

# UCP IN ACTION:

## Using peaceful and unarmed responses to conflict management

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# In This Issue:



p3

Residents of Mathare speak about using peaceful means to prevent conflict



p6

We discuss how media is embracing peace-making to prevent conflicts



p8

Informal settlement in Nairobi turns to UCP to manage conflicts



p10

Njoki speaks about using peaceful means to secure peace in communities



p12

How media is managing conflicts through rumour control



p15

Koros inspiring story of how women are using negotiation skills to manage conflicts

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# Residents turn to peaceful means to prevent conflict in Mlango Kubwa



Citizens demonstrate to stop violence against women. Statistics show this form violence is rampant during conflict times.

**BY CLARET ADHIAMBO**

For many years, Nairobi's Mlango Kubwa estate, in Mathare Constituency, is synonymous with election related violence or violence resulting from struggle over economic opportunities.

The violence has affected economic and social lives of the residents, who live in constant fear of being attacked. Women have been sexually molested and some people killed whenever these violence happens. But the residents have decided to

manage the situation by using unarmed civilian protection and response methods to prevent conflicts from taking root in the area.

UCP is the practice of civilians protecting civilians in situations of eminent or

**PAGE 4>**

### <FROM PAGE 3

ongoing violent conflict. It is either international civilians protecting local civilians or local civilians protecting each other without firearms.

Mlango Kubwa is one of the areas that were adversely affected by political violence in the run-up to the 2022 general elections. Politicians were accused of hiring gangs that reined terror on their opponents and those perceived to be opposing their candidature.

Women and youth were among those who were attacked and injured during these violence. Among the women leaders who were attacked is Liz Waithera, who was vying for the Mlango Kubwa ward seat.

The violent youths attacked and attempted to undress her. "They tore my clothes and left me bleeding. I was not able to cast my vote," Waithera says.

Leaders in Mlango Kubwa and many of the informal settlements in the City blame the high rates of unemployment and difficult economic times as the factors making young people vulnerable to people who use them to unleash violence on other residents.

George Kutosi, Mlango Kubwa community chairperson

notes: "The youths are very industrious and at the same time are not selective when it comes to taking up jobs. This, coupled with their desperation to make quick cash, has made them so vulnerable to politicians who offer that kind of cash to unleash violence on their perceived opponents."

It is this sorry state of affairs that has made the residents of this estate in Nairobi to adopt UCP methods to help prevent and manage conflicts that affect them.

One of the UCP methods the residents are using to prevent and manage conflicts is negotiations and relationship building between the warring parties.

"We take cases brought to us to the Nyumba Kumi officials and sometimes the area chief for resolution. This has pretty much helped us to avert chaos," Kutosi said. "Sometimes, when the barazas are not effective, we go back and sit down to resolve the issues because at the end of the day, we all need each other."

Nyumba Kumi is one of the security structures recognised within the the National Policing Service. It is designed to enhance security and prevent

conflicts and crime before they happen. It is premised on the fact that people within a radius of ten households know each other well, have strong relationships, and are able to notice potential criminals or perpetrators of conflict very easily; then report to the local security apparatus for action. This approach uses peaceful means to help prevent and manage conflicts and crime.

During electioneering periods, use of these methods has helped the residents of Mlango kubwa to use negotiations to prevent young people fighting over political supremacy or economic opportunities from engaging in conflicts.

Although UCP is a new concept to many people, including the media, as a method of conflict resolution, it is slowly getting the attention of the locals.

The residents say that before negotiations between warring groups and dialogue are initiated, some sort of relationship building between the two groups has to be done.

Jane Wanjiru, a UCP expert, says the concept might be new to Kenya, but many people have been using it unknowingly. She

PAGE 5>

#### <FROM PAGE 4

says it requires no party to the conflict to be superior.

"When you verbally solve a conflict between two people by just talking to them, that is UCP in the application," Wanjiru says.

During a recent training of media practitioners on UCP, it was noted that the concept is applicable at various stages of a conflict; during early stages to prevent violence, during crisis to stop violence and at later stages to help sustain peace and agreements and safer spaces.

"What Mathare residents are currently doing is creating safer spaces for and preventing a repeat of what they witnessed in the run up to the 2022 general elections," says Wanjiru.

She notes that applying UCP after violent situations may include provision of safe houses, strengthening local peace infrastructure at the grassroots levels; and building resilience among communities to ensure sustainable peace.

Some of the countries where UCP has been successfully applied include Sri Lanka, Philippines and South Sudan. In the Philippines, a peace agreement was successfully

negotiated between the government and the insurgent Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2014.

At the international level, UCP is also getting traction. Between 2017 and 2021, representatives of 160 international, national, and local organisations from 45 countries came together to discuss principles, good practices, and challenges in nonviolent civilian protection work.

However, there is still little known about nonviolent protection provided by organisations specialising in UCP, and this work links with community self-protection practices.

Many international UCP organisations trace their history back to pacifist thoughts and embrace the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi's Shanti Sena, a peace army of nonviolent civilians who worked at the grassroots level to reduce violence and bring peace to communities in India.

Humanitarian Practice Network cites relationship-building as the heart of UCP. It says it is central to all other UCP methods, as it is through strong relationships with

communities affected by armed conflict, armed actors involved in conflict, and relevant local and national authorities that UCP practitioners can make their presence known.

It also helps them to keep abreast of rapidly changing conflict dynamics, understand the protection needs of communities affected by conflict, and take informed action.

Facilitated by these strong relationships, UCP methods include advocacy, multi-track dialogue, confidence building, proactive engagement, rumour control, and ceasefire monitoring.

Since UCP thrives on relationship building and dialogue, the shrinking civic spaces in East African countries and elsewhere, pose one of its limitations.

The other challenge is that UCP relies in part on the willingness of armed actors to consent to it. Without this minimum consent and the basic cooperation of armed actors, UCP practices are severely restricted.-CSS





Journalist discussing Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) approaches during a training workshop on UCP in Uasin Gishu County

# Media embraces peace-making to prevent conflicts

## BY AWC FEATURE CORRESPONDENT

Uasin Gishu county has on many occasions been in the news for all the wrong reasons: the epicentre of tribal clashes and conflicts arising from political rivalries and cattle rustling. These happenings have been accompanied by cases of sexual violations of women and girls and deaths.

These conflicts, most of the time, happen during an

election year, with politicians whipping up emotions by using land injustices as one of their campaign issues. They accuse people, who they fear will not vote for them, of having used unjust means to acquire land from their forefathers.

One of the actors that has been accused of amplifying these statements by politicians and advancing narratives of injustice, is the media. Through its framing of issues, media has on many occasions been an

accomplice to fuelling conflict in this region. The biggest concern has been media engaging in rumour mongering.

But in recent times, the media is changing the narrative. During a training by African Woman and Child Feature Service (AWCFS) on using Unprotected Civilian Protection (UCP) methods to manage conflicts sponsored by Creating Safer Space, the media practitioners admitted that as individuals and as media houses, they have

PAGE 7>

## <FROM PAGE 6

been a culprit of spreading rumours and sometimes untruths that fuel conflict.

During the 2022 general elections, the media did the opposite; it played a powerful role in pacifying the country. Through controlling rumours, airing and publishing messages, and refusing to give airtime or media space to individuals who were known to incite their communities, the media played a key role in managing election related conflicts.

Mildred Magut, a radio presenter at Upendo FM, says she has on many occasions, helped prevent possible conflict in the volatile Kerio Valley, one of the regions in a county that borders Uasin Gishu. She has done this by helping present the facts and address rumours. She says this has been made possible through her regular engagement with locals, social media monitoring, and collaboration with non-government organizations.

"Issues around Kerio Valley are known to many. On more than one occasion, based on information I get from listeners and other means, I have hosted elders from different communities in the region for talk shows to give the correct information. This has helped calm down situations," says Magut.

She also shares information she gets with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) which is then used to pre-empt conflicts.

James Gitaka, a journalist based in Uasin Gishu county, says through his reporting, he has helped prevent conflicts.

One of the early warning methods Gitaka has utilised is having a close collaboration with peace and security organizations who share information about potential conflicts with him.

"Journalists usually work closely with civil society organizations and the security agencies. It is a collaboration that I have previously used to share information about potential conflict, which enabled them to prepare communities who responded appropriately to the issue to stop conflict from happening," Gitaka says.

This, he says, is part of conflict-sensitive reporting. One of the methods he is now using to contribute to preventing conflicts is managing rumours, thanks to the trainings on UCP and conflict sensitive reporting he has benefited from the training by AWCFS.

But it is never an easy ride for journalists who try to engage in early warning and peace building efforts. Some have been threatened for being

perceived to be government informants while others are usually accused of taking sides.

"I remember one time I accompanied peace actors to an event that was meant to help avert a potential conflict and we were attacked. We had to run for our safety," Gitaka recalls.

He believes that with more training on early warning techniques, peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive reporting, journalists will be better equipped to be part of ensuring a conflict-free society.

"The dynamics around conflicts keep changing and this calls for more training to the journalists who will always be part of the solution," says Gitaka.

Timothy Simwa, a senior journalist, notes that negative public perception towards media and difficulties in accessing information as some of the challenges a journalist is likely to face in his attempt to prevent conflict and help in peacebuilding.

"Many people believe journalists always take sides, with some even of the perception that we will always be on the side of the government. This perception makes it hard for a journalist to access information from all sides in the conflict," Simwa says. **-CSS**

# Informal settlement in Nairobi turns to UCP to prevent conflicts



Training of Police officers by AWCFS on securing peace and justice of survivors of violence against women that are a key feature in informal settlements.

BY SARAH KIMANI

**K**ibera, one of the largest informal settlements in East and Central Africa, is known for sporadic conflicts that are either political or economic in nature.

The violent conflicts that are mostly rooted in political differences, intensify during election time, have forced the community to start rethinking how best to prevent them from happening in the first place.

Ismail Siyama, a peace actor in Kibera, says the major forms of conflicts experienced in Kibera are either political or tribal violence. This violence has resulted in women and girls being sexually molested and other people dying.

It is this sad situation that made Siyama and other women peace actors to adopt dialogue and negotiation as strategies to prevent and reduce the intensity of such conflicts.

When tension starts rising, Siyama says, residents are usually mobilized to a meeting where they engage in dialogue about the issue that is likely to cause violence. "Some of the issues that cause tension are business rivalry or criminals, believed to be from one tribe attacking business of another tribe. These leads to fights between youths from the two tribes."

"Similarly," adds Siyama, "during general elections, youths from two major tribes align with certain candidates, who then engage in violent conflicts to discourage the supporters of the rival camp from campaigning for their candidates. This is designed to achieve political supremacy for the camp that emerges with greater say."

The politicians are said to take advantage of unemployed youth, who are steeped deeply in poverty, who they bribe with handouts to unleash violence on the supporters of their rivals.

It is this situation that has led Siyama and her team to promote dialogue and negotiations among the youth to prevent the violence from happening,

**PAGE 9>**



## <FROM PAGE 8

and protect the residents from crime and conflict.

"It is unfortunate people have lost lives, suffered injuries, or lost their life-long earned investments. This has to end, hence why we promote dialogue and negotiations in solving differences," notes Siyama

In some of the cases, Siyama and other women have been on the forefront mediating these conversations of rival gangs. "I am happy that such meetings come up with solutions and agreements that have helped to secure peace and protection of life and property in this informal settlement."

Most of the time they have to involve the local chief and County Commissioner, both representing government, to give the dialogue the seriousness it deserves.

In 2022, Siyama and her team did door to door campaign urging people to remain peaceful and shun violence. They also put a lot of effort to control rumours that were mainly the source of many conflicts in Kibera, including working very closely with the media.

"We had to go to the media to denounce rumours that were creating tensions and give the right information of what was happening. This helped a great deal to reduce the tensions and

prevent conflicts since we were reaching so many people in a split of a second."

What Siyama and her team do not know is that the methods they have been using are part of the Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) approaches used to resolve conflicts and protect civilians from harm during times of conflict. UCP is the practice of civilians protecting civilians in situations of eminent or ongoing violent conflict.

It involves international civilians protecting local civilians or local civilians protecting each other. During the 2022 General Elections, the slogan that was used to help prevent conflicts in Kibera was: Piga Kura Usipige Jirani (Go and vote, not fight your neighbour).

To push their messages of peace to even larger crowds, Siyama and her team work closely with the religious leaders and groupings who already have a constituent they are speaking to regularly.

During a training of media practitioners on UCP that was conducted in Nairobi by African Woman and Child Feature Service with the support of Creating Safer Space, Jane Wanjiru, a UCP expert, said UCP provides protective presence for civilians who are threatened or vulnerable to conflicts. She said these can take hours, weeks or months.

Methods used under UCP, she added, include rumour control. Indeed, in Kibera, the leading cause of conflicts is rumours. Managing rumours alone, says Siyama, will help manage over 70 per cent of the conflicts in this informal settlement.

The interventions by politicians such as one by former Prime Minister and Presidential Candidate in the 2022 elections, Raila Odinga, urging communities in Kibera to coexist harmoniously, helped greatly to reduce tensions and ensure peace.

These interventions by politicians, Wanjiru says, is a UCP approach where an individual is able to verbally solve a conflict between two people or warring groups.

She said some of the countries where UCP has been successfully applied include Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and South Sudan.

The only challenge is while UCP presents one of the best ways to prevent and manage conflicts, it is little known in Kibera in particular, and in Kenya in general. There is need to create greater awareness in communities about UCP approaches to help them manage conflicts and protect civilians from injury.

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# Njoki: Using peaceful means to secure peace in communities



AWCFS having a dialogue with Moraans in Samburu, in Rift Valley, on the need of pursuing peaceful approaches to managing conflicts in their communities

BY LUCY WANGARI

**M**ary Njoki is a woman on a major peace mission. People describe her as a courageous woman whose voice in peace has remained consistent in Uasin Gishu county.

Her peace journey has been shaped by painful experiences that have strengthened her resolve to soldier on in using peaceful means to protect civilians during conflicts and prevent such conflicts.

In the aftermath of the 2007 political turmoil that left

devastation in its wake, Mary responded to the conflict by rallying warring parties to embrace peace and protect women and children from violence.

Being an advocate for peace and reconciliation, she found herself among those who bore

PAGE 11>

## <FROM PAGE 10

the brunt of the conflict. She lost her father and brother as result of the skirmishes.

Determined to spare others from similar anguish, Mary made a profound commitment to champion peace and harmony within her community.

Reflecting on her journey, Mary shares: "After I lost my father and brother, I did not even get the chance to bury my dad. It was so painful, so I decided to be a peace activist because I wanted to protect other people from a similar fate and pain."

In response, she spearheaded the formation of 100 women's group, whose mission was to improve relationship building between communities and foster mutual support and solidarity.

Through her unwavering advocacy, Mary tirelessly empowers women and girls to demand for peace so that they are able to flourish in their businesses and other social issues.

With courage and determination, she inspires individuals to rise above societal stereotypes and pursue their aspirations. To succeed in an environment where conflicts take a regular pattern, she has learnt that peace is a long and continuous process, whose dividends emerge many years down the line

Mary's resilience and unwavering commitment to building a brighter future has established her as a beacon of hope in Uasin Gishu County when it comes to using non-violent means to peace making. Her character is a true reflection of the power of grassroots activism and the benefits of using non-violent means to bring about peace.

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***"After I lost my father and brother, I did not even get the chance to bury my dad. It was so painful, so I decided to be a peace activist because I wanted to protect other people from a similar fate and pain."***

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In recognition for her steadfast commitment to promoting grassroots peace initiatives, Njoki was recognised by UN Women for great efforts in preventing conflicts and bringing peace in her community. Currently, she collaborates with local peace actors to advance peace building efforts at the grassroots level.

She says that her focus at the moment is on addressing

the escalating threat of gender-based violence which pose a major challenge to peace and stability in the region.

In 2022, Mary's exceptional contributions to peacebuilding and use of peaceful means to manage conflicts earned her presidential recognition, underscoring the impact of her role as a peace actor. But she says such recognition does not come on a silver platter. It is about genuine passion, dedication, and great sacrifice in advancing peace in communities, she notes.

Even with these successes, her peace journey has on some occasions ran into some headwinds. One of them is lack of political will. There are times when politicians have incited communities to invade other people's farms or businesses. And they then refuse to engage in dialogues to stop such conflicts.

The other challenge is lack of resources, which remains a significant obstacle in advancing peace and protecting civilians trapped in conflicts in Uasin Gishu county.

Despite these challenges, her unwavering resolve and dedication to foster harmony and reconciliation in her community continues to inspire hope and drive positive change.

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# Journalists taking leadership in using UCP to prevent conflicts



Dr Andrew Maoga from Moi University, making a presentation on UCP approaches during a training of journalists in Uasin Gishu county.

**BY EKUWAM SYLVESTER AND ANGELA SILAYO**

**T**he role of the media in conflict prevention and management has never been more important than is the cases now. In the past 10 years, the role of the Kenyan media in promoting peace and using its reporting techniques

to protect civilians from conflict has gained a lot of attention.

This role was more prominent during the 2022 Kenya's general elections when the media helped to prevent conflicts that would have hurt many civilians. It achieved this by engaging in practices that addressed incitement and

rumours.

Through fact checking what politicians and political opponents were saying, and refusing to publish what they believed were untruths or correcting false statements, the media greatly helped to prevent or reduce intensity of conflict, which would have

**PAGE 13>**

## <FROM PAGE 12

taken another path if media institution and the journalist did not act responsibly.

It is with this background that media is emerging as a major player in using peaceful means to prevent or manage conflicts. This was the reason why African Woman and Child Feature Service (AWCFS), an NGO, conducted a training for journalists in Uasin Gishu county on using Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) methods to prevent conflicts.

Speaking during the training forum, Lilian Bwire, Women Peace and Security Consultant explained that UCP is also informed by UNSCR 1325 international legal framework on gender equality and inclusion of women in peace and security. Some of the key things contained in these resolutions is the protection of women and girls from violence; with one of the four pillars of the resolutions speaking to Protection, an area that is heavily addressed under UCP.

Bwire said it is important to involve women, in the spirit of UNSCR 1325, to be part of any interventions around UCP.

"This resolution is a gender responsive action tool that ensures fair treatment of men

and women in communicating peace matters and conflict management approaches."

She acknowledged the key role journalists play in the application of UCP in communities and localization of the UNSCR 1325. This is to ensure these approaches to conflict management are owned and implemented at the local levels

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***Some of the key things contained in these resolutions is the protection of women and girls from violence; with one of the four pillars of the resolutions speaking to Protection, an area that is heavily addressed under UCP.***

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Bwire noted that some of the methods that are likely to contribute to enhancing peaceful management of conflicts have been codified in some counties, with Uasin Gishu not fully compliant

"In Uasin Gishu county, these frameworks such as the KNAP exists in a draft form waiting

implementation. However, Bungoma, Vihiga, Elgeyo Marakwet and Nandi County have already implemented the policy-based approach that goes beyond the local adoption of law," says Bwire.

On her part, Ruth Omukhango from AWC, discussed the barriers to women inclusion and participation in peace processes and peace building, noting patriarchy as the main challenge.

"It is important to know if women are in these positions and what roles they are playing when it comes to conflict management approaches such as UCP. In Uasin Gishu, women have been on the forefront using peaceful means to bring peace as well as protect fellow civilians from harm," she noted.

She added that Uasin Gishu faces conflicts caused by contestations over land ownership, and political supremacy which need to be solved through peaceful means to protect civilians from harm.

A lecturer at Moi University, Dr. Andrew Maoga, spoke in detail about UCP approaches, touching on its principles and its implications in conflict prevention and promoting the role of women in peace and

**PAGE 14>**

## <FROM PAGE 15

security.

"UCP works under the principles of Nonviolence, Non-Partisanship, Relationship Building and civilian Immunity. UCP categorizes vulnerable groups as women, children, Journalists, Elderly people and persons living with disability (PWD)," he told the journalists.

He added that conflict exists in stages; latent stage, confrontation, crisis, post crisis and outcome. But he observed that UCP provides early warning and early prevention if adopted as a method of conflict resolution

The training also included a firsthand account by Esther Kangogo, member of the county Peace Committee and Council of Elders who shared her experience, challenges and views as a woman peace actor in using peaceful means in conflict resolution and peace building.

"I am a member of the Miyot Council of Elders and currently there are 30 women in the council of elders. Initially, it was a challenge to join the council of Elders following the traditional practices that believed women should not be a part of it. But

we now use it an institution to advance peace and protect community members from attacks during conflicts," she said.

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***UCP works under the principles of Nonviolence, Non-Partisanship, Relationship Building and civilian Immunity. UCP categorizes vulnerable groups as women, children, Journalists, Elderly people and persons living with disability (PWD),"***

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Kangogo affirmed that as a peace actor, she has played a crucial role in ensuring sustainable peace in homes through her peace initiatives, especially those focused on building good relationships between groups that have traditionally been involved in conflicts.

She used these approaches during the 2022 electioneering period by liaising with Assistant County Commissioners (ACCs),

and chiefs to ensure a protective barrier was put in place to protect civilians from violence, threats or intimidation.

Maoga urged Uasin Gishu journalists to abide by the media ethics when reporting on sensitive matters by providing context, root causes and possible solutions in their stories, and avoid perpetuating conflicts.

Through framing of the narrative, language use, empowering women's voices and collaboration for peace building, the media practitioners are called upon to address issues such as promoting reconciliations and managing rumours in addressing conflicts, he added.

Media are encouraged to work with different organizations that champion peaceful resolutions of conflicts as a means to protecting civilians from harm.

"As journalists, we should be keen on how we report and frame our stories. Our choice of words should avoid dehumanizing people or groups," said James Gitaka, Chair, Uasin Gishu Journalists Association Chair.

**-CSS**



# Koros proves women's abilities to use peaceful means to prevent conflicts in Rift Valley

BY AWC CORRESPONDENT

**T**he 2007/2008 post-election violence that was sparked by the disputed presidential election in Kenya was a watershed for Winnie Koros. It defined her work as a peace maker when, in response to what was happening, she started rallying her community to embrace peace.

She was only 24 years old and nursing her baby when chaos erupted in Kericho following the disputed presidential poll. The situation was further compounded by the death of Ainamoi MP who had been killed under mysterious circumstances during the same period."

"I had to walk for three kilometers to get to my home in Kapsoit centre which had already been blocked by fighting groups. I escaped death by a whisker at Kapsoit centre when it turned into a battleground."

She watched as buses of leading company were burnt to ashes by youth who also waylaid and ransacked lorries carrying fish and other goods.

"My lowest moment came when the authorities announced that we



**PAGE 16>**

## <FROM PAGE15

had lost 20 youth as result of the skirmishes. Both the Luos and Kalenjins had ganged up against the Kikuyu in Londiani. By the time GSU officers were deployed to quell the situation, people were counting huge loses."

These happenings were a turning point for her. In 2009, she joined the Yes Youth Can, a lobby group targeting the youth to spearhead peace in her area and the larger Rift valley including Uasin Gishu county.

In 2014, she was elected as the President of the group for a period of one year. It is during that period that she was mentored into leadership, which helped increase her visibility in peace work.

"I was representing youth across the County which has 30 wards. This enabled me to speak in forums convened at the county level. I was also endorsed by the community to serve in different leadership positions."

Koros and her teams use non-violent means and relationship building to increase harmony between communities and preempt conflicts.

During the 2022 General elections, the peace crusader says she worked closely with the church which convened several meetings where political aspirants committed to uphold peace during and after elections.

As a strategy, Koros took advantage of the campaign rallies

to spread messages of peace across the county.

"I was also invited to local Radio and TV stations among them Radio Injili and Light and Life FM stations to help address rumours that were triggering violence and advocate for peace during the electioneering period."

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***While culture demands that women remain at home to cook and take care of their husbands, those who defy culture are in most cases subjected to violence and ostracized in the community."***

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"We crafted peace messages that urged people to coexist harmoniously and remain peaceful during the electioneering period. Social media platforms among them Facebook were also used to spread peace messages. We had opened a Facebook page where we continued to preach peace even after our candidate lost the gubernatorial seat."

Despite these successes, she has had to content with some challenges. One of them is the poor integration of women into peace structures and peace processes that are expected to use non-violent means to manage conflicts.

"While culture demands that women remain at home to cook and take care of their husbands,

those who defy culture are in most cases subjected to violence and ostracized in the community."

"To increase women representation in peace processes in such an environment, the peacebuilder underscores the need for male involvement. "Let us have male champions pushing for women inclusion in peace structures and processes. We need to hear voices of men pushing for the inclusion of women in peace processes."

Capacity building of women peace builders on mediation, and reconciliation, is another area that needs attention if they have to succeed in using non-violent means to bring about peace.

"Women need more women to be trained as peace ambassadors. They also need to be trained to be mediators. In Kispigis community, most cases are resolved informally by a group known as Kipkaa where women are vilified and ostracized in cases where they report husbands who have defiled their children. This happens because women are not part of the mediation teams at the community level."

To succeed in such an environment, she has learnt that peace is a long and continuous process, whose dividends emerge many years down the line. "Calmness witnessed during 2022 General Election is a testament that we are now reaping the dividends of continuous peace work in the county.

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