

Communication-Facilitation as a Faith-Based Mediation Strategy for Conflict Transformation along the Border between Bomet and Nyamira Counties, Kenya

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Abstract

Faith-based actors tend to feature less in national and international efforts to transform inter and intrastate conflicts. Their contribution has further elicited less scholarly attention to the extent that policy interventions are less comprehensive and largely exclusive. This study aimed to investigate the contribution of communication-facilitation as a faith-based mediation strategy for conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, Kenya. The target population of the study comprised 140 respondents. The sample size consisted of 87 household respondents for questionnaires, 29 respondents for in-depth interviews, 18 respondents for key informant interviews, and 6 focus group discussions from the Kipsigis and Abagusii communities along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, Kenya. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing specific descriptive survey methods along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border zone, Kenya. The research was conducted at four sites in the Ekerubo and Raitigo locations of Nyamira County and the Gelegele location of Bomet County. Questionnaires were administered to the identified household respondents along the Gelegele, Ekerubo and Raitigo locations border. Structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions were utilized to gather information from the respondents. The findings indicated that dialogue, compromise, negotiation, and empowerment were key in transforming conflicts along the border of the counties. It concludes that communication-facilitation had a substantial positive impact on conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira border since it builds mutual trust and promotes peaceful co-existence along the border. However, to enhance the effectiveness of this mediation strategy faith-based organizations should emphasize peaceful sessions along the border. Additional frameworks should be set on continuous training in peace.

Keywords: *Conflict; Faith-Based; Communication-Facilitation; Transformation*

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1. Introduction

Intrastate border conflicts have emerged as a major concern of national governance architectures in most developing countries. In Africa, they have become impediments to the pursuit of nation building and development efforts. Such conflicts depict competition and control of scarce natural resources existing in their cultural and ancestral spaces. In response to these conflicts, various mediation mechanisms have been put in place by the state to transform them. However, the importance of faith-based intervention strategies, especially the communication-facilitation strategy remains unexplored. This paper interrogates the contribution of this strategy in conflict transformation in contested spaces between Bomet and Nyamira counties in Kenya.

2. Review of Literature

Conflict transformation strategies are usually instrumental in conflicts that are pervasive and protracted. The strategies depict the efforts used to identify and intervene into conflicts to advance their positive while reducing the negative aspects (Botes, 2003). Within the realm of conflict transformation, such strategies manifest human empowerment and transparency that promote dialogue, negotiations, and accommodating strategies that are the most common (Haynes, 2018).

The paradigm shift in the understanding of war, conflict and peace has ushered in the new conflict transformation and mediation strategies that currently involve state and non-state actors. This then invites us to reexamine the faith-based mediation strategies that have largely not been acknowledged. Compared to state and non-state mediation strategies literature indicates that faith-based mediation strategies seem to be marginalized especially in developing country contexts (Mahfudin & Sundrijo, 2021; Ruland et al., 2019). According to Ruland et al., (2019) faith-based mediation strategies emerge as an afterthought hence becoming scholarly insignificant in conflict transformation discourse.

Communication facilitation as argued by Bercovitch & Houston (2000) and Quinn et al., (2013) is a type of mediation strategy that aids communication among disputants through compromise, and negotiations. The aim of this strategy is to transform violence and enable peaceful interaction between conflicting parties. Thus, in a communication-facilitation strategy a mediator plays the role of go-between such as passing messages from one disputant to the other and providing involved parties with unbiased information (Young, 2017).

This ensures the comprehensible and unbiased communication among disputants through mediators as a key to conflict transformation. Communication is thus a key factor in conflict transformation and empowers the disputants to take responsibility for the negotiation process and reach their own agreements (Fisher, 2016). This increases the legitimacy and authority of the expected outcome.

The involvement of faith-based actors in conflict transformation is however not new phenomenon (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). By exploring the existence of the communication-facilitation strategy in the modern era, religious leaders have had a prominent role in transforming many conflicts globally and locally. This has been witnessed in states such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel/Palestine, and Sierra Leone (Bercovitch, 2019). Looking at a positive association between high rank and successful mediation, religious leaders are often viewed as high-ranking leaders in communities, where sources of legitimacy are based on custom and religious traditions (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2018). This then depicts how the communication-facilitation mediation strategy is incorporated in the search for conflict transformation in conflict theatres.

3. Statement of the Problem

The border between Bomet and Nyamira counties has experienced protracted intercommunal conflicts for a long time. The conflict has generally been perceived to be not only ethnic and cultural but often mutates into a political conflict thus confounding the relations between the communities in the two counties. Administrative strategies have been trying to transform border conflicts through coercive and other state-centric mediation to no avail. The role of faith-

based mediation strategies has, however, not received much recognition though they have had several initiatives that are directed towards transforming the conflicts. This study interrogated the contribution of communication-facilitation strategy of the faith-based institutions to conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border. It examined the extent to which the strategy impacts on efforts to cultivate peace and coexistence.

4. Theoretical Framework

This paper used the conflict transformation theory to understand the import of communication facilitation as pursued by the faith-based organization in the study area. The theory was espoused by varied authors including, Johan Galtung, Robert Baruch and Joseph Folger, John Paul Lederach, Dietrich Fischer, Johannes Botes, Eleanor Fisher, Maarten Bavinck, and Aklilu Amsalu. For Baruch and Folger (2004) in their seminal work, *The Promise of Mediation*, the theory of conflict transformation can explain the deeper changes among people in conflicts beyond just seeking solutions to short-term problems. Basically, mediation should have the power to deal with the deeper issues of social life and not just stop conflicts. Baruch and Folger (2004) thus said this in reinforcing the premises of the theory of conflict transformation; mediation's greatest value lies in its potential not only to find solutions to people's problems but to change people themselves for the better, in the very midst of conflict.

In his little book on *Conflict Transformation*, Lederach began using the term conflict transformation in the 1980's (Lederach, 2014). This was after an intensive experience he had in Central America that enabled him to re-examine his language amid a conflict. To understand his trend of conflict transformation he came up with four levels that are affected. The first one is the personal level where there is a change in the cognitive, emotional, perception and spiritual dimensions (Botes, 2003). The second is the relational level that has a change in communication and interaction resulting from affectivity, power, interdependence, expressive and communicative aspects of a conflict (Lederach, 2014).

Third is the structural level that brings into light the underlying causes of conflict and the changes it brings in the social, political, and economic structures (Lederach, 2014). This level as indicated in his work affects social structures, organizations and institutions in their patterns and decision making (Botes, 2003). For Lederach, conflict transformation seeks to understand the root causes of conflict to build social structures that can bring solutions without going into violence (Ullah & Inayat, 2023). The last one is the cultural level (Lederach, 2014). It refers to changes produced by the conflict, like identity and response to it, that help the parties involved to promote and build mechanisms of handling the conflict.

Galtung and Fischer have a common definition of conflict transformation. For them it is a way of changing violent attitudes, behavior, and application of creativity to contradictions (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). As a response to conflict globally, socially, and personally, transformation is achieved when hatred, violence, and issues involved are tackled. Conflict transformation then signifies a continuous process of change in relations, behaviors, attitudes, and social structures from negative to positive (Makonye, 2021). As defined the theory is centered on the quality of relationships that is perpetuated through interactions.

Botes's definition and ideas are almost like the ones of Galtung and Fischer. He begins his analysis by acknowledging that conflict transformation is a new invention in the field of peace and conflict studies (Botes, 2003). Unlike conflict resolution, a term that was commonly used in the field of peace and conflict studies, transformation necessitates a psychic transformation in the attitudes, and relationships of involved parties. This denotes overcoming those sources and causes of conflicting situations. In that case transformation leads to reconciliation and healing.

Lastly Fisher, et al (2018) define conflict transformation as an act of involving institutions in the settlement of disputes. It means that societal actors like government agencies, academic institutions and organizations have an upper hand in conflict transformation. This goes further into making sure policies used by these institutions are well revised and the parties involved in the conflict are empowered. It is a change that begins from the highest bodies coming down to the

affected bodies. Any contribution made by these institutions towards conflict transformation has efforts to stimulate justice for the poor and the marginalized.

The theory of transforming a conflict on the other hand believes that a mediator can go beyond offering solutions to a problem and empowering people to change their behavior to stop future conflicts (Baruch & Folger, 2004). Central to the theory is the idea that human beings do not only seek to satisfy their individual needs: they also have a desire for connectedness (Irvine, 2007).

Analytically observed the conflict transformation theory is grounded on two limbs, the first being empowerment and the second being recognition. Empowerment according to Baruch and Folger (2004) is enabling the conflicting parties to identify by themselves the issues that underlie the conflict and to bring about possible solutions on their own. Recognition respectively means the capacity for the opposing party to see the point of view of the other party and to recognize the underlying issues that cause the other party to feel and act the way they do that emerges as a form of understanding (Baruch & Folger, 2004). Consequently, the theory shuns the manipulation mediation strategies for the facilitation strategies and other faith-based strategies, religious activities, that are more inclined to preaching and inspiration. Further, it puts the solutions and responsibility for ceasefire and mutual coexistence on the disputants and not the mediator (Baruch & Folger, 2004).

Further, empowerment according to the theory of conflict transformation does not mean power balancing but means the equipping and re-skilling of disputants to deal with their issues on their own. They in fact infer about empowerment that it offers disputants the capacity to access, greater clarity about their goals, resources, options, and preferences. This clarity then enables the disputants to make conscious and informed decisions about what they want to do to deal with the conflict. Baruch and Folger (2004) define recognition as the elicitation in persons of acknowledgment and understanding for the situation and problems of others that are built on the foundation of empowerment.

Thus, the theory looks at conflicts as a chance for growth and training for the conflicting parties while the former looks at conflicts as a problem to be solved (Lehti, 2019). Also, it views conflicts as a long-term process unlike the short-term basis of conflict management. Moreover, the mediators under theory of conflict transformation seek empowerment and recognition and act as facilitators.

The theory of conflict transformation is, however, not without its criticism. The main criticism is that it is a new paradigm that has not been empirically exhausted. However, it is considered prudent to give the theory of transformative mediation a chance; considering also that faith-based mediation strategies that seek to empower disputants have shown positive potential. It thus applies to the current study because it is attuned to faith-based mediation strategies that seek mostly to create a situation where mediation should have the power to deal with the deeper issues of social life and not just stopping conflicts but empowering the involved parties.

5. Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative research design relying on descriptive survey research methods to interrogate communication-facilitation strategy and conflict transformation in the study area (Orodho, 2009). Data was collected using questionnaires that were distributed to sampled households. Key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and group discussions were also held. Eventually they have provided qualitative data on the contribution of communication-facilitation strategy. The target population of 140 respondents is from Ekerubo and Raitigo Locations of Nyamira County and Gelegele Location of Bomet County. The study utilized primary data collected using self-administered questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. Before the actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted along the Kericho-Kisumu Counties border to test the reliability and validity of the research instruments. Validity was achieved by consulting research supervisors. Reliability was determined by the use of Cronbach Alpha at a level of 0.7. Data analysis was done with the use of SPSS and Microsoft excel. The collected data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

6. Findings

The study examined the contribution of communication-facilitation faith-based mediation strategies to conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, Kenya. The findings from the respondents indicate that dialogue, compromise, negotiation, and empowerment are the primary strategies used in transforming conflicts in the study area. These findings are represented in the table below

Table 1: Communication-Facilitation Strategies and Conflict Transformation Along the Bomet-Nyamira Counties Border, Kenya

Communication-Facilitation Mediation Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Dialogue	25	36.2
Compromise	20	29.0
Negotiation	15	21.7
Empowerment	9	13.1
Total	69	100

Researcher (2025)

The analysis of communication-facilitation faith-based mediation strategies reveals a nuanced approach to conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira Counties border in Kenya. Dialogue emerges as the predominant strategy, with 25 respondents favoring open communication as their primary method of addressing conflicts. This preference suggests a community-oriented approach that prioritizes direct conversation and mutual understanding.

Compromise follows closely, with 20 respondents indicating a willingness to find middle ground and make mutual concessions. This approach demonstrates a pragmatic attitude towards conflict transformation, where parties are prepared to adjust their positions for the sake of peaceful coexistence. Negotiation, employed by 15 respondents, further reinforces the community's commitment to structured and rational conflict transformation methods.

The least utilized strategy is empowerment, with only 9 respondents selecting this approach. This lower percentage might indicate a potential area for improvement in community conflict transformation practices, suggesting a need for more individual capacity building and support mechanisms. The findings collectively paint a picture of a community that values communication and collaborative problem-solving. The significant emphasis on dialogue and compromise indicates a mature approach to conflict transformation, where the primary goal appears to be maintaining social harmony and finding mutually acceptable solutions. This approach is particularly crucial in border regions like Bomet and Nyamira Counties, where inter-community relationships can be complex and sensitive.

The findings from the respondents shed light on the primary communication-facilitation faith-based mediation strategies being used along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border to address and transform conflict. Below are the communication-facilitation mediation strategies that have been used in this study.

7. Dialogue as a Communication–Facilitation Strategy

Dialogue as one of the spiritual principles is frequently mentioned as the primary method for addressing conflict. Respondents view dialogue as a space where parties can discuss grievances, clear misunderstandings, and promote mutual understanding, which is essential for de-escalating conflict.

Respondent 3 from Gelegele location said, *“Through dialogue especially from our religious leaders, we get to listen to each other. Often, misunderstandings arise simply because we don’t take the time to talk to each other. When we talk, we see that we have common issues, and the tension dies down.”*

This statement emphasizes that dialogue is a fundamental strategy for ensuring that people talk to each other, feel heard, and learn to listen to each other. It is a method that has been globally applied as a faith-based mediation strategy especially in Northern Ireland where they embraced an ecumenical dialogue (Power, 2005). In this dialogue the church leaders had created a forum that fostered on ways in which the churches can co-operate on addressing the social and economic needs of the people. Along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border, this dialogue has been of great influence on mutual understanding that brings transformation towards peace. It really shows that when people understand one another and talk to each other it helps reduce the likelihood of violence.

Respondent 5 from Raitigo location also shared, *"Dialogue has been the key to transforming our conflicts. During the meetings, community leaders and church leaders from both sides are present, and this has helped transform conflicts from escalating. It helps to know that we are willing to hear each other out as one family from God."*

This underscores the role of facilitated discussions, particularly with leadership involvement, in preventing small issues from turning into larger confrontations. The presence of the leaders is a clear indication of the trust that people have when sorting out conflicting issues. As was observed by Rüland, et al (2019), in Afghanistan, Nahdatul Ulama leaders had a role in positive peace because they had gained trust from the parties in conflict. Through their interventions there were sessions of dialogue that made the Afghan people come into terms. Then it is important to note the importance of church leaders and community leaders' presence in discussions of peace. They play a great role in the dialogue that enables disputing communities to restore peace and live harmoniously.

One respondent stated, *"Despite our religious and ethnic affiliations, when we sit down and talk, we realize that we have more in common than what divides us. Dialogue helps us to understand each other's pain and console one another."* This sentiment was echoed by another participant who noted, *"Through dialogue, we can address misunderstandings before they escalate into violence."*

The findings suggest that fostering a culture of dialogue, especially where people have respect for their common good, is vital for conflict transformation. It not only helps to clarify issues but also builds relationships, understanding, and trust among community members. It is a similar situation that Nahdatul Ulama as presented by Rüland, et al (2019) applied to process information that granted knowledge and understanding among the conflicting parties. As observed, the value of what the two communities have in common and understanding are presented as key in dialogue that can bring transformation in conflict situations.

In conflict transformation theory, dialogue is recognized as a core approach because it allows for the expression of grievance and the discovery of common ground (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Dialogue from the respondents was seen as an essential and foundational strategy for conflict transformation along the border. Residents that have a religious background believe that talking openly about issues creates opportunities for mutual understanding, which is crucial in areas with recurring conflicts. From the observations made, it suggests that dialogue helps to humanize the other party, reduces mistrust, and lays the groundwork for cooperation. This finding is aligned with conflict transformation theory, which emphasizes the importance of communication-facilitation in transforming conflicts. Fisher et al., (2018) emphasize that dialogue can help to break down the barriers that fuel mistrust and aggression between rival communities. Thus, dialogue is of great value along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border since it has created room for transforming many conflicts.

8. Compromise as a Communication–Facilitation Strategy

Compromise was recognized by the respondents as a necessary approach when both sides have established positions. While compromise can be challenging, especially when valuable resources such as land and water are involved, it was

noted that both sides often make concessions through religious influence to ensure that there is a transformation towards sustainable peace. This was particularly evident in land disputes, boundaries, and water sharing conflicts where religious leaders are actively involved in persuading their people. It is seen as a necessary approach when a full consensus is not arrived at, and both parties must sacrifice some demands to reach a solution that is acceptable.

Compromise is not always easy, but through church teaching, we've learned that it's better to accept the other's stands than continue fighting. Giving in a bit allows for peace to prevail," shared respondent 5 from Gelegele location.

"We compromised on boundary and water with the other community. At first, it was tough, but when we as Christians realized the benefits of peace and tranquility, we had to agree," explained a village elder from Ekerubo location.

Respondent 7 Gelegele location explained, *"Compromise is essential, especially when we have conflicting interests like land and water. Not everyone will have all that they want, so compromising on certain issues and things ensures that harmony is maintained. For example, in our border and water dispute, our church leaders from both sides agreed to share the facilities that are seen as basic for the sake of harmony."*

The responses given above reflects on the practicality of compromise, particularly in resource-sharing disputes where both communities must find a common ground to live together harmoniously despite differing interests. Compromise as a conflict transformation strategy was key in the Sierra Leone civil war. The Inter Religious Council of Sierra Leone urged the disputing parties to put away their interests and find a common ground that fostered peace (Turay, 2000). The role played by compromise along the Bomet-Nyamira border has great similarities with the one of Sierra Leone. As such compromise is a key strategy to conflict transformation.

Respondent 11 of Raitigo location added, *"The ability to compromise is what keeps us peaceful in this area. If one side insists on their firm standing without being flexible, there will be constant conflict. But when we agree to give up some of our interests for the common good, peace prevails."*

This clearly indicates how compromise can be an ongoing solution towards transformation ensuring that both sides feel mutually respected in the process. We also recognize the importance of sacrifice in compromise. The response given above on the issue of compromise has been proved to be one of the challenging situations when the warring parties have particular interests. However, in Uganda the rebels and the government were called upon to sacrifice their interests for the sake of peace. As Hoekema (2019) explained the Ugandan conflict transformation efforts, all the conflict parties were flexible. This led to a peaceful agreement facilitating face-to-face meetings. This is a real situation where the act of flexibility takes over for the disputing parties to agree. The giving out that which is precious for the sake of peace is a true acceptance of conflict transformation.

A farmer shared: *"We agreed to let the neighboring community, who are our brothers and sisters, who share social facilities like the church and health facilities, use the water during dry seasons. It's human because we are in need of this as human beings which is better than fighting over a natural resource that is given freely from God."*

A village elder remarked, *"Sometimes we have to give up something we want to reach an agreement. Compromise is about finding a solution that works for everyone."* Another participant added, *"Without compromise, conflicts will never end. We must be willing to meet halfway."*

The two responses highlight the mutual agreement based on the nature of the resources available. Since the resources are from God then each party needs to compromise the other for a mutual sharing. Also, there is the element of finding a solution that is good for the two communities. The same trend of compromise towards agreement has been positive in transforming the conflict of Mozambique. The community of Saint' Egidio, a faith-based organization from Italy, engaged the disputing parties, opposing leaders Chissano and Dhlakama, to a peace agreement (Hegertun, 2010). They signed a peace agreement after compromising the hard stands that were an impediment to peace. What is coming out is that the two parties compromised in mutual sharing, sacrifice, and they also considered the source of the resources available. Being a gift from God, the conflicting parties must accept to share them which is also a sign of love.

Compromise in this context refers to the willingness of individuals and groups from the two communities to adjust their interests and come up to a consensus to reach a mutually acceptable solution. While it is often a difficult process, especially when the conflict involves natural resources, residents see it as a necessary step to detach themselves from hostilities and fighting. The findings suggest that, despite the challenges, the sustainable benefits of compromise are recognized, including the maintenance of peace and understanding along the border region. However, the responses also indicate that bitterness can arise when one side feels they have sacrificed a lot, underlining the importance of complementing compromises fairly.

Compromise is a well-established conflict transformation strategy, particularly when resources are scarce, and the basic needs of the parties involved are not easily reconcilable. Then compromise is effective because it allows each party involved to feel that they have acquired something out of sacrifice.

Respondents with religious affiliations above indicated that compromise often requires sacrifices from both communities, which is viewed as a path to conflict transformation. This willingness to compromise certain demands for the common good was seen as a relevant way to reduce hatred and promote harmonious coexistence. However, some respondents who seemed to be non-believers expressed skepticism, noting that compromise sometimes leads to feelings of resentment when agreements are perceived as unfair.

9. Negotiation as a Communication–Facilitation Strategy

Negotiation emerged as a more formal approach to conflict transformation. Respondents noted that negotiation is often utilized when conflict involves serious issues like land disputes, cattle theft and border dispute. It is a structured course where both parties negotiate terms with the involvement of concerned community leaders and religious leaders.

"Through negotiation, we were able to agree on where to farm and get water for domestic use and for our animals without causing conflict. The selected community representatives and church leaders help us negotiate with respect to everyone's needs," said a resident from Gelegele location.

"Negotiation is necessary when we want a fair distribution of land and other resources, even job opportunities. It's not always easy, but it creates room for everyone to have a voice," shared respondent 6 from Raitigo location.

"Representatives from each community, especially the religious leaders and community administration negotiate on our behalf, especially when the issue is too complicated for us to handle. I've seen good results from such negotiations," stated a community leader from Ekerubo location.

Respondent 9 from Gelegele location stated, *"We use negotiation when there are serious issues, like when there are disputes over the borders, water and land ownership. Chiefs, assistant chiefs, Elders, and church leaders from both sides sit down, talk and agree on how to solve the conflict that has arisen. Without negotiation, things could be worse along our borders."*

These responses underline the need for and importance of formalized talks, especially in disputes that involve the administrative and religious leaders from the two communities. The involvement of these representatives from the two communities is paramount because they negotiate and come up to a common ground. Another factor that is underlined from the responses is that the border conflicts are negotiated by community and religious leaders. As such they represent people from the two communities in the negotiation process which is the same method that was applied in Sierra Leone through the ideas of Turay (2020) to transform conflicts. In the dispute of Sierra Leone, the Inter Religious Council of Sierra Leone were instrumental in the mediation process that helped in the negotiation and signing of Lome Peace Agreement (Turay, 2020). It indicates that the communities in conflict negotiate for peace through the help of a religious or community mediator. The involvement of negotiation then, in conflict transformation is paramount.

Respondent 15 from Raitigo location shared, *"Negotiation is where we table our demands that are discussed and then agree on how we can give each other something in return. It's a give-and-take process, but it calls for patience and understanding from both communities. In fact, this is what we are always taught in our churches"*

This demonstrates that negotiation is not simply a discussion; it is a transformative process that calls for structured and deliberate engagement from representatives from the two communities along the border. It is reciprocal in nature because the give and take are satisfactory to them all. The negotiation engagements above have proofed to essential in the past when interfaith leaders from the Acholi region negotiated peace between the rebels and the government of Uganda (Hoekema, 2019). Their negotiations enabled the two parties to strike a deal towards peace restoration. Negotiation being a formal way of transforming conflicts, we appreciate the nature of the two parties in conflict fully engaged for peace. It makes the parties accept the results of the negotiation because each of them is satisfied with them.

Participant 28 explained, *"Negotiation allows both sides to present their case. Church leaders then help us find a middle ground that works for everyone."*

One villager elder said, *"Last year, our church leaders negotiated with the other community to have a mutual collaboration in health and spiritual facilities, and we have had fewer clashes since then."*

A respondent stated, *"Negotiation allows us to bring our church leaders together to discuss our issues. It is more organized by our pastors and helps us to stay focused on finding solutions."* Another participant emphasized, *"Through negotiation, we can set clear terms and conditions that both parties agree to follow."*

Negotiation as presented by the respondents is viewed as a structured form of communication where religious representatives from both communities actively engage in discussions to come up with a fair and binding agreement. Negotiation in these border conflicts often involves faith-based mediation by respected figures, such as community elders, local leaders, and church leaders, who facilitate the process. Negotiation is also done because of the facilities that are shared like hospitals and churches. The findings suggest that negotiation is particularly useful in formalizing agreements on social and political issues like land use or political alignments that has been implemented in the northern Uganda conflict (Khadiagala, 2002). The restoration of peace in northern Uganda reflects the restoration of peace along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border through formal agreements. This has also been achieved in consideration of the shared facilities like hospitals, churches and schools. The facilities act as a means of hope in transforming the conflicts along the border.

Thus, negotiation from the responses and the example of northern Uganda provide a more systematic approach to conflict transformation, especially when the issues are complex or involve multiple stakeholders. Negotiation then is

key in transforming conflicts that are more complex and require administrative and religious backing. Fisher, et al (2018) note that negotiation enables the parties to agree on practical solutions, often with the assistance of third-party mediators. As such religious and community leaders are important in negotiations.

10. Empowerment as a Communication–Facilitation Strategy

Empowerment is a strategy mentioned by several respondents as an essential part of conflict transformation. Empowering the affected communities, like women, youth, and elderly, helps to build internal capacity for conflict transformation and ensures that everyone is carried along in maintaining sustainable peace. Empowerment emerged as a key religious mediation strategy for long-term conflict transformation. Many respondents especially Christians noted that empowering community members, the youth and women, was crucial for promoting peace and reducing the likelihood of future conflict. Empowerment included providing education and training in conflict transformation. It also actively involved marginalized groups in conflict transformation processes.

"We have been trained by our church leader on conflict transformation, and now we know how to deal with issues peacefully without resorting to violence. This empowerment has really helped us avoid conflicts in the first place," said a woman from Ekerubo location.

"Empowering the youth to take part in peacebuilding activities like seminars and ball games has been really helpful. They no longer fight; they now know the value of dialogue and understanding," shared a church leader from Gelegele location.

"The empowerment programs have helped us women feel more involved in the peace process. Now, we are part of the decision-making," noted a female respondent from Gelegele location.

Respondent 2 from Gelegele location stated, *"Empowerment is very important, especially for our young people. When they are given knowledge and skills, they are oriented in changing their mentality to conflicts in their homes and communities. They don't just rely on community and church leaders to solve everything."*

This shows the role of empowerment programs in promoting self-sufficiency and maturity in conflict transformation. We realize from the responses that the young, adults and elderly people are equipped with skills by faith-based leaders that help the two communities along the border maintain peace. Thus, empowerment makes the parties involved in the conflict take the responsibility of creating a harmonious environment. This was a common practice in Northern Ireland conflict where the Mennonites, a Christian community, led to teaching peace and nurturing peace makers (Lietchy, 2000). For Sandal (2017), empowerment meant to create strong relationships down from the ground levels of the affected parties. He simply recognized the importance of empowering the locally affected to lead themselves towards conflict transformation. Empowerment is important because people are well equipped with skills that enable them to transform conflicts.

Respondent 10 from Raitigo location added, *"Women and youth need to be given a voice. When they are empowered by church organizations, we have had around here gives them the tools to control issues peacefully in their families. For example, when a youth is involved in cattle rustling, we need to intervene early and use the tools of peace education to prevent more harm. He is also talked to for conversion from the evil he is committing that is not good for his life"*

This highlights the active role that empowerment can play in conflict transformation, particularly when it comes to changing behaviors and mentality of the people before the conflict escalates. It is paramount especially from the conflict transformative theory perspective in which Fisher, et al (2018) advocates for the involved parties to be

empowered to transform their conflicts to sustainable peace. As a way of transformation, the leaders' interventions call the two communities disengage themselves from conflicting activities. The teachings also offered by the same leaders help the people change their way of doing things that are destructive.

A community leader noted, "When people are empowered, they can stand for themselves and their needs. Empowerment is key to transforming conflict situation from arising."

Another respondent added, "Trainings in conflict transformation skills, offered by our churches, has helped us to manage our disputes without violence."

A young woman commented, "If we are educated and have jobs, we can't be involved in fighting our brothers and sisters over small issues like water."

Another respondent pointed out, "The youth are often used to fuel conflicts. If they are given peacebuilding skills and job opportunities, they will not be misled by politicians."

From the responses empowerment initiatives offered by religious organizations, such as vocational training and community development projects, were cited as crucial for addressing the root causes of conflict. Ullah & Inayat (2023) stresses the same idea of empowering the local actors involved in conflict to address and transform their conflicts. Empowerment was then seen as a transformative approach to conflicts that helps build the capacity of individuals and community groups to transform their way of life towards peace. It has involved equipping individuals and community groups with skills, knowledge, and resources that help them to handle conflicts independently.

The emphasis on involving the youth and women suggests a recognition of the need for inclusiveness in conflict transformation, where all members of the community play an essential role in maintaining peace. These responses align with contemporary approaches to conflict transformation that stress the importance of community's ownership and capacity building for sustainable peace. Empowerment here is a recognized method in conflict transformation theory because it allows individuals and communities to become more self-reliant in addressing issues affecting them. Lederach (2014) affirms the same that empowerment strengthens community resilience and helps transform conflicts from recurring.

As it has been discussed from responses and scholarly inputs above, communication-facilitation strategies are essential for fostering long-term peace and stability along the border. They are interconnected with established conflict transformation theories, which advocate for both top-down and bottom-up structural approaches to conflict transformation (Fisher, et al., 2018; Lederach, 2014). The combination of these mediation strategies helps to address both the immediate causes of conflict and the underlying structural issues. It also leads to more sustainable conflict transformational outcomes in the Bomet-Nyamira border region.

11. Conclusion

The primary goal of the study was to examine the contribution of faith-based mediation strategies on conflict transformation along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border zone comprising of the Kipsigis and Abagusii communities. Further this study has critically evaluated the scholarly efforts that have been put in place to transform conflicts globally. From several scholarly sources, international and state actors mediation strategies seem to have been given much attention in the field of conflict transformation. This is to recognize the mechanisms that have been put in place towards transforming border conflicts.

However, there have been peace initiatives employed by the faith-based mediation strategies toward border conflict transformation. And one of the faith-based strategies that have been instrumental is the communication facilitation

strategy. It is a strategy that has been of great help in transforming border conflicts along the Bomet-Nyamira counties border in Kenya. Through its contribution, faith-based communication-facilitation mediation strategy has had substantial positive impact on conflict transformation. It has effectively built trust and promoted peaceful coexistence among communities by encouraging open dialogue, fostering compromise, enhancing negotiation skills, and empowering individuals. It has also helped to reduce tension and hatred among the two communities along the border.

To further enhance the effectiveness of these mediation strategies, it is recommended that faith-based organizations continue to facilitate dialogue sessions and expand their outreach to include a broader segment of the community. Additionally, frameworks should be developed to encourage compromise, ensuring that all parties feel their needs are met. Training programs for community leaders in negotiation techniques would also be beneficial, as would investment in empowerment initiatives that equip community members with the skills necessary for active participation in conflict transformation.

12. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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