Grassroots Peace through Faith: Roman Catholic Involvement in Amani Mashinani and the Pokot-Turkana Conflict in Kenya

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Abstract

The Sahel region and East Africa have often experienced sustained levels of inter-pastoral violent conflict, which have led to loss of lives and properties, thereby negatively impacting the livelihoods of communities. The Turkana-Pokot conflict is a protracted intercommunal struggle, driven by competition over scarce natural resources such as water and pasture, exacerbated by climate change, historical grievances, and the proliferation of small arms in Kenya's North Rift region. Despite the state-led interventions, this conflict has led to insecurity, displacement, and underdevelopment in the affected regions over decades. Much attention has not been given to how the local religions have been at the forefront in solving these conflicts. *Amani Mashinani*, meaning "peace at the grassroots," is a community-driven peacebuilding initiative spearheaded by the Catholic Church in Kenya's North Rift region—particularly among the Pokot and Turkana communities—that employs dialogue, cultural exchange, and local leadership to foster reconciliation and sustainable peace. This paper examines the role of the Roman Catholic Church in supporting and shaping peacebuilding efforts within the framework of *Amani Mashinani*. Guided by Peacebuilding Theory, a grassroots approach to peacebuilding, the study applied qualitative methodology to gather data through interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The data collected were analyzed through the lens of Catholic social teachings (CSTs). Therefore, *Amani Mashinani* aligns deeply with core principles such as the dignity of the human person, the call to family and community participation, the pursuit of the common good, and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. Ultimately, the paper recommends recognizing the significance of faith-based institutions as credible, community-anchored partners in grassroots peacebuilding and advocates for greater institutional support and policy recognition of their role in managing intercommunal conflict.

Keywords: Religion, Peacebuilding, Conflict, *Amani Mashinani*

Introduction

This paper examines the role of the Roman Catholic Church in managing the Pokot-Turkana conflict through *Amani Mashinani* in Kenya. *Amani Mashinani* is a Swahili phrase that translates to "peace at the grassroots." The phrase is associated with the late Rt. Rev. Bishop Cornelius Arap Korir for the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret. Korir was a mediator, negotiator,

and advocate of the power of communication through dialogue to mitigate the impact of various conflicts in Kenya's North Rift region. The *Amani Mashinani* model of conflict management is based on dialogue and roundtable talks by employing bottom-up, middle-out, and top-down approaches to peacebuilding.

Investigating the Catholic Church's involvement in peacebuilding through the *Amani Mashinani* initiative is crucial for understanding how faith-based grassroots approaches can effectively transform entrenched interethnic conflicts such as those between the Pokot and Turkana by fostering reconciliation, cultural integration, and sustained community dialogue. Studying peacebuilding is essential for establishing sustainable, just and inclusive societies. Peacebuilding is also integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16, which seeks to establish inclusive, accountable and effective institutions at all levels, support peaceful and inclusive societies, and ensure universal access to justice.

In a world that increasingly affected by conflict, inequality, and political polarization, it is hoped that *Amani Mashinani* can offer tools and knowledge to address the root causes of violence, foster dialogue, and promote reconciliation. It is also hoped that it can empower individuals and communities to resolve disputes nonviolently, build resilient institutions, and support social cohesion. By deepening our understanding about the dynamics of peace and conflict, this paper aims to contribute to lasting solutions that go beyond temporary ceasefires or political agreements, thereby ensuring long-term stability and human development for affected communities.

This paper examines the Church's engagement in the *Amani Mashinani* framework through its clergy, lay movements, institutions, and faith-based networks to assess how religious narratives, ethical leadership, and spiritual resources are mobilized to foster dialogue, mediate conflict, and support trauma healing. Additionally, it investigates how the Church complements or challenges other peacebuilding actors, including state institutions and secular civil society, and whether it contributes to more inclusive, sustainable and culturally resonant approaches to peace.

Understanding the Catholic Church's role not only fills a critical gap in the literature on faith-based peacebuilding but also informs broader discussions on the integration of religious institutions in community-led development and conflict transformation efforts. This paper therefore contributes to policy and practice by identifying strengths, challenges, and opportunities in church-led or church-supported peace initiatives within the grassroots model, which can be adapted to other areas experiencing conflicts worldwide.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by Peacebuilding Theory, which encompasses a range of frameworks and practices aimed at resolving conflicts and establishing sustainable peace by addressing the underlying causes of violence and fostering inclusive, just societies. It involves strategies such as conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, and the promotion of social cohesion and reconciliation. Notable contributors to Peacebuilding Theory include Johan Galtung, who introduced the distinction between "negative peace" (the absence of violence) and "positive peace" (the presence of social justice and equality), emphasizing the importance of transforming societal structures to achieve lasting peace (Alger, 2014).

Johan Galtung, a pioneering figure in the field of peace and conflict studies, is credited with first presenting the concept of "peacebuilding" in his work titled *Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding* (1976). Galtung's theory emphasizes addressing the root causes of conflict, including structural violence, to establish sustainable peace.

The Turkana and Pokot communities have historically been involved in conflicts

primarily driven by competition over natural resources such as water and pasture, aggravated by environmental challenges and population pressures (Osinde et al., 2023). Cultural practices, including cattle rustling and territorial claims, further intensify tensions. Efforts by the Kenyan government to alleviate these conflicts have included disarmament initiatives, the provision of social amenities, and the promotion of peaceful coexistence. Nonetheless, we criticize the effectiveness of these strategies due to challenges such as political interference, inadequate funding, and mistrust between communities.

According to Ogoti et al. (2017), Peacebuilding Theory suggests that the sustainable resolution of the Turkana-Pokot conflict requires multifaceted approach. It is stated as follows: (a) implementing equitable resource distribution and development initiatives that consider the needs of both communities; (b) facilitating conversations that include diverse voices from both groups to promote mutual understanding and building trust; (c) recognizing and incorporating indigenous conflict resolution practices to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts; and (d) building robust local institutions capable of managing disputes and delivering services to ensure long-term peace.

Through this theoretical lens, the paper demonstrates that the *Amani Mashinani* initiative illustrates the practical application of Peacebuilding Theory in addressing the prolonged conflict between the Turkana and Pokot communities in Kenya's North Rift region. Rooted in the principles of conflict transformation, *Amani Mashinani* underscores grassroots engagement, inclusivity, and the reestablishment of social cohesion among historically antagonistic groups. It operationalizes these principles by implementing a community peacebuilding process, which includes stages such as intra-ethnic consultations, airing of grievances, interethnic dialogues, and the development of joint 'peace connector' projects like schools and cattle dips. These steps are designed to foster mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation between the conflicting communities. Furthermore, the initiative underscores the importance of local ownership and cultural sensitivity in peace processes. By involving local leaders, women, and youth in peace committees, *Amani Mashinani* ensures that the solutions are contextually relevant and have broad-based support. This aligns with Peacebuilding Theory's emphasis on empowering local actors to lead reconciliation efforts, thereby enhancing the sustainability of peace outcomes.

The strength of the model lies in its ability to build trust, restore interethnic relationships, and foster a culture of nonviolence at the community level. By decentralizing peace efforts, it has contributed to reducing the recurrence of violence and enhanced the legitimacy of local peace processes. The model also complements other approaches by addressing the root causes of conflict, including structural inequalities, political exclusion, and historical marginalization. In addition, it acknowledges the nexus of gender, age, ethnicity, and class in both the experience of conflict and the process of healing. But, the initiative's reliance on religious institutions may limit its reach within more secular segments of the communities. Also, while *Amani Mashinani* addresses immediate relational conflicts, it may not fully tackle underlying structural issues such as resource scarcity, exacerbated by climate change. Sustaining peace also requires consistent funding and support, which are often uncertain.

To address the limitations of Peacebuilding Theory as applied in the *Amani Mashinani* initiative for the Turkana-Pokot conflict, several strategic enhancements were implemented. First, while the initiative effectively fosters grassroots engagement, it also began to focus more intentionally on structural interventions that address systemic issues such as resource scarcity and economic marginalization. Second, the initiative expanded its scope beyond religious frameworks to include secular institutions and diverse community stakeholders, thereby enhancing inclusivity and promoting broader community buy-in. By tackling these issues, *Amani Mashinani* aims to strengthen its application of Peacebuilding

Theory and contribute to a more comprehensive and enduring resolution of the Turkana-Pokot conflict.

Finally, the Peacebuilding Theory provided the foundational lens through which data in this research were interpreted, helping to make sense of how interventions like *Amani Mashinani* contributed to lasting peace in conflict-prone areas of Turkana and Pokot. The theory helped us to interpret the power dynamics, historical grievances and cultural aspects influencing conflict and mediation.

Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used for this study, emphasizing narrative data over numerical values. The study adopted a qualitative research design grounded in Peacebuilding Theory to explore the role of *Amani Mashinani* in promoting peaceful coexistence between the Pokot and Turkana communities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, a focus group discussion (FGD), and key informant interviews with church leaders, community elders, youth representatives, and local peace actors. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants with direct experience or insight into the *Amani Mashinani* process. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data, with emerging themes aligned to peacebuilding indicators such as reconciliation, social cohesion, trust-building, and reduction in violent incidents. The study ensured credibility and trustworthiness through triangulation of sources and member checking. Findings were presented in a way that reflects both the experiences of participants and the theoretical framework guiding the research.

To support the review of existing literature, research articles, books and other academic publications relevant to the topic under investigation were examined. This process assisted in the applicability of available secondary data to understand the broader context and identifying knowledge gaps. Subsequently, content analysis was conducted by systematically reviewing the main arguments in reports, publications, and other written materials. This method involved identifying and categorizing themes, patterns, and key concepts within the data, guided by the tenets of Peacebuilding Theory. Finally, the data were presented in narrative and descriptive formats.

Background of the Pokot-Turkana Conflict

The ethnic conflict between the Pokot and Turkana communities along the Kainuk-Kasei conflict corridor in Kenya has persisted for decades. This conflict has been attributed to several causes, including cattle theft and competition over limited natural resources such as pastureland and water. Both communities are pastoralists, and their livelihoods revolve around livestock and livestock products. According to Azarya (1996), pastoralism refers to an economy based on raising livestock. Opiyo and Scheffran (2012) argue that pastoralism and nomadism have been described as the primary drivers of conflict between the Turkana and the Pokot communities. Behnke (2008) notes that livestock ownership serves a variety of social, economic and religious purposes in pastoral livelihoods, including providing household members a consistent supply of food such as milk, meat, and blood, as well as generating cash income for the purchase of cereals, healthcare, education, and other services. As a fundamental form of pastoral capital, livestock is also a symbol of wealth and status. In addition, Slocum-Bradley (2016) argues that the conflict has endured in part due to specific cultural practices in the two communities.

As Nganga (2012) notes, other contributing factors to the violence include competition over natural resources, particularly the scarcity of water and pasture during droughts, which has been a significant source of tension; political and economic

marginalization, as both communities have historically faced underdevelopment and lack of infrastructure; the easy availability of firearms, which has escalated the intensity of conflicts; ambiguities in land ownership, which have led to disputes; and the erosion of traditional systems, which has hindered peaceful resolution efforts.

During the colonial period (1895–1963), the imposition of new political and administrative structures disrupted traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution. Territorial disputes, competition over resources, and cultural differences were exacerbated by colonial policies, leading to increased tensions between the communities. In the post-independence period, these tensions persisted, compounded by marginalization and inadequate government interventions. The introduction of firearms in the early 20th Century, particularly among the Turkana who acquired weapons from Ethiopia and South Sudan, further intensified the conflicts (Sagawa, 2010). By the 1970s, the region was awash with small arms due to spillovers from regional conflicts, making cattle rustling more lethal and widespread.

During interviews, it was noted that several efforts have been made to address the conflict. In 2003, Turkana and Pokot pastoralists formed a joint security force to combat cattle rustling (interview with Lotus, August 20, 2023). Also, Lotus claimed that in 2006, the communities agreed to share resources along the River Kerio and formed committees to ensure equitable access. Organizations such as the Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (SCCRR) have facilitated community-led conflict resolution initiatives, leading to improved relations. Additionally, members of parliament (MPs) Protus Akujah and Titus Lotee have spearheaded annual peace meetings since 2023, fostering dialogue and collaboration between the communities. While these initiatives have yielded positive results, challenges remain. Sporadic incidents of violence, cattle theft, and banditry continue to disrupt peace efforts.

To mitigate this conflict, the Roman Catholic Church in the region has been actively involved in the search for a permanent solution. According to Ng'anga (2012), in 2012, the Catholic Diocese of Lodwar celebrated its Golden Jubilee of evangelization and invited neighboring Catholic dioceses that serve pastoral communities within the Kenyan northern conflict corridor. The aim was to develop a unified approach to promote peaceful coexistence among pastoralist groups. But, it was not until 2015 that the Catholic Diocese of Kitale and Lodwar began implementing targeted intervention strategies, particularly focused on engaging youths who were often recruited as cattle raiders. In 2019, the Catholic Diocese of Lodwar convened another conference under the theme "Peaceful Disarmament for Evangelization." Prior to this, Bishop Korir, the lead mediator in the Pokot-Turkana conflict, had devised an elaborate mechanism for conflict management known as the *Amani Mashinani* model. This approach was characterized by a series of meetings with the Council of Elders from both communities, state agents working in the region, and other faith-based organizations (Opongo, 2020).

Amani Mashinani: Strategies the Catholic Church Put in Place to Mitigate the Pokot-Turkana Conflict

We remember Bishop Korir's statement: "*Amani huleta maendeleo,* which translates as Peace brings development. It is true that when there is peace, schools, hospitals, and roads are built" (personal communication, October 11, 2022). Throughout the interviews and (FGDs), most people living near the border praised the intervention strategy used by the late Bishop Korir: i.e. building schools and dispensaries in areas where peace had prevailed after the conflict. His main aim was to use these projects as examples to other regions still experiencing violence by encouraging them to embrace peace as a path to development.

Most interviewees were unaware that Bishop Korir's approach was rooted in Catholic

social teachings. Pope Paul VI clearly articulated the interdependence between peace and development. According to this teaching, there is a consensus that if you want peace, you must prepare for development—echoing Pope Paul VI's 1967 declaration that development is the new name for peace (Orobator, 2008).

In the same vein, Pope John Paul II (2000) asserted that failure awaits every plan that separates two indivisible and interdependent rights: (1) the right to peace and (2) the right to an integral development born of solidarity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2001) declares that injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust, and pride among people and nations constantly threaten peace and cause wars (Kreeft, 2011). Bishop Korir understood all too well that every effort to combat these societal ailments helps to establish peace and prevent conflict.

The role of the church in development emerged as a prominent theme. While two of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on poverty eradication and development, the research clearly revealed a strong links among poverty, underdevelopment, and conflict. The findings emphasized the need for the church to collaborate in efforts to develop the region and improve the livelihoods of the communities. As Samuel attested during a FGD,

> The church could also partner with well-wishers and the government to implement alternative livelihood programs that would help improve the living conditions of the people. Such partnerships offer a reliable way to transform the lives of the communities living along the borders and fighting over natural resources. These partnerships focus on connecting different communities living side by side to reduce the animosity that has existed for so many centuries through connector projects (personal communication, October 11, 2022).

Referring to the work of Bishop Korir along the conflict corridor, the study revealed that peacebuilding is a process, not an event. Unlike in political gatherings where religious leaders are often invited to "open and close" the event with prayers as an "add-on," the Catholic Church took a leading role in praying for peace and actively participating in the peace process during the Pokot-Turkana conflict.

This engagement intensified after the reports of killings became a daily occurrence, and Bishop Korir could no longer remain a bystander. As mentioned earlier, his approach, referred to as the "Peace at the Grassroots" model, was a unique, multi-level strategy that employed bottom-up, middle-out, and top-down methods of peacebuilding. He understood that people at the grassroots level are the most affected by conflict. Nonetheless, he also believed that those in positions of leadership have a mandate from the people to ensure peace and security for all. When necessary, he would reach out to national leaders. At the middle level, he collaborated with county officials, non-state actors, and peacebuilding organizations working in the region.

Our research revealed that Bishop Korir chose to pursue peace through the power of communication, specifically dialogue and roundtable discussions. He believed in the transformative power of conversation and in generating shared meaning within the context of the Pokot-Turkana conflict. But, at a later stage, he reached an understanding with the warring communities that the incorporation of indigenous laws and institutions was essential to conflict transformation. The dialogue and engagement process were structured into 12 distinct steps as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Bishop Korir's Dialogue and Engagement Process

Step	Title	Description
1	Analysis, Intervention, and Interruption	Assess the root causes and dynamics of the conflict, and implement immediate interventions to halt ongoing violence and prevent further escalation.
2	Protection, Sanctuary, and Relief	Provide immediate safety and humanitarian assistance to those affected by conflict, including shelter, food, and medical care, emphasizing compassion and human dignity.
3	One-to-One Meetings	Facilitate personal dialogues between individuals from conflicting groups to build trust, break down stereotypes, and open lines of communication.
4	Small Group to Small Group Meetings	Expand from individual interactions to small group discussions involving members from each community to address grievances and explore common interests, laying the groundwork for broader reconciliation efforts.
5	Sharing Food	Organize communal meals as a powerful symbol of unity and hospitality, humanizing former adversaries and fostering a sense of shared community.
6	Intra-Ethnic Meetings	Conduct internal discussions within each community to address internal divisions and prepare for interethnic dialogue, ensuring each group presents a cohesive voice in subsequent engagements.
7	Airing of Grievances	Provide a safe space for communities to express their grievances openly, allowing for acknowledgment of past wrongs and paving the way for healing.
8	Preparation of Agenda and Inter-Ethnic Meetings	Organize structured interethnic meetings with clear agendas to address specific issues, fostering dialogue, negotiating solutions, and building consensus on contentious matters.
9	Reporting Back and Caucusing with Communities	Communicate outcomes from interethnic meetings back to the respective communities, ensuring transparency, community involvement, and reinforcing the legitimacy of the peace process.
10	Peace Connector Projects	Initiate joint community projects, such as rebuilding infrastructure or shared services, to solidify cooperation and demonstrate the tangible benefits of peace, helping to rebuild trust and interdependence. E.g. dispensary
11	Social Contract	Formalize commitments to peace through agreements that outline shared values, responsibilities, and mechanisms for conflict resolution, serving as a guiding framework for ongoing coexistence.
-12	Monitoring and Ongoing Development of the Agenda	Establish mechanisms to continuously evaluate and adapt the peace process, with communities monitoring progress, addressing emerging issues, and ensuring the sustainability of peace efforts.

Source: Self-generated by the Authors Using Korir (2009)

As can be seen in Table 1, the *Amani Mashinani* is a comprehensive twelve-step

framework designed to transform interethnic or intercommunity conflicts into sustainable peace through community-led processes. Rooted in the principles of inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and long-term reconciliation, the model emphasizes grassroots engagement as the foundation for effective conflict resolution.

The first step involves the mediators familiarizing themselves with the communities affected by the conflict. This approach recognizes that each community is composed of smaller units such as clans and sub-clans that must be included in the process. Each clan typically resides in a kraal, which consists of a few family members living together in a *manyatta* (traditional homestead), and each kraal has its own leader. Ensuring representation from all of these units is essential, as previous peace efforts often failed when aggrieved groups felt excluded. This step is metaphorically referred to as "putting the house in order."

Later on, all of the kraal leaders were invited to a meeting held under an acacia tree near a riverbank, chosen for its calm and quiet environment—an idea suggested by one of the kraal leaders. The aim of the meeting was to identify the root causes of the conflict, determine the parties involved, and chart a path forward to end the hostilities and manage the conflict. This approach was grounded in the belief that a homegrown solution is more effective than externally imposed, cut-and-paste models from other parts of the world. Moreover, homegrown solutions are informed by and responsive to the cultural context of the community.

At this stage, the clans agreed to resolve their internal disputes first. Using a shared strategy, they then committed to engaging their counterparts in an intercommunity dialogue. Bishop Korir referred to this as "asking for permission to engage the other side and prepare them for a meeting." Seeking permission was to avoid suspicion that participants were revealing sensitive information to their perceived enemies. For any mediator, building trust from the outset is essential.

Finally, representatives from the Pokot and Turkana communities were invited to a workshop held in a safer location within the conflict zone. This meeting was intended for bilateral engagements and focused on discussing the common issues previously addressed at the clan level within each community.

It was agreed by Bishop Korir that there was no need to remove participants from the conflict environment, as the church sought to avoid replicating the typical non-governmental organization (NGO) approach of convening in high-end hotels with generous sitting allowances—an approach that, in some cases, discouraged lasting peace by incentivizing continued conflict. It was also agreed that no sitting allowances or transport reimbursements would be provided. As Bishop Korir emphasized, "Peacebuilding should not be reduced to hand-outs. This is not sustainable in the long-run. Participants must see the bigger picture and the goodness that comes with peace" (personal Communication, August 2014).

During these engagements, several concerns were raised, and a path forward was suggested. Both communities reported killings due to cycles of revenge; livestock theft, burning of homes, and the displacement of people were widespread. Armed community warriors terrorized passengers along the inter-county highway.

Drawing from their indigenous conflict management institutions, the Tree of Men among the Turkana and the Kokwo among the Pokot, participants resolved to pursue their traditional approaches. This involved conducting dialogues with the parties involved, with the council of elders serving as a key component of the resolution process. The council included seers, traditional healers, and kraal leaders. This became a vital entry point for serious engagement between the two communities through their three-level conflict model. Bishop Korir strategically leveraged cultural resources to localize peacebuilding and seek a lasting solution. Consequently, the Bishop identified the following four key peace initiatives in the area that would contribute to sustainable peace: (1) the construction of schools along the

common border, (2) the establishment of water points in the same areas, (3) the equipping of these schools with necessary materials, and (4) the construction of shared cattle dips.

Pleased with the Bishop's initiatives, one elder donated land to support peace activities in the region. This land is now known as Congo Stadium, where various sports events have been organized under the Bishop's leadership. He also provided uniforms to support these activities and foster community participation.

In addition, the Bishop initiated common assessment tests for the students attending the schools along the border. He also provided uniforms for girls and introduced pyrethrum-growing nurseries for the youths. Furthermore, he rehabilitated old cattle dips and established new ones to serve both communities on the same days. This arrangement helped facilitate the identification of any unfamiliar or potentially stolen livestock. The cattle dips were jointly managed by elders from both communities.

To reduce overreliance on pastoralism, the Bishop launched a group revolving fund of 500,000 Kenyan shillings. Each benefitting group received 10,000, shillings, which was to be repaid after six months. But, the fund eventually collapsed as many groups failed to repay the money as agreed.

Participants agreed that peace in the highlands has proven more sustainable than in the valley, as evidenced by the many community activities in the region. Every year on January 1, members of both communities gather at the Kapsait Catholic Church to celebrate their progress, where they slaughter two bulls and several sheep for a communal feast. The celebration includes an interdenominational service and speeches from elders. Later, participants proceeded in a procession to a large wooden cross erected at Kapsait Hill—now considered a holy site—officially named Our Lady Queen of Peace.

To transition away from keeping indigenous cattle, residents were encouraged to crossbreed their livestock to produce higher milk-yielding breeds. Currently, the community operates a shared milk processing plant located on the border, which is jointly managed by officials equally drawn from both communities. They also established a cooperative SACCO named Lelan Highland Dairies Company Limited. Farmers are encouraged to use artificial insemination to improve the quality of their calves.

Notably, raiders tend to avoid stealing high-bred cattle, as these animals are slower and less suited to raids. Nonetheless, concerns have been raised that this progress may be threatened by emerging challenges, particularly rising alcoholism among youths and early marriages, which may push some into cattle threat to support their families.

All these initiatives were introduced by the Bishop to foster intercommunity interaction and shift attention toward income-generating activities as a means of reducing conflict. Also, records from the Office of Justice and Peace in the Catholic Diocese of Kitale indicate the presence of a dedicated office responsible for monitoring conflict management programs. The Catholic Church's role in initiating alternative livelihoods was affirmed by Dolan, who indicates the following: "In each African country, the Catholic Church, as a Track I and II conflict management actor, utilizes its Catholic justice and peace commissions as the main avenue to monitor and invigorate programs on conflict management, civic Peace, justice, educational and medical development, and the integrity of creation" (Dolan, 2006).

This was corroborated by the Director of Justice and Peace in West Pokot County, who explained how the Catholic Church purchased generators and water pumps to support families along the conflict corridor in irrigating their farms and producing food. He stated: "Total dependence on livestock has impoverished the people, and during the long dry season when most of the livestock die, they steal others' animals to re-stock their herds. This is due to a lack of diversification in livelihood. The Church provides the generators as an alternative way of feeding their families" (personal communication, October 11, 2022).

Moreover, the Catholic Church's social teaching and activism in Kenya are grounded

in a shared vision and mission (Good, 2007; CJPC, 1988; CJPC, 2005; CJPC, 2013). Through its development programs and the Justice and Peace Commissions in each diocese, the church maintains a continuous presence even in the most remote areas, engaging with ethnic communities experiencing conflict (Dolan, 2006; CJPC, 2013).

Currently, the role of the Catholic Church among the Pokot and Turkana peoples includes the provision of medical and education services, intertwined with peacebuilding initiatives that are both extensive and substantive (Diocese of Lodwar Pastoral Plan 2007-2012; Mwaniki, 2007). According to Good (2007), Mwaniki (2007), and the Catholic Diocese of Lodwar and Kitale (CJPC, 2015), these activities include preaching, facilitating peace meetings, fostering tolerance, assisting the injured, and building educational and health facilities, among others. These longstanding efforts formed the foundation of Bishop Korir's call for the continued implementation of development initiatives in the region to ensure lasting peace.

Achievements of *Amani Mashinani*

Amani Mashinani has significantly contributed to reducing ethnic violence and fostering sustainable peace in Kenya's North Rift region. As a community-centered approach, it has not only addressed immediate conflicts but also established resilient structures for ongoing dialogue and cooperation. The model's success has inspired similar initiatives in other conflict-affected regions, demonstrating its adaptability and effectiveness in grassroots peacebuilding.

The *Amani Mashinani* approach guides communities through stages of dialogue, trust-building, and joint action, thereby enabling them to address deep-seated grievances and foster peaceful coexistence. The initiative has facilitated the formation of local peace committees in conflict-prone areas such as the Turkana-Pokot border, Burnt Forest, and Yamumbi/Kapteldon. These committees' respected local leaders serve as mediators and advocates for peace, effectively managing and resolving interethnic tensions at the grassroots level.

Amani Mashinani introduced "connector projects"—collaborative community initiatives such as rebuilding health centers and constructing rural roads. These projects bring together previously divided groups, fostering cooperation and mutual understanding through shared objectives. The initiative has also promoted inclusive dialogue by engaging diverse stakeholders—including women, youth, and religious leaders—in peacebuilding processes. This broad participation ensures that multiple perspectives are considered, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of reconciliation efforts.

Catholic Doctrines on Peacebuilding

Teachings on peace and conflict are drawn from the Scriptures and Catholic social doctrine. Integral to the mission of the Catholic Church in Africa are the sacredness of human life, the promotion of peace and justice, the integrity of creation, human rights, development, and the ethical formation of human agency (Nganga, 2023). On this basis, the church is deeply concerned with all forms of violence, including interethnic violence, and their negative repercussions. Notably, peacemaking has been central to the Catholic Church's missionary presence in the world since its inception (Ujhazi, 2024).

Historically, St. Augustine introduced the concept of *tranquillitas ordinis*, defining peace as a state of well-ordered harmony rooted in justice (Van Geest, 2020). This idea was later developed by Thomas Aquinas and remains central to Catholic thought on peace, emphasizing that true peace arises from a just and rightly-ordered society.

In his 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth"), Pope John XXIII asserted that peace must be founded on truth, justice, love, and freedom (Vatican II Conciliar, 1963). He emphasized the importance of respecting human rights and the role of international cooperation in achieving global peace. At the heart of the church's peacebuilding efforts lies Catholic social teaching that provides a moral framework for addressing social issues. Key principles include the inherent dignity of every person, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity. These principles guide the church's engagement in promoting peace by addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and injustice.

The church's commitment to peace is also grounded in its theological understanding of humanity and the world. The belief in the *imago Dei*—that every person is created in the image of God—calls for the respect and protection of human life (Son, 2018). Also, the teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly the Beatitudes and the call to love one's enemies, serve as a foundation for nonviolent action and reconciliation.

Central to the Christian approach to peacebuilding is the concept of *shalom*, a Hebrew term encompassing peace, completeness, and wellbeing (Anthony, 2024). Christians believe that true peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice and right relationships among individuals and communities. This belief is grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus, who emphasized love, forgiveness, and reconciliation as transformative responses to conflict. The Apostle Paul reinforces this in Romans 12:18, urging believers as follows: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

Lay Catholics are encouraged to actively participate in peace initiatives, utilizing their unique positions within society to mediate conflicts, promote dialogue, and support reconciliation efforts. Their involvement is considered vital in translating the church's teachings into tangible actions within diverse communities. According to documented sources in the Diocesan Justice and Peace Office in Lodwar, the office was established among the Turkana in 1993 and in West Pokot in 1999 (Dolan, 2007). This aligns with broader Catholic social teaching and the church's preferential option for the poor. Resources such as the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2005) provide a comprehensive synthesis of Catholic teachings and aspirations concerning conflict, peace, poverty, development, justice, minorities, and environmental sustainability.

The church's peacebuilding efforts are underpinned by a theology that views peace as both a divine gift and a human responsibility. This perspective calls for the active pursuit of justice, reconciliation, and the transformation of societal structures that perpetuate violence and inequality. By integrating faith with action, the church seeks to embody the Gospel's message of peace in the world. In reference to the Pokot-Turkana conflict, this study observes that unity and harmony between two communities require transcending ethnic, cultural and religious differences and embracing a shared identity grounded in mutual respect and non-discrimination. Such unity demands differences be used to strengthen solidarity rather than to foster division. This implies that every individual, as a member of one human family created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), must understand and respect the value of human diversity and direct it to the common good.

Referring to Bishop Korir's sentiments, he emphasized that the conflict between the two communities had a ethnic dimension, which undermines the concept of human fraternity. In his role as Bishop, he stated that he had opened an Office of Justice and Peace in West Pokot County to address regional issues and had appointed priests to serve as agents of reconciliation. Citing the Gospel of John and its call to unity (John 17), he affirmed that "unity calls for peaceful co-existence." This call entails a constructive appreciation and development of what distinguishes individuals and communities, as well as what constitutes their identity. Such recognition contributes to the building of a united and peaceful society. The participation of people, while respecting of their diversity, in shared activities is essential

to unity and peace. In his address at a peace meeting in Lodwar Town, Turkana Country, Bishop Kimengich stated the following: "Participation in the country's life is not just a right; it is also a duty that each Christian should be proud to assume and exercise responsibility. People in positions of authority, in government and administration, have a particular duty to work for the restoration of a climate of trust and openness" (quoted by Gitonga, 2019, 1).

Within the context of this discussion, respect for cultural differences is key to unity and peace in Africa. The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) affirms that "…a church which allows and leaves room for a diversity of cultures offers the kind of witness to which our African continent is particularly sensitive today" (Iheanacho, 2024, 1). In addition, all humans are called to belong to the new People of God. Each part contributes its gift to other parts and to the whole Church, such that both the whole and its individual parts are strengthened through the common sharing of all things and the joint effort to attain the fullness of unity that prefigures and promotes universal peace (SECAM, 1981, 19).

In the same vein, there is a need to respect one another's cultures, particularly those consistent with sacred teachings. The study affirms that although cultures differ, they are the source of our wealth. Such sentiments are echoed by Bansikiza, who observes that "cultures have different ways of understanding the meaning of personal existence and identity" (Bansikiza, 2001, 160). From this perspective, one learns how essential it is to safeguard the fundamental right to freedom of conscience, which serves as the cornerstone of human rights and the foundation of every genuinely free community. In this context, it is important to distinguish between an unhealthy form of cultural identity, one that promotes contempt for other cultures, and a genuine love of one's culture that does not come at the expense of others.

The church emphasizes a universal principle found in the teachings of many religious traditions: "Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you." This ethnical maxim transcends religious and cultural boundaries. Jesus Christ expressed it clearly when He said "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do so to them" (Good News Bible, Mathew 7:12). This scriptural teaching calls each individual to put himself/herself in the place of the other.

In Hinduism, the Mahabharata states: "This is the sum of duty: Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you." Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him—PBUH) taught: "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." In Judaism, Rabbi Hillel taught: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." In Buddhism, the Buddha advised: "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." Confucius said: "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself." In Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you."

The preceding teachings emphasize love and peace as shared human values and stress the importance of treating others with the same respect and kindness we desire for ourselves. Collectively, they form the basis of the 'Golden Rule,' which serves as a bridge across cultures and religions, thereby promoting a universal ethic of empathy and reciprocity.

As Bansikiza affirms, "Only peace and love can save us; nothing else can" (2001, 161). If the communities along the conflict corridor between West Pokot and Turkana counties were to apply this principle in conflict resolution, it could lead to a more constructive attitude of coexistence. Buber also highlights the importance of respecting the other, describing it as "sitting at a distance in order to be able to relate to the other (person) and make his or her soul ours" (1976, 108)).

Pope John Paul II highlights the political divisions that undermine community cohesion and emphasizes that the solution lies in promoting a culture of peace. More broadly, in Africa, a continent deeply scarred by ethnic hostilities, fostering unity and peace could

help overcome political, religious and social oppression. He stresses that people must recognize that neither cultures nor human boundaries can confine God, as God is omnipotent and omnipresent, thereby transcending all cultures and people. Building peace and unity in Africa, he asserts, requires what he calls a "civilization of love." He further states: "We must discover a spirit of hope and a spirit of trust. Hope and trust are the premise of responsible activity nurtured in that inner sanctuary of conscience where one is alone with God" (John Paul II, 1995, 17). He continues: "No person, no group is excluded from this mission of unifying love which has now been entrusted to us…Father, may they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you" (Bansikiza, 2001, 163).

The two Bishops of Kitale and Lodwar dioceses have emphasized the importance of living out the Christian faith. One cannot be a true disciple of Christ while simultaneously propagating hate and conflict in the community. Their position is rooted in the theological teachings of the Catholic Church. In prioritizing reconciliation as a goal of its conflict management initiatives, the church proclaims an inseparability of peace, justice, and reconciliation, which are constructive dimensions of its mission and practice across Africa (Magesa, 2018). Lederach (1995) and Appleby (2010) further affirm that the ideals of Catholic social teaching align with the analytical components of Conflict Theory, including structural violence, conflict management, settlement, resolution, transformation, and reconciliation.

The Intersection of Religion and Peacebuilding: The Role of the Catholic Church

The information presented in this section generated gathered from a focus group discussion comprising employees from the Catholic Diocese of Kitale, which covers West Pokot County; the Diocese of Lodwar, which covers Turkana County; and the Dioceses of Eldoret. In addition, interviews were conducted with the two religious leaders from Kitale and Lodwar dioceses. Both the interviews and the focus group discussion were guided by the following question: What strategies did the church use to mitigate the Pokot-Turkana conflict?

It was observed that the church drew upon Catholic social teaching and the Scripture, particularly themes of reconciliation, forgiveness, and encouragement of Christian values such as good neighborliness. For example, Bishop Korir would often read Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." He regularly called upon participants to reflect on this verse before every meeting (personal communication, October 11,, 2022).

In addition, the church incorporated traditional conflict resolution practices from the communities involved. It was revealed that community dialogue fora were used to bring together elders and warriors, and that community gatekeepers or "game-changers" were engaged to persuade people to reject violence (personal communication, October 11, 2022). This marked a shift from earlier approaches that focused primarily on evangelization. As one priest working in justice and peace explained during the discussion, "The focus of the Catholic Church and other faith-based organizations was more on increasing numbers in their churches and saving more souls, as opposed to peacebuilding" (personal communication, October 12, 2022).

It was revealed that the Church partnered with well-wishers and the government to implement alternative livelihood programs aimed at improving the living conditions of the people in the region. This partnership is viewed as a promising strategy for transforming the lives of those people living along the borders who have been engaged in conflict over natural resources. The initiative focuses on connecting neighboring communities in order to reduce longstanding animosities through "connector projects" (personal communication, October 11,

2022).

Nonetheless, it was noted that a gender perspective has been largely absent in conflict mitigation efforts, as the church has not yet expressly targeted women in the community fora and intercommunity dialogues (personal communication, October 13, 2022). It was argued that the church's limited engagement with women is partly due to the persistence of traditional norms in border communities where roles and responsibilities are strictly divided. These communities remain strongly patriarchal, and the idea of men and women sitting together to address communal issues is still viewed as diminishing men's authority while elevating women's status. Also, the church has traditionally worked through existing indigenous structures, many of which systematically exclude women (personal communication, October 11, 2022).

The preceding rooted in the belief that conflict management strategies must be homegrown rather than externally imposed, and that they should remain culturally sensitive. On inclusion of women to peace building, the following case presents a testimony from a warrior, illustrating the willingness of combatants to engage in conflict solution.

Confessions of a Warrior

"I was born in the dry plains of Turkana, where the sun scorches the earth and water is a precious commodity. From a young age, I was taught that cattle are not just wealth, but life itself. Our community's survival hinged on livestock, and protecting them was considered a sacred duty" (personal communication, October 2022).

The warrior continues: "As I grew older, the lines between protector and aggressor began to blur. By the time I was 16, I had participated in my first raid against the Pokot. It was portrayed as a rite of passage—a demonstration of bravery and loyalty to our people. The adrenaline, the songs of victory, and the accolades from the elders made it feel honorable" (personal communication, October 2022).

The warrior adds: "However, the reality was far from noble. I witnessed the devastation we left behind—homes burned, families torn apart, and lives lost. The Pokot retaliated, and the cycle of violence continued, with each side justifying its actions as either defense or retribution" (personal communication, October 2022).

The root causes of our conflict are complex. Competition over scarce resources like water and pasture, intensified by climate change, often ignites tensions. Historical grievances, cultural practices such as cattle raiding, and political marginalization further fuel the animosity. The proliferation of small arms has made these confrontations deadlier, turning what were once traditional raids into lethal encounters.

The warrior further recalls: "Over time, the weight of this violence became unbearable. I lost friends and family members, and the constant fear and grief took a toll on my spirit. I began to question the cycle we were trapped in and started to seek a different path. Through community dialogues and peacebuilding initiatives, I found hope. As I engaged with former adversaries, I came to realize that the Pokot, like us, desired peace and prosperity. We shared more similarities than differences, and our mutual suffering called for unity rather than division" (personal communication, October 2022).

The warrior concludes: "Today, I advocate for peace, urging the youth to break free from the chains of vengeance. Our future depends on collaboration, understanding, and the courage to choose reconciliation over retaliation. Only then can we transform our legacy from one of conflict to one of coexistence" (personal communication, October 2022).

Based on accounts shared during the focus group discussion regarding the root causes of the conflict, it was revealed that the violence began in 1998 with cattle rustling in the Kerio Valley. The conflict was initiated when cattle rustlers from West Pokot stole livestock

from the Marakwet community. In retaliation, the Marakwet moved into the highlands at Kapsait, along the Cherangany Hills, and stole cattle in return.

Kapsait was considered a weak point because the local community lacked accesse to *Cheptai,* a coded term that literally means "second wife" but was used to refer to ownership of an Ak-47 rifle. At the time, a *Cheptai* could be purchased for between 35,000 and 50,000 Kenyan shillings. Today, the cost has risen to 120,000 shillings. According to participants, this price increase was due to disarmament efforts conducted in Kampala along the Kenya-Uganda border, which led to an artificial scarcity of firearms. It was also agreed that the raids typically occurred around 2:00 AM and could continue until as late as 11:00 AM.

Historically, the current conflict resolution process began in 1999, when the late President Daniel Arap Moi visited the area to promote peace. After his visit, there was a heavy police presence in the region. The government established a demilitarized zone approximately one kilometer wide on both sides of the border. Around the same time, the church also began its peace initiatives in the area.

Gender Empowerment

Focus groups and interviews emphasized the importance of women's empowerment in both communities. According to Woroniuk (1999), engendering society or politics is not an attempt to reverse prejudice or to homogenize men and women. Rather, it is a means of achieving fairness through equal life chances and opportunities. Gender equality can differ depending on culture and society, as long as men and women enjoy equal rights, freedom of choice, and access to resources and power. In one of the interviews, Aziza supported this view by stating the following: "Women do not need to be part of the council of elders, since it is a traditional system that is patriarchal…There is more space—women can create their own space without compromising their culture and religion and carve out their own niche in peacebuilding" (personal Communication, October 11, 2022].

The *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church* (2005) provides a comprehensive summary of the Catholic Church's teaching and aspirations concerning conflict, peace, poverty, development, justice, minority rights, and environmental sustainability. It invites all people of goodwill to become effective agents of peace and development by recognizing the importance of dialogue and cooperation in serving the common Good. These teachings should be interpreted as promoting an all-inclusive approach that establishes space for both genders to participate in peacebuilding. The following case serves as an example to encourage greater involvement of women into peacebuilding efforts.

Women and Peace Building: Dekha Ibrahim Abdi

In 1991, amid escalating clan violence in Wajir, northeastern Kenya, Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, a school headmistress and mother, emerged as a transformative peacebuilder. Witnessing the devastating impact of conflict between the Ajuran and Degodia clans, she mobilized local women to launch grassroots peace initiatives. Operating from her home, Dekha facilitated dialogues among women from opposing clans, encouraging them to persuade their male counterparts to cease hostilities.

This unprecedented move led to the voluntary disarmament of youth militias and opened avenues for broader community reconciliation. Her inclusive approach culminated in the formation of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, which united elders, religious leaders, and government officials to sustain peace. Dekha's pioneering work not only restored harmony in Wajir but also influenced peacebuilding frameworks across Kenya and beyond.

The story of Dekha and her role in peacebuilding is remarkable. She brought women

together who traditionally had no place in the council of elders and mobilized them to demonstrate and capture the attention of both the government and the international community. They raised their voices and demanded peace. She went on to form the Women for Peace movement, which was formally recognized by both the government and the council of elders.

In the area of our study, women from both communities gather at key border points—considered the "most" affected along Turkana-Pokot County border—to pray together, sing, dance, and talk. Despite many of them having borne the brunt of the conflict, these meetings provided space for women from both sides to come together and discuss how violence has impacted their lives. The gatherings also allowed them to reflect on and interrogate their roles in the conflict and to address the challenges they face.

Key Lessons from Amani Mashinani

Amani Mashinani emphasizes that lasting peace begins with personal transformation. The model encourages individuals to engage in self-reflection, fostering empathy and a commitment to nonviolence. This inner change serves as the foundation for broader communal reconciliation.

The model operates through local peace committees composed of respected community members. These committees facilitate dialogue, mediate disputes, and implement localized peace agreements, thereby ensuring that peacebuilding efforts remain contextually relevant and community-driven. *Amani Mashinani* also integrates peace initiatives with development projects, addressing underlying causes of conflict such as poverty and inequality. By linking peace efforts to tangible improvements in livelihoods, the model enhances community buy-in and sustainability.

Recognizing the pivotal role of women and youth, *Amani Mashinani* actively involves these groups in peace processes. Women, in particular, have played an instrumental role in mediation and reconciliation efforts, bringing unique perspectives and fostering inclusive dialogue. The model also leverages cultural norms and religious teachings to promote peace. By aligning peace messages with local beliefs and practices, *Amani Mashinani* enhances the legitimacy and acceptance of its initiatives within communities.

While rooted in the Kenyan experience, the principles of *Amani Mashinani* are adaptable to diverse conflict settings. Its emphasis on local ownership, cultural sensitivity, and integration with development makes it a versatile and replicable framework for peacebuilding in various global contexts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Catholic Church, through the two dioceses of Kitale and Lodwar covering the counties of West Pokot and Turkana has played a significant role in managing the conflict. It is arguable that, despite the ideals and the interventions of the Catholic Church in the Pokot-Turkana conflict environment, the structural reforms advocated by the Synod on Africa have yet to be fully realized. Structural deficiencies within the Church identified both in this study and by other scholars like Assefa (1987) and Mwagiru (2000) may be contributing to the persistence of the conflict. While the Church continues to promote suitable and contextually relevant structures, it still lacks a rigorous theoretical framework for its conflict management activities (Mwagiru, 2000). Catholic missionaries who have worked for many years in conflict-affected areas addressing justice and peace issues have echoed similar concerns.

We concur with Dolan (2006:12), who argues that the continued persistence of conflict between the Pokot and Turkana presents a challenge to the Catholic Church's

structure, particularly its Justice and Peace Commissions, to critically assess its conflict management capacity. This includes examining its theoretical competency, technical expertise, understanding of historical dynamics, and the strategic rationalization of its peacebuilding activities. Notably, the efficacy of the church's peacebuilding structures and interventions in the conflict under study has not been sufficiently researched.

Moreover, the persistence of the conflict under study raises questions about the Catholic Church's technical capacity to manage the Pokot-Turkana conflict effectively. Despite more than 50 years of the church's presence in the region, sporadic cattle rustlings continue to be reported. To address this conflict more comprehensively, greater attention must be given to gender considerations. As highlighted in the focus group discussion, gender blindness in peacebuilding efforts has contributed to the ongoing nature of the conflict. Enhancing gender balance within the *Amani Mashinani* model is therefore essential for building more inclusive and sustainable peace.

To enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of *Amani Mashinani*, it is recommended that the initiative be formally integrated into national and county-level peacebuilding frameworks. This includes establishing structured partnerships with government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners to ensure consistent funding and technical support. Additionally, investing in capacity-building for community peace actors through standardized training in conflict resolution, mediation, and trauma healing will enhance professionalism and improve the quality of interventions. A robust monitoring and evaluation system should also be developed to track impact, document lessons learned, and inform adaptive programming. Safeguarding the political neutrality of *Amani Mashinani* is essential and can be achieved by promoting inclusive, community-driven leadership and protecting the initiative from partisan interests. Furthermore, aligning the initiative's principles with relevant policy recommendations can help address underlying structural issues such as resource scarcity and political marginalization, thereby fostering long-term stability in conflict-prone regions like the North Rift Valley.

We end this essay with some Kikuyu and Swahili proverbs. To begin with, the Kikuyu say: *Thayu wi-goro no ni wa bata,* which translates to "Peace is costly, but it is worth the expense." This saying emphasizes that investing in peace, although demanding, yields invaluable returns. Similarly, a Swahili proverb states: *Asiyependa amani, kilio hakimtoki,* meaning that "One who dislikes peace is always crying." This reflects the idea that those who reject peace often live in a state of constant distress, underscoring the personal and communal toll of unresolved conflict.

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