fueled by hatred which is usually expressed by damaging property, loss of lives and other kinds of destructive behaviors.

Women and children make up the majority of the world's refugees. Fleeing and living in displacement creates numerous problems for women around the world and exposes them to enormous risks. Women flee taking few possessions with them and many become separated from their family members. Displacement may force women to become reliant on support from the local population in the area to which they are displaced or on assistance from international and nongovernmental organizations. Women often have to travel long distances

in search of water, food, firewood and for traditional foods and herbs, for medicines for themselves and their families (Migdal, Atul & Shue, 2002).

In the camps of displaced persons women are vulnerable, especially when they are heads of household, widows, pregnant, mothers with small children and elderly; for they have to shoulder all the daily responsibilities for survival which consume a lot of time and energy. According to Getui &Wamae (1996) most camps do not have enough facilities for the special needs of women, such as prenatal health care services, enough food and sanitary towels. Women with school age going children also have the burden of trying to look for ways and means for their children to access education. In the camps women also lack the privacy needed to maintain their personal hygiene and dignity. They have to share living quarters, washing and toilet facilities with children and men. The crowded camps with few hygiene facilities make women and children vulnerable to communicable and infectious diseases.

Women are also detained as a result of conflict often in worse conditions than men. In many cases women detainees are consequently housed in men's prisons and since they are fewer in number their section is usually small and lacks adequate sanitary facilities. People in detention rely heavily on their relatives to visit them and bring additional food and other items (medicines, clothes and toiletries). Women suffer more; they may not be visited by relatives because of the remoteness of detention camps and insecurity. The relatives may also lack money and means to travel to the detention camps. Women detainees often have added concerns of the well being of their children, either because young children are detained with them and are being raised in difficult conditions or because they have been separated from their children and are uncertain as to who is raising them and how. Even where a family member has taken responsibility for the children this enforced separation is very difficult for women to bear (ICRC Report, 2002)

In the twentieth century social conflicts increased considerably. The technology and scope of violence also increased. Homo sapiens have been in conflict throughout its development. The conflicts are spread across humanity residing wherever humans live, work and play (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). Conflict knowledge is passed from generation to generation and is transmitted from one life experience to the next. The handling of conflict is one of the life skills learnt and practiced

Conflicts recorded an increase in the West because of industrial revolution which had produced enormous demographic dislocations, extreme poverty and a wide gulf between worker and owner. In the late nineteenth century ethnicity emerged as a focus of conflict. Powerful ethnic nationalism was encouraged to serve various natural and imperial policies (Bogan, 1994). European governments were increasingly using ethnic identity and myths of racial superiority to curve out colonial empires on other continents. By 1900 huge areas of the world were controlled by colonial powers and it was inevitable that conflicts had to arise in the colonial empires.

As conflicts steadily increased, the human effort to explain and manage it became important. Kriesberg (1998) asserts that conflict behavior can occur for six main reasons; the parties may have (or believe that they have) incompatible goals, they may have achieved high solidarity, they may have organized for conflict, they can mobilize their conflict resources and they may have sufficient material resources. Many conflicts are influenced by some of these causes. Throughout history we see examples of terrible abuses against women.

Women who survive these atrocities often have to live with the vivid and terrifying images of rape, war and death for the rest of their lives. Women also suffer from sexually-transmitted diseases, stigmatization and sometimes unwanted pregnancies. They are faced with the daunting task of keeping families together after displacement, providing food, clothing and shelter – in what is, in most instances, destroyed infrastructure – for their children and their families.

During conflicts the belligerent parties deliberately inflict violence on civilian populations; and it also displaces a substantial number of people. Conflicts cause destruction of property and crops, physical insecurity, disruption in livelihoods, and shortages of food. This makes people to flee from their homes and seek refuge in other parts of the country or in neighboring countries (Stoll, 1993).

Rural women are at risk of violent crime from civil action patrols and death squads (Gerard, 1997). In Cambodia for instance many families chose not to send their girls to school because they feared of their safety. They also suffered from poverty, pain, and brutal violence. The traditional hierarchical structures were destroyed and conflicts affected the family institutions in three profound ways; first the Khmer Rogue sought to undermine family cohesion and redefine the roles of family members. They assigned men and women the same tasks in agriculture, irrigation, and other activities. They encouraged family members to spy on one another, they also forced men and women to collectively share domestic duties such as cooking and child care. They also organized marriages between randomly selected people without their consent or that of their family members. These cumulative effects of Khmer Rogue were devastating to the family members especially women (Kumar, 2001).

The conflicts also resulted in disintegration of many families in Cambodia. Often husbands drifted away because of the physical and psychological stress, abandoning their wives and children. There were also high causalities of young men in combat and this resulted in demographic imbalance, there was a surplus of marriageable age women in the 1980's and 1990's (Arcellana & Pearson, 1998). Faced with the situation many women preferred to become second and third wives rather than remain unmarried. There was a decline in women status and the traditional status of women was damaged. During and after the conflicts women enjoyed an honored position in the family. Women enjoyed the emotional and material support from family and friends. Moreover after marriage men lived with the family of their wives. But during and after the conflicts the surplus of marriageable women changed this; men were in a better bargaining position. They offered lower bride price and divorce and other marital problems were common (Ebihara, 1974).

In Guatemala women underwent painful experiences; some women witnessed violence and loss of family members. These atrocities affected women physically and they suffered from ailments such as chronic headaches, gastritis, chest pains, visual problems, respiratory infections and psychological manifestations such as recurring dreams and nightmares, sadness and depression were common (Kumar, 2001). The distrust and animosity among former belligerent ethnic groups compound the problem of physical insecurity among women. In Rwanda Hutu, women who fled their homes encountered social ostracism and physical violence when they tried to return home. Hutu women whose spouses were imprisoned for alleged participation in genocide felt socially stigmatized. Some Hutu women were subjected to violence by RPF soldiers in revenge for the violence perpetrated by Hutu men. Individual women were at risk simply because of their gender, while certain categories of women were targeted because of their actual presumed membership in particular group.

Tutsi women in general were at risk, even those married to Hutu men, as were Hutu women married to Tutsi men. Almost every Rwandan woman has a dramatic story of hunger and deprivation, fear, flight and loss of family and friends (Kumar, 2001).

Another vulnerable group of women in Rwanda were the ones whose husbands were imprisoned. They were accused of being involved in the genocide and were also faced with the burden of caring for their dependants and providing food for their husbands in prison. They were also sometimes ostracized in the localities they lived in. Some Hutu and Tutsi women who were involved in mixed marriages bore special burdens. A Hutu widow whose husband was killed in the genocide found herself rejected by her in laws and denied access to her husband's land and property. Likewise, a Tutsi woman married to a Hutu man encountered similar problems with her relatives. The daughters born of such mixed marriages also had difficulties (De Smedt, 1998).

The conflicts and the genocide shattered the dense local friendship networks and community solidarity that had traditionally provided solace and support for women. Family and friends were killed, neighbors and former friends turned into enemies. In Cambodia due to high causalities of young men in combat, demographic imbalance resulted and many women who attained the marriageable age could not get husbands. This resulted in polygamy and many married women in the communities looked at single women with suspicion (Krishna, 1997).

Present day conflicts in Kenya revolve around many issues which include violent cattle raids, perhaps the most well known and obvious form of conflict. Conflicts between two neighboring ethnic groups or clans are frequent among the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist groups in the North Rift and some parts of Eastern and Northeastern provinces. These conflicts had many negative consequences. It worsened the conditions of the already impoverished people. Many people have been killed, maimed and displaced in the conflicts. Many people in these conflict regions have lost their ability to be self provisioning. They desperately need assistance to survive and become economically active again (Green, 1999). The climate of insecurity has been a serious hindrance to effective development which is essential for effective long lasting economic and social growth and the reduction of poverty. Large areas of these regions have been abandoned because of the conflicts.

From the foregoing discussion, women are therefore seen as victims of conflict that need to be protected and kept safe rather than agents of change for peace. Because of such views and sentiments, the elimination of violence against women in conflict prone areas continues to pose challenges.

However, more needs to be done to empower women. Women must begin to play a significant and major part in peace talks and post-conflict reconstruction and they should be empowered to be less of victims and onlookers and instead to take steps against gender violence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in West and North Pokot Sub- counties of Rift Valley Province in Kenya. In West Pokot; Kanyarkwat location, Katikatmor sub-location was involved whereas in North Pokot Kopulio location, Nakuyen sub location was the study area.

The study adopted survey method which was deemed relevant due to the vastness of the area covered (Frederick & Lori-Anne, 2006). The target population consisted of women above the age of twelve years, chiefs, sub chiefs and the elders in the study areas. The total adult population in the two areas of study was one thousand nine hundred and fifty of which six hundred and fifty were women. The women in West and North Pokot were chosen because they were perceived to be the vulnerable population living in conflict prone areas. The chiefs and sub-chiefs due to their constant interaction with women victims during conflicts and administrative nature of their job are known to influence a lot about the conflicts in their areas. Consequently they were viewed as being able to have insights, opinions, and feelings on the effects of conflicts in the lives of women.

A sample of 100 women in each sub location was randomly selected making a sample of 200 women. The total population of women in Katikamor sub location was approximately 350 while Nakuyen was 300. In addition, one chief, one sub chief and six elders from the respective sub locations. One elder represented each of the six villages in the sub locations. The study used questionnaires, interviews schedules and observation methods for data collection.   Chi square tests were also performed on each variable at 0.05 level of significance. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Plutchik, 1983).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Extent of Conflicts

In the two sub counties, the respondents indicated that conflicts have affected their lives to a large extent; 73 per cent in West Pokot and 85 per cent in North Pokot. These results are recorded in table 1 below.The table also indicates that 25 per cent and 15 per cent of the respondents in West Pokot and North Pokot districts respectively said they were affected by conflicts to a less extent. A total of three per cent of the respondents did not give their views. The calculated chi square value was 8.79 for v=2 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. There was significant difference between the respondents who experienced conflicts to a large extent in North and West Pokot. A majority of women over (70%) in these conflict prone areas asserted that conflicts affected their lives to a great extent.

Table 1: Extent of Conflicts

Extent of conflicts	West pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North pokot (Kopulio)		
	f_0	f_e	f_0	f_e	Mean
To a large extent	73 (73)	80 (80)	85 (85)	90 (90)	79
To a less extent	25 (25)	19 (19)	15 (15)	9 (9)	20
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (1)	1
	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	

SD	36.950
Variance	1365.333
Calculated chi-square value(X^2)	= 8.785
Degrees of freedom	= 2
Level of significance	= 0.05
X^2 critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991

Frequency of conflicts

Table 2 shows the frequency of conflicts in the study areas 67 per cent in West Pokot and 79 per cent in North Pokot respectively reporting that the conflicts were frequent while 31 per cent and 21 per cent in West Pokot and North Pokot respectively said they did not experience conflicts frequently. Three per cent of the respondents did not give their views. With a calculated chi square value of 5.63 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the respondents who said that conflicts were frequent in North and West Pokot was accepted since X^2 critical was less than X^2 observed at $\alpha= 0.05$. It was largely concluded that there was not an overwhelming number of women in the conflict prone areas of West and North Pokot who experienced frequent conflicts.

Table 2: Frequency of conflicts Seasons when conflicts are common

How often conflict is experienced	West pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North pokot (Kopulio)		
	f_0	f_e	f_o	f_e	Mean
Very often	67 (67)	70 (70)	79 (79)	70 (70)	73
Less often	31 (31)	29 (29)	21 (21)	29 (29)	26
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (1)	1
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	

SD   30.580
Variance   935.151
Calculated chi-square value(X^2)   = 5.631
Degrees of freedom   = 2
Level of significance   = 0.05
X^2 critical(0.05,2)   = 5.991

On seasonality the respondents had various views. Some 39 per cent in West Pokot and 46 per cent in North Pokot thought conflicts were frequent. Whereas 32 per cent in West Pokot and 38 per cent in North Pokot thought conflicts were frequent during drought, 16 per cent in West Pokot and 7 per cent in North Pokot thought conflicts were frequent during rainy seasons. Another 3 per cent in West Pokot and 3 per cent in North Pokot did not agree that conflicts were frequent in any of the above seasons. As indicated in table 3, 10 per cent in West Pokot and 6 per cent in North Pokot did not give their opinions. This information is denoted in Table 28. Calculated chi square value was 10.00 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance; the null hypothesis was rejected since X^2 critical was less than X^2 observed at $\alpha=0.05$. There was significant difference between the seasons the respondents experienced conflicts in West and North Pokot. About half of the women in these conflict prone areas asserted that conflicts were frequent during the drought season with an equal number of them indicating that conflicts were common in wet seasons. Although the general view of most of them is that people became more aggressive when looking for grazing land for their animals during dry season, it has also become evident that conflicts are present during the wet seasons as well.

Table 3: Seasons when Conflicts were Common

Seasons when conflicts are common	West Pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North Pokot (Kopulio)		
	f_0	f_e	f_o	f_e	Mean
Frequently	39 (39)	50 (50)	46 (46)	55 (55)	42.5
Drought	32 (32)	25 (25)	38 (38)	30 (30)	35
Rainy	16 (16)	13 (13)	7 (7)	8 (8)	11.5
None of the above	3 (3)	2 (2)	3 (3)	2 (2)	3
No response	10 (10)	10 (10)	6 (6)	5 (5)	8
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	

SD 17.741
Variance 314.737
Calculated chi-square value(X^2) $= 10.003$
Degrees of freedom $= 4$
Level of significance $= 0.05$
   X^2 critical(0.05,4) $= 9.488$

Security Adequacy

A large proportion of respondents indicated that there is inadequate security for the women during conflicts. Table 4 shows that 94 per cent in West Pokot and 88 per cent in North Pokot said the security provided was not enough, while 4 per cent and 12 per cent in West Pokot and North Pokot respectively said the security was adequate. A total of two per cent did not give their views on security adequacy. From the table, a calculated chi square value was 6.43, for$v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance was obtained. The findings indicated that there was significant difference between the respondent's views on the adequacy of security in the two districts. A majority of women in these conflict prone districts believed they lacked adequate security by the government.

Table 4 : Security Adequacy

Security adequacy	West pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North pokot (Kopulio)		
	f_0	f_e	f_o	f_e	Mean
Yes	4 (4)	5 (5)	12 (12)	20 (20)	8
No	94 (94)	94 (94)	88 (88)	79 (79)	91
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (1)	1
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	

SD 41.467
Variance 1719.515
Calculated chi-square value(X^2) $= 6.425$
Degrees of freedom $= 2$
Level of significance $= 0.05$
   X^2 critical(0.05,2) $= 5.991$

CONCLUSION

As a result of the above findings it is evident that conflicts affected the lives of women to a large extent with the frequency of conflicts being high. . It is evident from the study that conflicts occurred more in drought season that during rainy season. The study also found out that there was no adequate security during these conflicts, something that to a large extent is a habor to the adversely encountered effects on conflicts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the government and other stake holders such as Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Church Based Organizations should increase structural peace building capacities and ensure that there is permanent alleviation of conflicts. This may be done by encouraging change in traditional cultural values such as high bride price payment of livestock, when a young man is to get married.

The study also recommends the role of women in peace building should be encouraged. Women can be resourceful in stimulating the men, youth and other women in the cultivation of peace. The women could do this through creating awareness in the song and dance presented in the women group meetings, cultural festivities such as initiation and wedding ceremonies.

REFERENCES

Arcellana, N. P. (1998). *U N Country Report: Cambodia*.

Bartos, O. J. & Wehr P. (2002). *Using Conflict Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bogan, K. (1994). *Ethnic Nationalism*. London: Greenwood Press.

De Smedit, J. (1998). *Child Marriages in Rwanda Refugee Camps*.UNICEF

Ebihara, M. M. (1974). Khmer Village Women in Cambodia. In C. Mathiason, Ed., *Many Sisters:Women in Cross Cultural Perspective.* New York: Free Press.

Gerard, P. (1997). The Rwandan Crisis: History of Genocide. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press. In Getui, M. (Eds). *Violence against Women, Reflections by Kenyan Women Theologians*. Nairobi: Action Publishers.

Getui M. N. & Wamae, G. (1996). *Violence against Women, Reflections by Kenyan Women Theologians.* Nairobi: Action Publishers.

Green, L. (1999). *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Himes, J. S.(1980). *Conflict and Conflict Management.* Athen: University of Georgia Press.

ICRC Report, 2002

Kriesberg, L. (1998). *Constructive Conflicts.* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Press.

Krishna, K. (1997). *Rebuilding Societies after Civil Wars: Critical Areas for International Assistance.* Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Kumar, K. (2001). *Women and Civilian War: Impact, Organization and action Boulder* Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publischers.

Migdal, J., S., Atul, K.& Vivienne, S. eds. (2002). *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World.* Cambridge: CambridgeUniversityPress.

Stoll, D. (1993). *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*. New York: Colombia University Press.