

Exploring the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS) for Peacebuilding in Mount Elgon Region

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Abstract

Conflicts have brought great distress and loss of lives across the globe. Unfortunately, the African continent has witnessed the greatest impact of these conflicts. However, from 2011, other the predominantly Muslim countries especially in the Middle East, Arabia and Africa also witnessed similar conflicts that led to loss of lives and overthrow of dictatorial regimes. The intra-ethnic conflict witnessed in Mount Elgon region between the Soy and Ndorobo clans of the Sabaot in 2006-2008 had great socio-economic implications in the region. While most literature has focused on the causes of intra-ethnic conflicts in Africa and Kenya in particular, there has been less focus on peacebuilding. More so on the role of ICTs to the peacebuilding process for societies emerging from conflicts. This study was designed to assess the ICTs used in the peacebuilding process in Mount Elgon region. The study was based on the conflict transformation theory which argues that conflict transformation is a long process requiring different interventions by different actors employing various approaches towards attainment of peace. The theory also posits that ICTs have the potential of transforming conflicts into peaceful co-existence characterized by new structures and new relationships. The study used questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions to collect data. The target sample was the residents and the state and not-state actors involved in the peace building process in Mt Elgon region. The study showed that ICTs such as mobile telephones, the Internet and radio, social media platforms and ICTs greatly contributed to the peacebuilding process in the region. The paper contributes to the on-going dialogue on peace building efforts in Mt. Elgon and other regions experiencing similar conflicts and recommends. The study recommends more investment in ICTs by both state and non-state actors involved in the peace building process in the region.

Keywords: ICTs, Peacebuilding, Mount Elgon Region

Introduction

Conflicts have brought great distress and loss of lives across the globe. According to the International Community of the Red Cross Society [ICRC] (2011), the suffering inflicted on the civilian population by such conflicts include deliberate attacks, destruction of infrastructure and goods indispensable to their survival, forceful displacement, murder, forced disappearance and torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and deliberate kidnapping and targeting of aid workers leaving the fate of thousands of civilians uncertain. Since violence is costly, efforts have now been directed towards managing conflicts and rebuilding societies torn apart by war hence the global quest for peace that has attracted the attention of many actors.

The 2006-2008 intra-ethnic conflict between the Soy and Ndorobo clans of the Sabaot community and the subsequent formation of the Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF) greatly

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affected the region. (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2008; HRW, 2011; Simiyu, 2008; Kamoet, 2007; Kamoet, 2011). The SLDF and the military were accused of deliberate killings and abductions, displacement of populations, mutilation and inhuman treatment, rape and sexual violence, destruction of property, theft, torture and forced recruitment into the army (KRCS, 2007; Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, 2008). Although the 2008 military intervention led to a forced ceasefire, it raised questions of alternative dispute resolutions and peace building mechanisms that can be attained without great loss of lives and property.

Peace is defined as the absence of widespread physical violence. The term is derived from Galtung's (1976) idea of positive peace where non-violence, social justice and ecological sustainability remove the causes of war by addressing the root causes of war. This is contrasted with negative peace which is characterized by the absence of war and other forms of direct violence (Galtung, 1996; Sandole, 2003; and Tschigri, 2003). Hence the aim of peace building is to normalize relations, and to build institutions that can manage conflicts without resorting to violence. It is further held to be an unqualified goal in terms of orderly politics and the sanctity of life (Boaduo, 2010; United States Institute of Peace, 2011).

The former UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali in his *Agenda for Peace* defined peace building as the action to identify and support structures which would tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). The fact that peace building was restricted to post-conflict reconstruction was a major shortcoming that was soon rectified by Boutros-Ghali's *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace* (1995) which extended the term across the conflict spectrum of pre-conflict prevention, actions during warfare, and post-conflict measures. Notter and Diamond (1996) support this view and add that peace building means creating the tangible and intangible conditions to enable a conflict-habituated system to become a peace system and that it can be done before, during or after violence erupts.

Advancement in ICTs has led to increasing connectivity all over the world making internet meetings and conferences possible. They were instrumental in bringing about political change during the Arab Spring in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia by facilitating the organization of protests and the global broadcast of these in real time. Similarly, in the Philippines, large scale demonstrations were organized via cell phones and short text messages (SMS) forcing President Joseph Estrada to resign, thus bringing about change without a large-scale violence (Wilson & Wilson, 2009; Manrique & Mikail, 2011). The digital revolution in the 1990s and the social movements in Arab countries has seen new services such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, Skype and so on (Camminos, 2013; Gujer, 2011; Nierkerk, Pillay & Maharaj, 2011). Through new media technologies such as digital audio, video, mobile video and multi-media services (MMS), it is possible to link community driven production of media that addresses local issues to potentially unlimited number of people (Hattotuwa, 2006; Gujer, 2011). Personal profiles on these websites help in the formation of new relationships which promote understanding across cultures and geographical boundaries leading to the concept of unity in diversity. For instance, a 'friendship tree' is a contact list of about 100 Zimbabweans which is activated every time an activist is arrested to ensure witnesses are available to monitor the proceedings (Wilson & Wilson, 2009; Boaduo, 2010).

According to Hattotuwa (2004) ICTs is the use of enabling technologies to augment existing stakeholder interventions, enable hitherto marginalized actors to participate more fully in peace building processes, empower grassroots communities and bring cohesion to the range of activities on multiple tiers that are an intrinsic part of full-field peace building and conflict

transformation involving all stakeholders. Similarly, the actors involved in peace building in Kenya have made extensive use of ICTs. For instance, *Uwiano* platform was successful in ensuring a peaceful national referendum in 2010. Other platforms like *Ushahidi* and *Amani Kenya @108* were instrumental in providing real time information to stakeholders during the 2007/2008 PEV (Babaud & Ndung'u, 2012). Hence, ICTs play a crucial role in peace building by empowering the citizens, encouraging participatory involvement as well as acting as an early warning mechanism. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine the extent of ICT use in peace building in Mt Elgon region using phenomenological approach.

Statement of the Problem

The 2006-2008 intra-ethnic conflict between the Soy and Ndorobo was devastating leading to the loss of many lives, property and livelihoods. Above all, it tore the social fabric which bound the clans together as one community and resulted in fear, hatred, suspicion and mistrust in the Sabaot society. Unfortunately, this was not the first time the community had gone through such an intra-ethnic conflict in spite of the fact that several peace building programmes had been initiated in the past by myriad players. The fact that such conflicts recurred every so often is an indicator that the past peace building initiatives may have not been successful after all. It follows, therefore, that such conflicts are likely to recur in the future if the concerned parties and stakeholders do not take measures to effectively build peace in this society. In an effort to enhance the impact of their peace building efforts, various players embraced ICT tools. However, no study has been conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of these tools in contributing to peace building in the Mount Elgon Region. Thus, there exists a knowledge gap regarding the suitability, sustainability and impact of ICTs in peace building in the region. This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the ICT tools which were used by the various players while striving to build lasting peace in Mount Elgon region; exploring how the ICTs were used and their actual contribution to the peace building process; as well analyzing how effective these ICTs were in facilitating the realization of lasting peace in the region.

Objectives of the study

The objective of the study is to:

- i. Identify the ICT tools used in peace building in Mt Elgon region
- ii. examine the contributions of ICTs to the peace building process in the region

Theoretical framework

Conflict transformation theory

Conflict transformation theory is a new theory drawing on the concepts of conflict resolution and conflict management through contributions of many scholars such as Miall (2004), Lederach, (1997) and Vayrynen (1991). Conflict transformation departs from the theories of conflict

resolution and management in that conflict management views conflicts as ineradicable consequences of values and interests between communities. Accordingly, conflicts can only be managed and contained by powerful actors having powerful resources. Conflict resolution, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of skilled but powerless third-parties working with parties to address the root causes of the conflict. The aim of conflict transformation is to pursue non-violent social change by transforming relationships and social organization into long-term peace (Lederach, 1997). Lederach sees peace building as a long-term transformation of a war system (conflict) into a peace system, inspired by a quest for the values of peace and justice, truth and mercy. The key dimensions of this process are changes in the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of conflict, brought about over different time-periods (short, mid and long-term) and affecting different system levels at different times. The theory affirms that conflicts as the one witnessed in Mt Elgon region are inevitable. However, through appropriate interventions facilitated by ICTs, conflicts can be transformed into peaceful co-existence characterized by new structures and new relationships. The theory enables parties to address the conflicts at different levels. The theory informs the study since Mt Elgon region is emerging from the conflict hence the need to understanding the relational, structural and social aspects of peace building as well as the effectiveness of ICTs in transforming the conflict into peaceful coexistence.

Sampling technique

The total population in the area of study for the four sub-counties to be included was 20,000 people. To get the actual sample size from 20,000, a table for determining needed size (S) of a randomly chosen size from a finite population (N) was used (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The proportions in the table assumes a standard error of .05 (95% level of confidence) hence the researcher targeted 377 community members were purposively selected for interviews regarding their views on the effectiveness of ICTs in peace building and the peace building efforts in the region.

Table 1.1 Distribution of respondents by Sub-Counties

Sub-County	Frequency	Percentage
Mt.Elgon	175	46.4
Bungoma North	50	13.2
Cheptais	87	23.0
Trans- Nzoia West	22	5.8
Bungoma West	43	11.4
Total	377	100

From the table 1.1 above, the respondents were drawn from five sub-counties which are within Mt Elgon region. Mt Elgon sub-county had the highest number of respondents followed by Cheptais Sub-County. This was because the victims of the conflict were drawn from these two Sub-counties. In addition, the contentious land in located in Cheptais Sub-County and most of those claiming ownership to the land are residents of the two sub-counties. However, other sub-

counties neighbouring Mt Elgon bore the spill-over effects of the conflict. These are Bungoma North, which had 50 respondents, Bungoma West sub-county which had 43 respondents and Trans Nzoia West Sub-county which recorded 22 respondents.

Data collection methods

The main data collection method was qualitative in-depth interviews both individually and in groups although field notes from observations, focus group discussions and document analysis were used to complement the findings. Interviews offer a means of collaboratively exploring the meanings, ideas, feelings, intentions of various stakeholders or publics, and of those involved in managing formal communications (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Hence, structured, semi-structured and unstructured questions were used to understand peace building, ICT tools used in peace building, contributions of ICTs in the peace building process, the actors involved in peace building and the effectiveness of ICTs in peace building. The responses from the interviews were recorded on digital voice recorders and later transcribed and translated into English. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. Other methods used in data collection were FGDs, questionnaires and observation.

Findings

ICT Tools used in peace building in Mt Elgon region

Table 1.2 Name of various ICT tools used in the region

ICT tool	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Radio	210	55.7
Mobile Phones	100	26.5
Television	27	7.2
Facebook	25	6.6
Twitter	11	2.9
Website	3	3.9
Satellite Cameras	1	0.3
Butterfly Cameras	0	0
Satellite phones	0	0
Skype	0	0
Total	377	100

Table 1.2 shows the ICT tools used by the actors involved in peace building. Radio was the most accessible ICT tool in the region. The accessibility of the radio was due to its affordability and wider geographical coverage. It was followed by the mobile phone which was accessible to most members of the community.

Other ICT tools like, Satellite cameras, butterfly cameras and Skype, the website and satellite phones were not so popular among the residents and the actors involved in the reconstruction process. This is further illustrated by Figure 1.

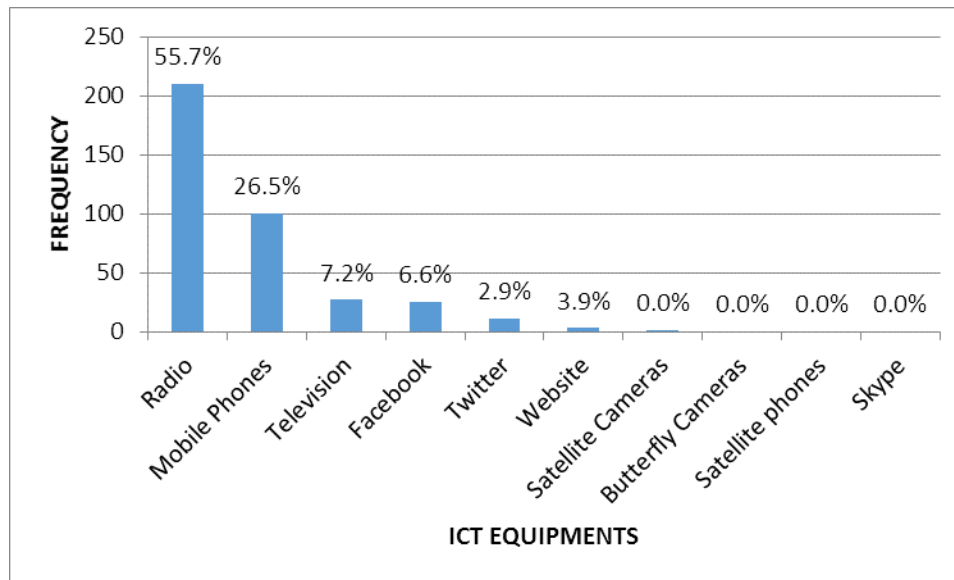


Figure 1 Frequency of ICT tools used in Mt Elgon

Information from FGDs and key informant interviews confirmed the use of other ICT tools like the satellite phones, VHF radios and the websites.

Mobile phone usage in peace building in the region

The findings from FGDs and key informant interviews indicated that mobile phones were the widely used ICT tool in the region by various and community members as an early warning mechanism and also for information sharing. For instance the Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) which gets its funding from PYM- Norway distributed Google compliant phones to identified individuals in hot spot areas within the region. There are identified individuals in every ward whose task is to monitor levels of tension on daily basis according to the indicators in the manual guide. In case of tension, the peace monitors relay the information via SMS to the system analyst in the control room in Kitale who filters the information and relays them to the relevant authorities; that is the police, County commissioners, County commanders and the Inspector General of Police for appropriate intervention. But if the tension level in the region reaches level three which is characterized by human rights abuses, burning of houses, shifting populations among others, the Kenya Red Cross Society would be contacted for humanitarian assistance.

The phones were distributed in Bungoma West, Mt Elgon, Cheptais and Bungoma East sub-counties in Bungoma County. It emerged that Mt Elgon region received the highest number of mobile phones because of the intensity of the conflict witnessed. Thus, a total of 50 mobile phones were distributed to 45 wards in Mt Elgon and Cheptais Sub-counties. Similarly, Trans Nzoia County received 50 mobile phones whereby Kiminini, Cherangany, Kwanza, Endeless and Saboti Sub-Counties were identified as hot spot areas. In general, 25 wards in Trans Nzoia County benefitted from the project.

The study also found that the residents employed SMS and mobile phone technology in contacting security agent in times of distress. Consequently, all the security agents like the Officers Commanding Police Division (OCPDs), the Deputy County Commissioners (DCCs), Chiefs, DPC members and other stakeholders often gave their mobile numbers to community members in public forums. There were also hotline numbers for contacting these authorities. However, verification of information often had to be ascertained to curb on rumours.

TV stations promoting peace in the region

The findings indicate that K24 was the leading TV station promoting peace in the region and also the frequently watched TV station. This was followed by Kenya Television Network (KTN) (26.5 %), Nation Television (NTV) (10.3%), Citizen (5.3%) and Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) which had (4.5%). The findings are further illustrated in Figure 2.

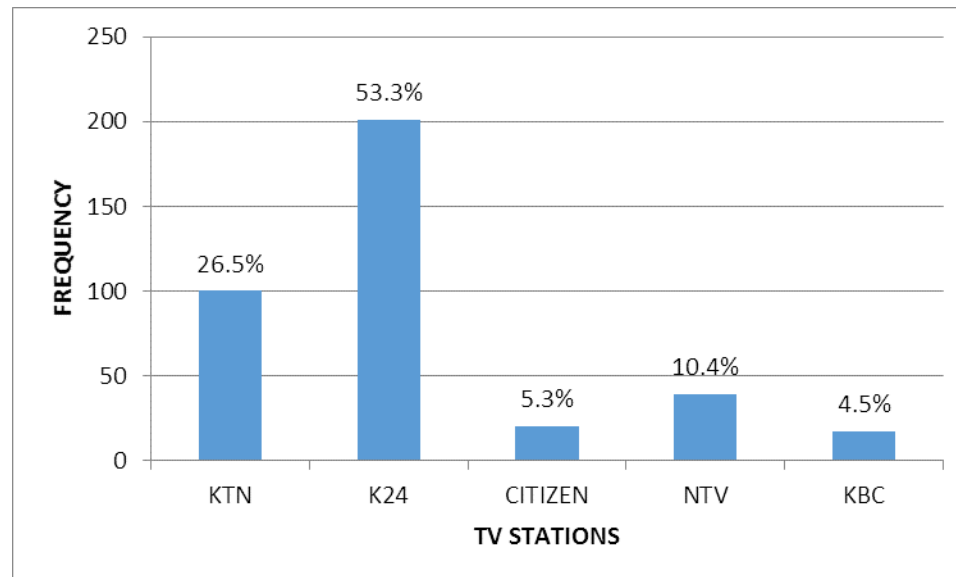


Figure 2 List of TV stations promoting peace in the region

Information from key informant interviews and FGDs indicate that the TV stations covering peace building in the region include Hope TV, NTV, K24, and Citizen TV.

Radio stations promoting peace in the region

The findings indicate that there were radio stations promoting peace in the region. They empowered the local residents and provided platforms for information sharing among all the stakeholders in the region. The findings are shown in Figure 3.

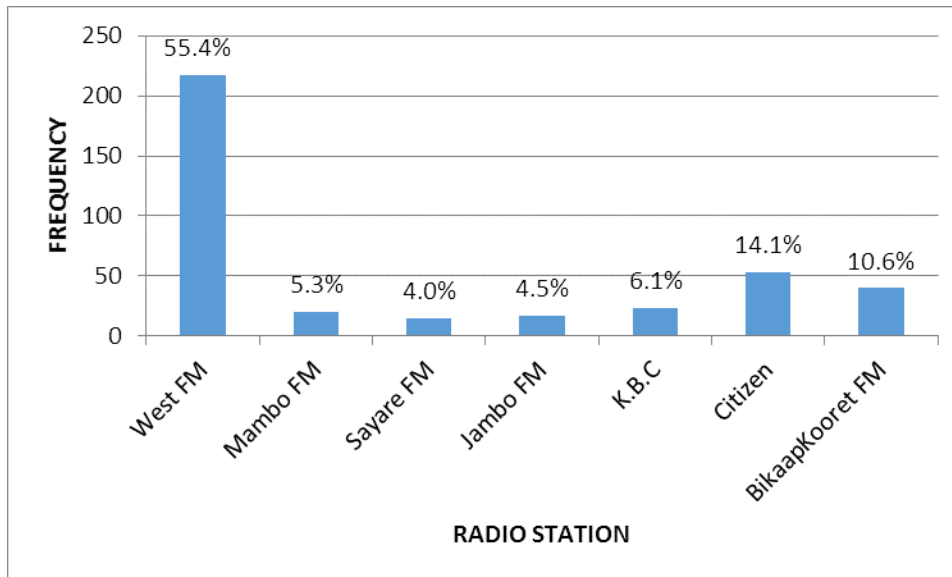


Figure 3 Radio stations promoting peace in Mt Elgon region

Figure 3 shows that there are 7 radio stations promoting peace in the region. West FM which broadcasts from Bungoma town was the most frequently listened to radio station. This was followed by Radio Citizen, Bikaap Kooret (BK) FM and KBC Radio. The findings indicate that the Sabaoits in the diaspora founded SIDO in 2010. In 2012, SIDO initiated an online radio station that broadcasts 24/7 through their website. In May 2013, SIDO News Network initiated a radio station available on 98.2 FM called BK FM which broadcasts from Kapsokwony in Mt Elgon and Minnesota (USA). The broadcasts from Minnesota however, requires the listeners to launch into the SIDO websites and listen online.

Other stations in the region were *Radio Mambo* which broadcasts from Webuye, *Radio Jambo* (broadcasting from Nairobi) and *Sayare Radio* which broadcasts from Eldoret. The findings from interviews FGDs and key informant interviews indicate that there were other radio stations promoting peace in the region. These included *Imani Media* in Kitale which has both radio (Imani Radio) and television (Hope TV) stations. Other radio stations promoting peace in the region are *Sabo Sema FM* and *Kaalya FM* which cover Kitale, West Pokot, Turkana and parts of Samburu. *Nyota FM* broadcasting from Webuye and *Radio Maisha* (Nairobi) also highlighted and promoted peace in Mt Elgon region.

Social media platforms promoting peace in the region

Social media platforms includes the use of Facebook groups, Twitter and other user generated contents. The findings indicate that there was Facebook use in peace building process among the residents in the region as indicated in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Names of Facebook groups promoting peace in the region

Name of various Facebook groups in the region	Frequency	Percentage
Kaboywo People Online	6	1.5
Chepyuk Peoples Union	103	27.3
Kapsokwony people's online	10	2.6
Sabaot People Online	268	71.1
Total	377	

Table 1.3 shows that there are various Facebook groups in the region. The leading Facebook group in the region is Sabaot Peoples Online. The Facebook link is used by the Sabaots in the diaspora and in Kenya to keep in touch with the community members and spread peace among the Sabaot community in the region. This was followed by Chepyuk Peoples Online. The findings indicate that the group was formed to build solidarity among Chepyuk residents who had been scattered by the conflict. Kaboywo People Online and Kapsokwony Peoples Online had the objective of keeping up to date with the latest news in the region. Results from the FGDs and Key Interviews indicated that there were other Facebook groups in the region which include Bungoma County 411, Mt Elgon News Network, Sabaot Women Online, Sabaot People Forum and Sabaot County (Saboti, Endebess and Mt Elgon). The Facebook groups are however, popular among the youth.

The researcher went further to find out the trending twitter accounts in the region. These were the twitter accounts promoting peace in the region. The results are shown in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4 Name of various Twitter accounts in the region that are promoting peace

Twitter account	Frequency	Percentage (%)
KTN	57	15.1
K24	50	13.3
Mt Elgon Peace Tweets	150	39.8
Our Citizens	120	31.8

Table 1.4 shows the trending twitter accounts in the region. It emerged that the respondents had been following the trending twitter groups in the traditional media like the TV. Our Citizens was the leading twitter account promoting peace in the region (26.3%) followed by Mt Elgon twits (2.7%), KTN (1.6) and K24 (1.1%). The results further support the study's findings on the leading TV stations that highlighted peace building in the region (KTN and K24).

Websites promoting peace in the region

There was minimal use of websites in promoting peace in the region. The findings indicate that the website was mainly used by the NGOs and CBOs. For instance, there was SIDO website founded in 2010 by Sabaots living in America. SIDO gave rise to SIDO News Network website and Sabaots.com in 2011 which relays current news updates about the Sabaot community globally. The findings indicate that the website was popular among the youth and the elite.

The study found that the Western Kenya Human Rights Watch (WKHRW) has a website for information sharing and documentation of human rights abuses with the human rights monitors at the ground level and international human rights organisations. Similarly, Imani Media had a website for the residents to give their views during the healing process in the region. The use of the website was however stopped in 2011 due to junk messages. The FPFK also has a website which allows users to access information and make their contributions to the peace building process.

The KRCS has a website (kenyaredcross.org/redcross.org.ke) which was used to provide news updates for the KRCS staff. The study found out that in KRCS, all communication from the ground to the top done through email. Any rapid assessment on the ground is sent by email since it is fast. The information moves from the team leader, operations manager and the coordinating office. Amani People's Theatre (APT) in Mt Elgon also uses the website for coordination with the head office in Nairobi. Similarly, Mount Elgon Residents Association (MERA) and Peace Tree Network (PTN) had website for coordination and sharing of news amongst its members and the general public.

Conclusions

The findings show that ICTs have been greatly employed by various actors involved in peace building in Mt Elgon region. The findings show that local radio stations have played a great role in enhancing peace in the region. This was mainly due to its affordability and the use of the local language in order to reach the residents. Mobile phones and SMSs also played a great role in enhancing early warning mechanism among the residents apart from providing a platform for information sharing. On the other hand, TV, social media platforms and the websites were mainly used by the elites to enhance information sharing and empowerment of the residents. Their use of twitter and Facebook groups among the residents provided updates on the latest news and events and also promoted cohesion among the Soy and Ndorobo clans.

Recommendations

In order to enhance ICT use in the region, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

- Digital inclusion (digital literacy) should be enhanced through provision of ICT services and digital villages in the region.
- There should be censoring of information especially from the social media platforms to avoid the spread of hate messages.
- There should be continuous dialogue and consultation by all the stakeholders in the region in order to address emerging issues in the region.
- There is need for county government should improve the infrastructure in the region in order to promote development and ICT use in the region. This is because most of the region had poor roads, low network coverage and lack of electricity.
- The main cause of the conflict in the region was the dispute over the Chepyuk settlement scheme. Thus, the government should resolve all historical land injustices in the region by resettling the landless in order to avoid future conflicts.

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