

Exploration of Local Peace Committees in Community-Based Peacebuilding: Five African Cases

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Abstract

This paper explores local peace committees (LPCs) as a means of resolving community-based conflicts. I posit that communal harmony can be realized by utilizing local capacity that exists within communities, thus rebuilding fractured and estranged relationships. This article discusses African examples of local peace committees that are seen as effective and necessary peacebuilding structures at local levels. Central to LPCs are three concepts: participation; the need for sustainability; and utilizing local knowledge and skills. LPCs are intended to be inclusive and to involve community members who can work together to rebuild relationships; further, they become valuable instruments that use traditional and local skills to resolve conflicts where their resolution matters the most. Evidence from African cases demonstrates examples of LPCs that prevented communities from degenerating into violence and widespread conflicts. The cases analyzed in this paper are from Burundi, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. I have also examined challenges of instituting LPCs that should be considered and stenciled on one's mental sheet concerning their effectiveness and sustainability.

Keywords

Local Peace Committees, Local Capacities, Community-Based, Participatory, Peacebuilding

1. Introduction

The premise of this paper is that local peace committees (LPCs) are innovative and constructive means of resolving conflicts located within a community. Community-based approaches, as defined by Haider (2009), "seek to empower

local community groups and institutions by giving the community direct control” over decisions and implementation. Such an approach “emphasises inclusive participation and management.”

Research in the field of community-based peacebuilding increasingly demonstrates that when community members participate in the development and implementation of a solution, it is likely to be sustainable. The research of [Neufeldt and Janzen \(2021\)](#), in describing community-based research in Haiti that involved youth and community members from four communities, notes that the community members appreciated their meaningful participation in the research. They further note that although the process is complicated, messy, and time-consuming, the results are rewarding with the reduction of conflict, creation of new knowledge, and increased confidence of the participants. [Arviola \(2008\)](#) posits that LPCs reflect a community-based peacebuilding approach that uses innovative local means of social interaction, and has the aim of rebuilding relationships, reducing violence, and fostering constructive social transformation.

I have analyzed five LPCs in Burundi, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe that have added value to peacebuilding efforts and conflict transformation at the community level. Whether formal or informal, LPCs have served as essential structures to enhance and promote peace at the level of the community. The contexts in the five countries and associated communities are dissimilar; however, the LPCs were community-driven and locally owned. They recognized, relied upon, and used local capacities, that is, skills and knowledge, to create peaceful and communal harmony. That LPCs have proven successful in community-based peacebuilding in diverse settings, especially across troubled African communities, is the rationale for further examination of LPCs. Through the analysis of these cases, I also identify some of the successes and challenges that occur in utilizing LPCs.

2. Community-Based Peacebuilding

A major challenge of development and peacebuilding efforts has been that they have frequently ignored what is already known by people in the community. Arguably, this is relevant in Africa and other continents. In the field of development, it had become apparent by the 1990s that development from a top-down approach was ineffective. [Picciotto \(1992\)](#) notes that

Evaluation findings confirm that projects developed with sensitivity to social and cultural realities are more likely to deliver productive results. Beneficiary participation and community involvement have begun to permeate development assistance programmes.

Currently, participation by stakeholders in development has evolved to become a major narrative of development initiatives, notwithstanding, however, that the understanding of what constitutes ‘local’ and ‘participation’ is evolving. In the field of peacebuilding, [Mac Ginty \(2017\)](#) notes the poor returns from in

ternational and state-building investments, with many post-war societies suffering from several maladies that include economic inequality and a tense, uneasy peace. [Autesserre \(2017\)](#) describes the unevenness of national approaches to local initiatives and the subsequent damage to a community when there is a lack of support for local initiatives. The differences between top-down and grassroots perceptions of the nature of the conflict and of peace create “a different kind of narrative emerges if one employs ascriptive, bottom-up and community-orientated research techniques” ([Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2016](#)). This shift in focus from international/national to local involvement is increasingly accepted as essential in peacebuilding. Not only peacebuilding practitioners but also researchers have incrementally recognized that worldwide peace-support efforts that do not involve the local people but national elites cannot easily be sustained as they lack local ownership which is essential for obtaining genuine local peace ([Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021](#)).

An important effect of a community-based approach is that the community is treated with respect and taken seriously when building, rebuilding, maintaining, and sustaining personal, intergroup, intragroup, and social relationships and avoiding conflicts or strained relationships. A change in perception of a community is necessary: the “views of communities as powerless and conflict as uniform reinforce framings of conflict areas as devastated (institutionally, politically, economically, culturally)” ([Roll, 2016](#)). It is a mediatory process at the local level by conflict solvers who can use a community’s approaches, experiences, knowledge, and resources to solve a conflict.

3. Local Peace Committees (LPCs)

LPCs are formal or informal service-oriented structures in a community, providing a framework for decisions to be implemented ([Chivasa, 2019](#)). They are formed at the local or grassroots level for “inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding” ([Issifu, 2016](#)). In understanding what is meant by “local”, [Van Leeuwen et al. \(2020\)](#) acknowledge that this is an ambiguous concept that can be seen in a variety of ways such as a space, cultural group or structure. Their roles vary and can include prevention, mediation, or healing.

LPCs use a variety of means to accomplish the objective of building peace: agreement; awareness creation; community-level capability building and empowerment; consensus building; traditional advocacy; mediation, and negotiation ([Issifu, 2016](#)). LPCs are usually a collection of people at the local level who agree as a group to work together to rebuild strained or damaged relationships and to prevent communal or interpersonal tensions, violence, or conflict. As local structures, they can provide the framework for peacebuilding concepts to be implemented: they draw upon the power of the group to bring about change. [Van Tongeren \(2013\)](#) acknowledges the significant roles local peace committees have played in meaningfully investing in local people to become builders of peace, solvers of community tensions, and reducers of community violence.

To help in addressing local conflicts, LPCs have emerged as necessary struc-

tures that incorporate customary and contemporary measures to inhibit, manage or transform conflicts within an ethnic group or involve ethnic groups (Mac Ginty, 2017). Chivasa (2017) argues that LPCs are important mechanisms in preventing the outbreak or spread of low-level conflicts into brutal and more extensive conflicts and promoting development.

The use of indigenous, traditional, or local knowledge recognizes that “the knowledge and proficiency unique to a given society or culture” is helpful in facilitating mediated settlement of differences or reconciling people (Ademowo & Nuhu, 2017).

4. International, National, and Local Peacebuilding

The importance of local initiatives in peacebuilding is argued, however, external initiatives from international or national structures are equally important, particularly in cases of widespread violent conflicts, as will be noted in the discussion below on Burundi. Curtis (2013) argues that without international interventions, even an uneasy peace would have been challenging, and it also shows:

The stark limits of the international peacebuilding project. In particular, Burundian peacebuilding highlights the complex interplay between outside ideas and interests, and multiple Burundian ideas and interests.

In terms of national peacebuilding structures, a national example is that of Ghana, which became the first African country in recent years to have formed a national peace infrastructure through the National Peace Council Act (Act 818) of 2011. The National Peace Committee (NPC) effectively addressed violence and post-electoral tensions after the 2008 and 2012 elections and contributed to peaceful democratic transfers of power (Nganje, 2021; Awinador-Kanyirige, 2014). The model used in the NPC could be utilized in local contexts as well, representing a more holistic approach in which a model could be effectively used nationally and locally. The need for local, national, and international values and standards to be aligned is argued by Akande et al. (2021), who present an integrated approach to peacebuilding:

The ideal of building and sustaining peace is that all levels of society function harmoniously, reflecting an integration of local knowledge and national policies, in short, holistic systems and principled standards.

5. Case Studies

I have discussed five cases where LPCs were used, followed by a discussion of significant findings. In **Table 1** below, the locations, types of conflicts, and types of LPCs are summarised.

5.1. The Kibimba Peace Committee in Burundi

Burundi, since its independence from Belgium in 1962, experienced ethnically-based political violence, including civil war and genocide (Burihabwa & Curtis,

2019). The country's first direct presidential elections were held in 1993 and brought Melchior Ndadaye, an ethnic Hutu, to the presidency (Alfieri, 2016). His death at the hands of the Tutsi military elites in 1993 plunged Burundi into over a decade of civil war that resulted in an estimated 300 000 deaths between 1993 to 2005 (Nganje, 2021; Burihabwa & Curtis, 2019; Hajayandi, 2015). International and local efforts became compelling necessities to ensure that the country was restored to normalcy.

The Arusha Peace Agreement (UN Peacemaker, 2000) was signed in 2000 with the militant Hutu groups, the *Forces for National Liberation (FNL)*, who were still actively causing political chaos across the country. In 2004, a UN peacekeeping mission was deployed. This peace arrangement was important in guaranteeing that warring parties would stop hostilities and leave the battlefields (Hajayandi, 2015; Niyukuri, 2020). It helped to promote integration and ethnic balance in political institutions, demobilize belligerent groups, and transition Burundi to democratic governance. The peace agreement was a significant move at finding political solutions and fostering the restoration of peace and stability.

While international efforts helped in finding political resolutions to the issues, the resolution of local conflicts in the communities devolved to communities as the major political solutions had been agreed upon. One such community-based committee was the Kibimba Peace Committee (KPC), an initiative originally developed in 1994 (Nganje, 2021) as an informal means of mediation and resolving conflicts. Kibimba, a colline in Burundi with its highest population being Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, experienced violent conflicts in 1993 after President Ndadaye was assassinated, and Hutus, in rage over this assassination, gathered Tutsis at a petrol station and burned them alive, the most horrible single incident of 1993 resulting in 450 deaths (Leach, 2016). M. Mathias Ndimurwanko, a primary school teacher of the Kibimba, and an escapee from the petrol station massacre, mustered the courage and rallied local leaders around the idea of reconciling their differences and living together once again peacefully. He spoke with a range of community members, including teachers, religious leaders,

Table 1. Summary of case studies by location and type of conflict.

No.	Location	Type of Conflict	Type of LPC	Period of initiation
1	Burundi	The genocide involving Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups	Kibimba Peace Committee began as an informal LPC	1994
2	Kenya	Livestock raiding and natural resource conflict among ethnic groups in Wajir	The Wajir Peace and Development Committee was an informal LPC	1993
3	Sierra Leone	The use of cultural practices to realize guilts, apologize, and seek forgiveness	Fambul Tok community peace structures were informal LPCs	2007
4	Tanzania	Ethnic land disputes between the Maasai and the Sonjo	Community Leadership Forum was an informal LPC	2009
5	Zimbabwe	Farmland invasion, ethnic tension, political and electoral violence, and economic challenges	The ward and village-level PC were informal LPCs	2014/2015

and military officers of both ethnic groups. The result was the creation of the Kibimba Peace Committee in December 1994 (Leach, 2016). The local peace committee was composed of ethnic Hutus and Tutsis, including traditional, religious, and military leaders as well as internally displaced and returned exiled Hutus. They worked together, brought their individual issues before their collective group, and found possible solutions that restored peace to the Kibimba community. This LPC helped in facilitating mediatory dialogues that ensured that the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, who once fiercely confronted and killed each other, found means to settle their differences and peacefully co-exist. The KPC succeeded in facilitating dialogues between conflicting ethnic groups and calmed down nerves, as well as ensured peaceful coexistence while undertaking development projects in the community (Issifu, 2016). Accomplishments included an income-generating association, reopening of schools, organization of multi-cultural events, and accommodating returned refugees. A Hutu testified that the Kibimba Peace Committee facilitated dialogue. The KPC helped make the community understand the root causes of the conflict in Burundi and how the unsuspecting citizens were driven into violence by “ill-intentioned politicians” who fled the country to safety when the conflict intensified (Niyonkuru, 2012).

Owing to past hostilities and losses, there were initial apprehensions about the local peace initiative when it commenced. Gradually, fears and mistrust dissipated as confidence was restored among the people, and genuine healing and peace in Kibimba became possible. The Kibimba Peace Committee gained an enviable reputation in Burundi as the most effective and efficient local mechanism for repairing relationships, resolving inter-ethnic conflict, and restoring peace and stability (Nganje, 2021).

Against this backdrop, the Ministry for Peace and Reconciliation (MI-PAREC), a national non-profit organization based in Gitega, committed itself to replicating the Kibimba Peace Committee model around the province. Hence, the MI-PAREC and British NGO, the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD), set up and organized training sessions on reconciliation, forgiveness, leadership, restorative justice, and conflict transformation for LPCs that provided them essential skills in peacebuilding and conflict resolution locally (Niyukuri, 2020). As a result, about 500 to 600 LPCs, modeled after Kibimba's, were established in 14 of the 17 provinces in Burundi at commune, community, colline, and zone levels, and they helped to restore peace and stability in Burundi that was once overwhelmed by atrocious ethnic conflict (Niyonkuru, 2012).

5.2. The Wajir Peace and Development Committee in Kenya

Situated in Kenya's north-eastern province, the Wajir District was “fragile to extremisms and the ‘survival of the fittest’ syndrome, and rivalry between different clans over controlling and utilizing the scarce natural resources” (Issifu, 2016). The area is pastoral in nature, and the district lacked economic progress, con-

tributing to high youth unemployment and fights over natural resources. In 1991 and 1992, the district witnessed clashes over natural resources that resulted in 1200 deaths, thousands of robberies, injury and rape cases, and the destruction of livestock estimated at \$900,000 (Van Tongeren, 2013). Livestock raiding that resulted to 592 deaths between 2006 and 2009 in Wajir West communities and clashes over points of water during the dry season were the key conflicts in Wajir. Not only was Wajir District plagued with livestock raiding, lack of social infrastructures, hunger, widespread rape of women, the scarcity of resources, and poverty, but the district was also embroiled in conflict involving three Somali clans that resulted in the loss of lives and properties. The whole area was considered unsafe; the situation had deteriorated by 1993 to the extent that a solution appeared helpless (Juma, 2000).

In 1993, a group of women who had come to the market met together (Juma, 2000) and started a local peace initiative, the Wajir Women for Peace Group, and developed a home-grown remedy to the problems experienced. The group expanded in Wajir Town and later was renamed the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC), composed of women, businesspeople, youth, elders, and a network of community-level peacebuilders (Leach, 2016). WPDC resolved conflicts, restored peace, calmed tensions, and enhanced stability within Wajir. WPDC cooperated with local and religious leaders as it mediated and settled community conflicts. WPDC's mediatory interventions resulted in the 'Al Fatah-declaration', an agreement that laid out rules to return Wajir to peace, inspired businesspeople who contributed their resources for peace activities in the community, brought home-grown peace to the community or district and led to the replication of the WPDC initiative across Kenya, including in many pastoral and semi-pastoral areas (Issifu, 2016). The Kenyan Government espoused the local peacebuilding initiatives of WPDC and decided to establish District Peace Councils (DPCs) across Kenya through the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008 (Khabure, 2014).

The importance and usefulness of the WPDC is not only reflected in the excellent work done in Wajir District at creating home-grown solutions to conflicts but it is also reflected in its national impact that made the Government of Kenya to establish District Peace Councils (DPC) across the country through the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008, thereby giving relevance and formalization to local peacebuilding works across the country.

5.3. The Fambul Tok and National and the District Code Monitoring Committees in Sierra Leone

A brutal civil war in Sierra Leone lasted from 1991-2002, with countless casualties and millions of displaced people. The causes of the conflict were "multi-faceted and complex," including ethnic, political, intergenerational, urban and rural, state and local conflicts (Higgins, 2019). The brutality of the conflict left physical and psychological scars on communities and families. Peace was declared in 2002, however, the underlying grievances and root causes of the

conflict remained (Novelli & Higgins, 2017). At the end of the war,

various post-conflict programmes were implemented, including the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme, the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a reparations programme (Martin, 2021).

However, many community-level issues had not been resolved by the TRC, SCSL and other such programmes. The gap was filled by the formation of an organization called “Fambul Tok,” which is a Krio (Sierra Leonean language) phrase meaning “family talk”. One of the aims was to rejuvenate the traditions of truth-telling, apology, and forgiveness and to bring solutions to the community level (Hoffman, 2008). The Fambul Tok was a creation of Sierra Leonean Human rights activist John Caulker, who felt that the work of the SCSL and the TRC were insufficient and needed the involvement of a broad cross-section of community members to take part in resolving conflicts. The local peace initiative was quite helpful in facilitating communal peace in Sierra Leone after the country’s civil war. An evaluation of the initiative indicates that:

84% of people felt their local peace groups had helped prevent conflicts, and 96% said that levels of violence had been contained; 60% agreed that the programme had made them want to bring people closer together; Over 85% thought it had changed their perception of others whom they had not previously liked, and that they had learned to forgive others (Vernon, 2019).

Additionally, the National and District Code Monitoring Committees also served as effective structures that addressed contentious disputes by way of effective mediation and reconciliation activities. For instance, the EU Election Observation Mission (European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission, 2007) reports that the National and District Code Monitoring Committees played key roles in resolving elections related clashes in “some areas including Kono, Kambia, Kailahun, and Bo district.” The National and District Code Monitoring Committees formed local peace committees, whose primary responsibility was to mediate conflicts that involved political parties. The LPCs worked, maintained, and built peace in four districts in Sierra Leone and helped to avoid electoral and post-electoral violent clashes that would have undermined the peace and stability of the districts and destructively impacted the general peace and stability of the country.

5.4. The Community Leadership Forum in Tanzania

In an agricultural community in Ngorongoro District, Northern Tanzania, ethnic land disputes erupted between the Maasai section, Loita, and the Sonjo or Matemi over the “unjust grabs of land” (Goldman et al., 2014). Ethnic clashes also emerged over cultural attitudes and livestock thefts in the face of scarcity of land for the Sonjo, who believed that the Loita Maasai had arrived from Kenya to invade and take over their land. Tanzania’s government was seen as favoring

the Sonjo because the government did little or nothing about the Sonjo's expansion into the Loita's territory. The interventions of state and external actors to resolve the conflict were characterized by little success. In fact, mediatory interventions by the government and its local officials were unwelcome and resultantly failed to yield the intended outcome of bringing peace amongst the people, as those interventions fell short of involving the local people and considering their cultural values and practices (Goldman et al., 2014). The interventions of state actors and external nonstate actors were fruitless and unsuccessful.

Predicated upon the situation, it became a necessity for mechanisms that would find a sustainable remedy and would incorporate the customary values and practices of the communities. An innovative partnership between Ujamaa Community Resource Trust (UCRT), a community-based organization, and the pastoral Maasai customary leaders led to the creation of the Community Leadership Forum (CLF). It supported customary leaders using local conflict resolution techniques to arrive at sustainable peace within and between the communities (Maphosa et al., 2014). The intervention of the CLF proved fruitful in addressing the conflicts and promoting peaceful interactions within and among the communities and their members. The mediation efforts of CLF took into consideration the customary practices and values of the Loita and Sonjo ethnic groups and succeeded in reducing tension over the unjust land grabs, and in resolving conflicts between four of the six villages, especially using internal or local actors, actions, and strategies for effective local peacebuilding (Autesserre, 2017). The CLF proved quite useful and helpful in mediating and addressing conflicts and building and sustaining peaceful relations within communities and beyond.

Conflicts over land ownership were some of the sources of conflict in Tanzania, as noted above. For women in Tanzania, land rights were insecure: "in male-dominated customary institutions, women often have a limited role in the group's decision-making process" (Dungumaro & Amos, 2019). An important outcome of the UCRTs was an increase in women's participation. Dungumaro and Amos (2019) note that where UCRTs were active, women became involved in the structures and were able to address issues of importance to women.

5.5. The Ward and Village Level Peace Committees in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has experienced years of violent conflict since independence. The country's transition to independence was accompanied by ethnic tensions, economic challenges, and political and electoral violence (Dzimiri et al., 2014). These situations left the ordinary Zimbabweans exposed to "hunger and food insecurity at households' level, unavailability of finances to pay school fees, rape cases involving the girl child, domestic violence, stock theft, robbery, fist fighting at beer parties, and disputes over land boundaries" (Chivasa, 2019).

As a result of farm invasions and election-related violent events that needed to be addressed to keep communities peaceful, the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET), a grassroots organization, in 2001 held 72 workshops in

Mashonaland West that brought together 3,804 participants and 54 workshops in Mashonaland Central that brought 3,982 participants to create community awareness on conflict management, the damage of violence against children and women, and gender sensitivity and inclusivity. ZIMCET succeeded in establishing local peace committees that served as liaison groups that sought “to promote peace and tolerance between individuals and group” (ZIMCET, cited in [Chivasa, 2019](#)). The peace committees were quite helpful in supporting community development work and allowing the communities to own their peace and development and proved to be effective “...watchdogs, providing early warning systems on conflicts within communities; deliberate on conflicts that would have arisen in communities as well as following up on resolutions arrived at during deliberations” ([Makwerere, 2017](#)).

Building on the successful work of the peace committees, peace committees at the ward and village levels in Seke District were formed through an action research study ([Chivasa, 2019](#)) aimed at addressing their conflict concerns and promoting local peace initiatives. Committee membership included people who manifested qualities of trustworthiness, steadfastness, and faithfulness, and they came from diverse ethnic, political, economic, and cultural backgrounds within the communities. Chivasa’s action research created “a ward level peace committee initiative and three village peace committees between 2014 and 2015” ([Chivasa, 2019](#)). The peace committees served as valuable structures that enhanced community development and increased community participation in taking ownership of their peace and development initiatives. They responded to Seke District’s peace needs, facilitated community development, and promoted community cohesion. The peace committees were self-initiated local peace mechanisms that were less costly because they relied on local capacities for peace within Seke District for creating sustainable peace that bequeathed peace benefits of social development to the communities.

These local peace committees faced several challenges. In a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe, the formation of the peace committee required age and gender sensitivity. Secondly, the members of the peace committee were volunteers who, at times, gave less attention to the work and paid attention to other things that provided them personal benefits. Also, the LPCs were confronted with material (logistical and financial) challenges. In spite of the challenges, the idea of peace committees gained traction as an essential tool that uses context-specific means of resolving local conflict in the Seke District.

I have summarized the challenges the LPCs have faced in their work in Zimbabwe, as noted by [Makwerere \(2017\)](#):

- 1) Traditional leaders have political connections outside of the localities that influence them and side-lining them in the committees’ formation is not an option. They may find it difficult to become transformation agents when the political objectives differ with those of the LPCs.

- 2) Committee members who fear reprisal actions when interacting with local officials in other spheres find it difficult to feely express themselves during the

work of the committee.

3) Traditional leaders' determination to maintain the status quo and their supremacy in the face of religious leaders telling them the truth of the situation, and youth, women, and elderly (the ordinary people) remain determined to bring forth their issues.

4) Handling and resolving cases traditionally which the traditional courts considered as usurpation of their functions was a challenge, for which, in some cases, they insisted that the LPCs report to their councils to make a final determination even in cases the committees had already handled and settled.

5) LPCs being rushed into decision-making to bring finality to community conflicts.

6) Structural and cultural violence against women and their rights that inhibit and, in some instances, adversely affect their participation in the work of the committees.

5.6. Discussion

The five LPCs across Burundi, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe offered great opportunities for community harmony. As the situations differed from one country to another based on cultural values and the nature of the conflict, the solutions were tailored based on the culture and communities in which they operated. When local communities engaged in fierce conflict or were confronted with the threats of intense internal conflicts, the LPCs intervened and prevented the occurrences of violence, reduced tension, and constructively engaged in solving their problems through dialogues that helped find practical and amicable resolutions to the conflicts. The LPCs were composed of committed members who were key in mediating, preventing, and resolving conflicts and, at the same time, repairing relations to support and build peaceful communities “using traditional advocacy, mediation, negotiation, agreement, consensus building, awareness creation, community level capability building and empowerment” (Issifu, 2016).

Types of conflicts: The conflicts in Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe were primarily ethnic. In Burundi, the conflict was about ethnic extremism and political power between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups that resulted in the politically influenced elimination of opponents, civil conflict, and ethnic cleansing, ending up in the death of over a quarter of a million people (Hajayandi, 2015). Efforts of a primary school teacher culminated in the formation of Kibimba Peace Committee in December 1994 that helped to restore calm and peace to the once-troubled Kibimba community. Issifu (2016) writes that “it took the intervention of LPCs to restore some degree of peace in Burundi.”

In Kenya, ethnic conflicts, conflicts over scarce water resources during the dry season led to the establishment of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, a “network of women, youth, businesses, elders, and others” (Leach, 2016). This committee was started by a group of women. The committee locally built peace

and restored stability in the Wajir communities by focusing on inclusivity and rebuilding relationships. For the Ngorongoro District in Northern Tanzania, ethnic land disputes between the Maasai and the Sonjo were resolved by the Community Leadership Forum (CLF) after repeated failures by state and other external actors whose interventions in the conflicts failed, principally because they ignored, overlooked and side-lined the local capacities for peace and cultures. In Zimbabwe, farmland invasion, ethnic tension, political and electoral violence, and economic challenges were situations that accompanied the country's independence. These situations negatively impacted several communal relationships across the country and were resolved by the mediatory interventions of the local peace committees set up by the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET) in Mashonaland West and Mashonaland Central and the ward-level and village-level peace committees in the Seke District. For Sierra Leone, the TRC and the SCSL did not focus on community or local level conflicts among community members. Hence, the Fambul Toks (family talks), community peace structures, created room for the use of traditional means to tell the truth, render apologies, seek forgiveness, reconcile people at the community levels, and restore peace and they succeeded at doing so in many communities in the country.

Formal and informal LPCs. Formal LPCs are those LPCs recognized by the state, while informal LPCs have little or no recognition by the state. Informal LPCs are those that may be “composed of volunteers with a high level of personal interest in peace” (Irene & Majekodunmi, 2017). The memberships of the informal LPCs encompassed committed volunteers who were very passionate about peacebuilding and seriously willing to resolve local conflict using more innovative means. Whether formal or informal, these LPCs are usually established at the sub-national level in districts, chiefdoms, clans, zones, cities, towns, and villages. They primarily seek to bring to an effective end occurring or past violence and try as much as possible to prevent the repetition or resurgence of violence. They recognize that collaboration is needed to take the necessary actions to handle the immediate threats a community faces. They aim to find solutions to situations that, if left unattended, could most likely plunge the communities into chaos of far-reaching consequences and thus undermine unity and peace.

The Kibimba Peace Committee in Burundi, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee in Kenya in Kenya, the Fambul Tok in Sierra Leone, the Community Leadership Forum in Tanzania, and the ward and village level peace committees in Zimbabwe were informal LPCs that evolved into more formal structures, while The National and the District Code Monitoring Committees in Sierra Leone were formal LPCs. They operated in small-scale geographic spaces closest to a population, where practices therein were easily understood by its inhabitants and whose peace and other needs were common (Öjendal, Leonardsson, & Lundqvist, 2017).

Challenges of LPCs: A challenge with informal LPCs is that they often lack the influence to engage governmental and political actors and leaders who possess

political powers to get things done. As a result, those governmental and political actors often give little or no attention to them. Financial support may also be problematic depending on the goals of the LPC.

The formality and informality of LPCs come with additional challenges. Formal LPCs seem to be vulnerable to infiltration by elected and other political officials who want to use them to promote their narrow political interests in cases where the LPCs rely on state institutions to support their work (Nganje, 2021). When formal local peace committees that depend on the national structure are not supported to do their work, they can be rendered impotent, if not ineffective, to meet their desired objectives. For instance, Nepal's Transition to Peace Initiative (NTTP), a formal local peace committee, became dysfunctional when the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction was embroiled in a political power struggle and could not provide support any longer (Odendaal, 2010). Informal LPCs depend on voluntarism, whose absence leads to its failure (Chivasa, 2019). As LPCs are consensus-building arrangements that lack enforcement powers, they become powerless structures when situations of conflict that require enforcement occur. While the inclusion of marginalized groups promotes inclusivity, equity, justice, and effectiveness, Kenya's male elder dominant traditional structures for conflict resolution in pastoral communities were weakened by the inclusion of women and youth on the insistence of NGOs because their inclusion was in sharp contrast to their roles defined by tradition and at variance with the local cultural standards (Glowacki & Gonc, 2013; Odendaal, 2010). However, as much possible, LPCs need to be inclusive and "comprised of different social groups, including youth, women and children, and religious groups" (Sangqu, 2014) to project and guarantee inclusivity, participation, equity, and fairness.

For local peace to be fostered by LPCs, appropriate actions must be taken by relevant political and other actors to fertilize the ground, especially in conflict and immediate post-conflict settings. In cases where local elites, officials, and actors present themselves as stumbling blocks to efforts to build peace because of corruption and greed, and unwilling and unable to bring the local people together, it undermines local efforts at building peace (Öjendal, Leonardsson & Lundqvist, 2017). For example, the local elites in South Sudan have been obsessed with the immediate benefits of international aid and thus they give little or no attention to the peace and stability of the country or its peace process (Ylönen, 2012).

When middle-level and top-level political actors are not considered and connected to the building of peace at the local levels, the tendency for what Donais and Knorr (2013) call "put the 'up' in bottom-up peacebuilding" can be difficult and lead to the minimum impact of peacebuilding interventions. In Burundi, the lack of resources and proper coordination served as key weaknesses owing to the drying up of peacebuilding assistance after their conflict (Niyonkuru, 2012). External support represents a threat to local ownership of the peacebuilding process as funding agencies advance their agenda and may even lead to a multiplicity of LPCs in a single community, making it difficult to establish community le-

gitimacy like in Northern Kenya (Glowacki & Gonc, 2013). LPCs lack effective enforcement power to compel compliance through the instruments of coercion for which they seek and use consensus to arrive at and implement decisions (Odendaal, 2010).

Benefits of LPCs: Irrespective of the contexts, the line that uniquely runs through the LPCs from the five African cases analyzed in this paper points to the fact that once local capacities for peace are identified and used, community-based peacebuilding through local peace committees and local ownership of the peace process can be realized. These cases have proven that every community has its unique local capacities for peace and culture that can be useful to rebuild broken relationships and return once-troubled communities and their people to peace, tranquillity, and stability. Across these contexts, the work of the LPCs was successful as the LPCs contributed to the decrease in and nonexistence of tension and violence and the willingness of the conflicting parties to work together to firstly stabilize their communities and secondly reconstruct and transform them through collaboration. The parties were motivated by their desire to use traditional or cultural means to reconcile and live together peacefully.

Inclusivity in LPCs is an important benefit for a wide range of reasons, and in particular, it allows those previously ‘voiceless’ to contribute towards peace. This is especially relevant for women in that they contribute towards a solution that has a direct benefit to their own communities and families. The Wajir and Tanzanian experiences both illustrate examples of women having a more direct role in peacebuilding and also in addressing past inequalities, further, such efforts advance the goal of women to be involved in all levels of peacebuilding (UN-Women, 2023). Shulika (2016) posits that “the agency of womens’ role is internationally recognized in various policy documents. Their inclusion at all levels of peacebuilding is an imperative that cannot be overstated”.

Often, those involved in the conflict also become involved in their solutions. So, it took members, especially women, of the Somali clans that fought among themselves to establish the Wajir Peace and Development Committee that restore peace to their communities. It took agreement between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups in Kibimba, who heartlessly fought against and killed each other to help themselves in establishing the Kibimba Peace Committee that helped restore peace and reconciliation among them after the bloodletting in Burundi. In Northern Tanzania, especially in the Ngorongo District, Maasai section, Loita, and the Sonjo or Matemi ethnic groups who clashed with each other for land agreed to work together through the Community Leadership Forum (CLF) to address their conflict issues and prevent further conflicts, thereby returning their ethnic groups and communities to peace and stability.

6. Conclusion

LPCs are useful and effective mechanisms for resolving conflicts and assisting in restoring calm to communities once plagued by hostilities and conflictual activi-

ties. In the formation and activities of LPCs, there is a need to exercise sufficient patience and exude tolerance. There is also the need to make necessary adjustments if and when needed, remain focused, and have courage. It is necessary to be aware of and brace oneself for delays during the work of the local peace committee. The participative approach applicability calls for finding people who share a common interest, getting their approbation to participate, creating the avenue for equal participation of all, and the need to collaborate to find a remedy to the identified problem. With those, the guarantee that a collaboratively participative approach is being actualized to undertake peacebuilding interventions is dependable.

The durability and sustainability of peace require it to be built at the community level, using creativity to guide social interaction and reduce violence (Mika, 2008, Khairi & Jamaluddin, 2017). Mediation interventions in disputes at local or grassroots levels contribute to sustainable harmony and development in the community. In one case study, women in Kenya were informal mediators and were able to contribute to peacebuilding (Mueller-Hirth, 2019). An effective effort to build peace at the local level needs to use the values, way of life, traditional practices, worldviews, beliefs, and community knowledge (Ademowo & Nuhu, 2017; Magni 2017). The customary, unique, and local knowledge within a particular geographic space increases the traditional self-importance of any group of people. Trustworthiness and acceptability by the people of a community encourage the development of home-grown solutions to conflicts through the use of local knowledge. Such local and setting-specific expertise is orally transmitted by way of demonstration or imitation, interlinking the facets of people's lives (Mistry & Berardi 2016).

A community-based peacebuilding approach that uses indigenous knowledge and local capacities for peace through local peace committees has successfully worked in Burundi, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. Whether informal or formal, the LPCs served as essential structures that enhanced and promoted peace at local levels. The LPCs succeeded as valuable instruments that fostered and ensured communal harmony as the efforts were driven from within the communities. They served as community-based mechanisms that used innovative ways to promote and contribute to social engagements that reduced violence and resolved conflicts, assuring hope for a future for the communities (Arviola, 2008, Khairi and Jamaluddin, 2017). LPCs' reliance on the use of local competencies and expertise for peacebuilding can be useful in ensuring the durability and sustainability of solutions that contribute to peace and promote community-level harmonious coexistence (Mika, 2008, Khairi & Jamaluddin, 2017).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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