



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



The role of pastoral activities in conflict resolution and peace-building among the Maasai community in Lolgorian parish, Ngong Catholic Diocese, Kenya

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Abstract

The general aim of this study was to assess the role of the Catholic Church in conflict resolution and peace-building in the Maasai community in Lolgorian Parish, Catholic Diocese of Ngong in Kenya. The Maasai community in Lolgorian Parish face recurring conflicts driven by land disputes, resource competition, political and socio-economic challenges, which have hindered economic growth and investment. These conflicts disrupt education, healthcare, social cohesion, exacerbating poverty and social inequalities in the region. Despite interventions by local leaders and the government, the conflicts have persisted, undermining sustainable development efforts. The Catholic Church plays a significant role in peace-building, but its effectiveness in addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering sustainable peace remains a challenge. The study integrated Karl Marx's, Paul Lederach's, and Montville's peace building models. The researcher reviewed related literature on the study themes and summarised the study variables into a conceptual framework. A mixed-method approach involving quantitative and qualitative research designs was used. The study applied the Yamane formula to calculate a sample size, with primary data being collected through questionnaires from 114 community respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select four key informants. The results are presented in tables and charts. The researcher believes that this study may enhance conflict resolution and peace-building mechanisms in Lolgorian Parish. By providing a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of conflict, the study's insights could inform the development of more targeted and effective strategies for mediation, community dialogue, and sustainable peace initiatives. In order to enhance the effectiveness of its pastoral activities, the study recommends that the Catholic Church should strengthen collaborations with local leaders and expand its social initiatives. These could be in healthcare and community development to meet the peoples' needs. The study also suggests that leveraging innovative strategies, such as sporting activities and social media campaigns, could improve the Catholic Church's engagement with the Maasai community. Furthermore, non-governmental organisations, religious groups, and the Government of Kenya, need to support these efforts by providing resources, technical assistance, and policy backing to improve the Catholic Church's impact on peace-building, social services, and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution; Peace building; Catholic Church; Maasai Community and Kenya

1. Introduction

The Catholic Church's mission in peace-building and conflict resolution is anchored in a comprehensive theological and ethical vision that transcends the mere absence of physical violence. Rooted in a tradition of justice and reconciliation, the Church asserts that sustainable peace requires the active cultivation of justice—a condition wherein social, economic, and political inequalities are addressed through engaged dialogue and mutual understanding (Power & Hrynkow, 2020). The Catholic Church current approach builds on a longstanding commitment to dialogue, reconciliation, and the inclusion of marginalised voices—a commitment now expressed through updated frameworks

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that integrate international human rights, sustainable development, and grassroots participation (Atidepe-Agbesi, 2021).

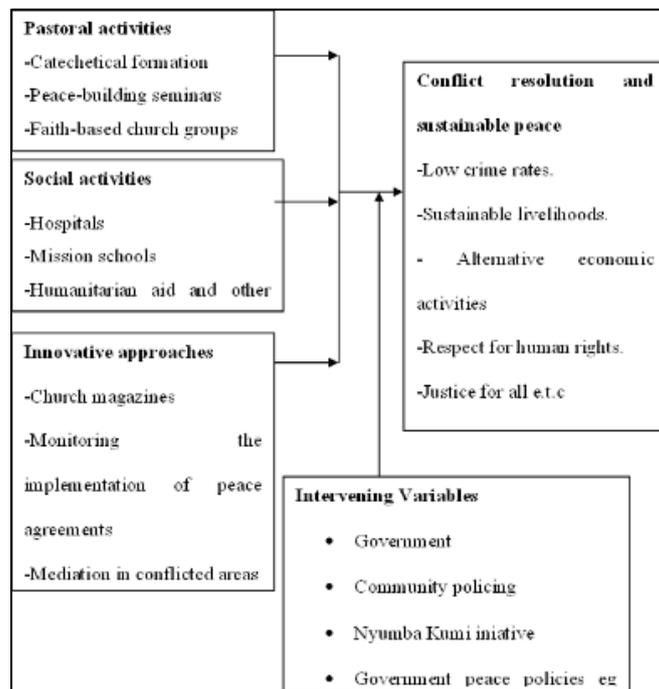
In Europe, the Church’s historical role remains evident in its contestation of oppressive regimes and its advocacy for political and social freedoms. In Eastern Europe, for example, the Catholic Church has maintained its position as a resilient critic of authoritarianism. This stance has evolved to include not only opposition to former totalitarian systems but also active mediation in post-authoritarian contexts through dialogue and interfaith collaboration (Montevecchio, 2023). In Latin America, the Church continues to be a pivotal mediator in addressing systemic injustices and promoting social transformation. In Colombia, where the Church serves as a major societal pillar, local diocesan networks and international collaborations enable it to hold political elites accountable and bring opposing groups to the negotiating table—efforts that have been reinforced by renewed emphasis on human rights and holistic development in recent peace agreements (Ernada, 2024; Montevecchio, 2021).

Recent empirical research further supports the Church’s pivotal contribution to conflict resolution efforts. For instance, studies focusing on post-conflict reconciliation in Nigeria have highlighted the success of enculturated and dialogical approaches, which are grounded in the Church’s teachings on forgiveness and social justice. These initiatives have not only provided immediate humanitarian relief but have also laid the groundwork for long-term community rebuilding and national healing (Amamnsunu, 2024). In Kenya, the Catholic Church has actively engaged in preventing ethnic conflicts and building bridges among pastoralist communities, which are often affected by resource scarcity and migration pressures. Church leaders have harnessed pastoral letters and ecumenical collaboration to advocate for justice and reform, denouncing corruption and calling for inclusive governance. For instance, in 1992, a pastoral letter titled “A Call for Justice, Love, and Peace” was seen as a turning point in challenging President Moi’s authoritarian regime (Njue, 2020). Pastoralist communities in Kenya, constitute a significant portion of the population but face persistent challenges related to resource scarcity and migration (Nyariki & Amwata, 2019). These migration patterns—often influenced by factors such as cattle rustling and dwindling resources—have been linked to ongoing conflicts in the region (Okumu, 2020). This study investigates the role of the Catholic Church in mitigating such conflicts and promoting sustainable peace among warring communities.

2. Material and Methods

The framework given in the conceptual framework illustrates how these activities interact with the dependent variable—sustainable peacebuilding—highlighting a reciprocal relationship. As the Catholic Church fosters a culture of peace through its initiatives, the community is empowered to build cohesion and support long-term conflict transformation.

2.1. Conceptual Framework



2.2. Research design and location of the study

This study employed a mixed-method design, which involved both quantitative and qualitative research designs. This research design aimed to systematically gather data to provide a detailed description of a phenomenon, situation, or population. It helped to answer the what, when, where, and how questions. The study was carried out in Lolgorian Parish, in the Catholic Diocese of Ngong, Narok County, which is situated in the southwestern part of Kenya. It is a region characterised by diverse ethnic communities and known for its pastoralist livelihoods and agricultural activities. The people of Lolgorian consist of various ethnic groups, including the Maasai, Kipsigis, Kisii, Kuria, Luo, Kikuyu, and Luhya, among others. These communities contribute to the cultural diversity and vibrant traditions of the region. Lolgorian is an important economic hub within Narok County and the country at large for its tourist attractions, with economic activities centred on agriculture, livestock rearing, mining, and trade.

2.3. Research instrument

A questionnaire and an interview guide were used for this study. The questionnaire used in this study was a combination of open-ended and Likert scale questions. The questionnaires were issued to the members of the Maasai community to respond to the set of questions. In this study, a key informant guide was used to collect data from the Catholic Church Bishop, Peace service personnel and Caritas leaders. The information provided by these key informants acted as a key source of data to complement the data collected from the questionnaires.

2.4. Validity and reliability

In this study, construct validity was established by aligning performance indicators with the study variables and relevant intervening factors, and by employing validated tools grounded in robust theoretical frameworks. Content validity, which assesses how well a questionnaire represents the whole domain of the research indicators, was ensured through expert appraisal (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013). Construct validity was tested during a pilot study to confirm that the instruments accurately measured the theoretical constructs of interest (Polit & Beck, 2021). In order to achieve internal consistency and reliability in the questionnaire and interview guide in the study, the researcher ensured that the questions or items were clear, unambiguous, and consistently framed. Secondly, a consistent and well-defined theoretical framework that aligns with the research objectives was used. A pilot test was conducted to gather feedback from a small group of participants to assess the clarity and comprehensibility of questions and items, making necessary revisions.

2.5. Target population, sample size and sample technique

In this study, the target population included Maasai residents of Lolgorian Parish, personnel from a Peace Service personnel, Caritas leaders, and the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ngong. A mixed-methods approach was employed, and the Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size. The final sample comprised 114 Lolgorian residents, 1 peace service staff member, 2 Caritas personnel, and 1 diocesan bishop, totaling 118 participants. The study targeted Maasai-speaking parishioners of Lolgorian irrespective of age or religious affiliation. This study adopted both purposive and stratified random sampling methods. The researcher used stratified random sampling, where the Lolgorian parish population was divided into strata (according to the different administrative wards that Lolgorian Parish covers). Thereafter, the researcher utilised purposive sampling to identify a group of 100 Maasai-speaking respondents. By purposefully selecting these participants, the researcher aimed to enrich the data with a deeper understanding of the perspectives, customs, and values unique to the Maasai, adding a valuable cultural dimension to the research findings. In employing purposive sampling, the researcher selected key informants who have knowledge, roles, or experience directly relevant to the themes of conflict resolution and peace-building.

Table 1 Sampling Frame and Size

Category	Ward Population	Sampling Technique	Sample Size
Lolgorian	43,302	Stratified Sampling	44
Kimintet	31,202	Stratified Sampling	32
Angata Barrikor	37,647	Stratified Sampling	38
Catholic Church Bishop	1	purposive	1
Peace Civil Service personnel	1	Purposively	1
Caritas	2	Purposively	1
Total	4		117

Source (Author, 2024)

2.6. Data analysis

The study employed descriptive analysis to examine the collected data. This technique involves the systematic and statistical evaluation of data to identify patterns, relationships, and trends. Both numerical and non-numerical data were considered. Quantitative data collected through surveys or experiments were analysed using statistical methods, while qualitative data from interviews or observations were interpreted through coding, thematic, and content analysis. After data collection, responses were checked for completeness and accuracy, then summarised, coded, and entered into SPSS version 26.0 for analysis. Coding included assigning unique identifiers to protect participants' identities, with anonymisation techniques ensuring confidentiality. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean responses were used to explore relationships between variables, and results were presented in tables alongside qualitative insights.

3. Results

3.1. Response rate and Cronbach alpha test

The researcher administered 114 questionnaires to respondents across the three wards of Lolgorian Parish, within the Catholic Diocese of Ngong, Kenya. Additionally, four key informants—one from Peace Service, two Caritas staff members, and the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ngong—were interviewed to supplement the data. Of the distributed questionnaires, 100 were completed and returned, while 14 were not filled out. These non-responses, which came from various wards, were accepted without issue, as participation had been clearly stated as voluntary at the outset. The response rate is presented in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 2 Interview Response Rate

Category	Sample Size	Response Rate (Frequency)	Response Rate (%)
Catholic Church Bishop	1	1	100
Peace Civil Service Group	1	1	100
Caritas	2	1	50
Total	4	3	75

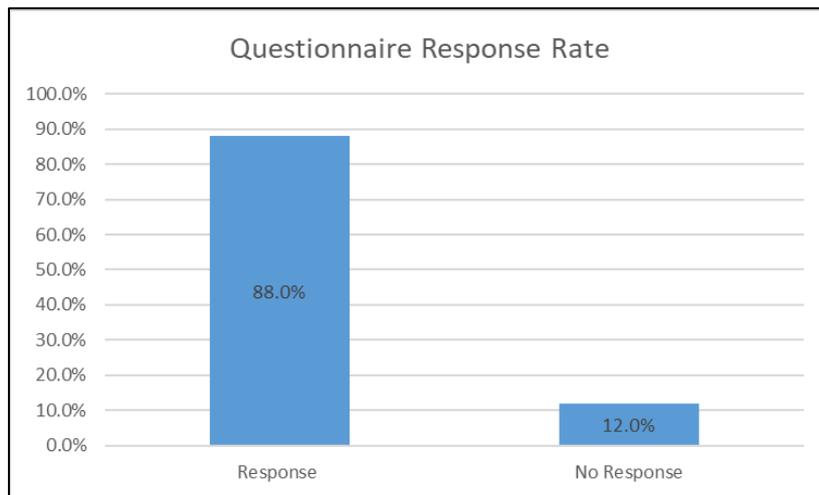


Figure 1 Questionnaire Response Rate

3.2. Demographic characteristics of the participants

The respondents were asked to indicate their gender and responded as shown in Figure 2.

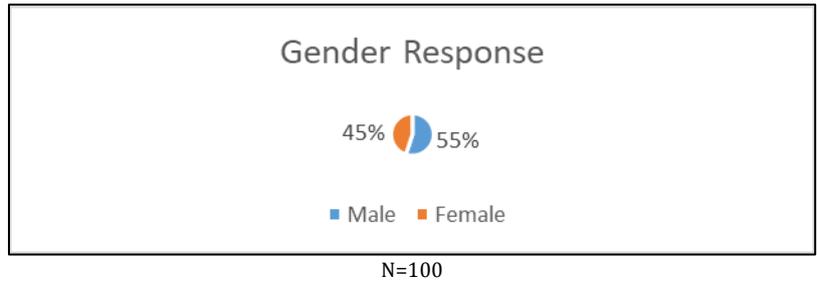


Figure 2 Gender Response

Data collected showed a fairly balanced gender representation among the participants, with males accounting for 55% (55 respondents) and females making up 45% (45 respondents) of the total sample. The even distribution of gender provided diverse perspectives, which was essential for ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject being investigated. The equal participation helped strengthen the validity of the findings by reflecting input from both male and female respondents.

3.3. Age of the Respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their age, which was categorized into 5 groups for easy classification of the responses as shown in Figure 3.

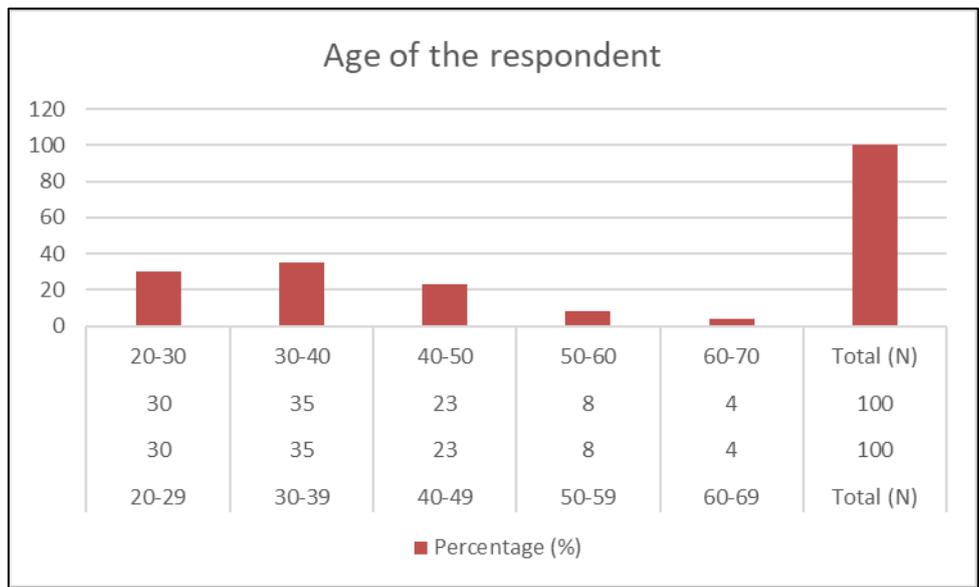


Figure 3 Age of Respondents

The majority of respondents were in the 30-39 age range, representing 35.0% of the total sample, followed by those aged 20-29, who made up 30.0%. The 40-49 age group accounted for 23.0%, while the 50-59 age group comprised 8.0%. The smallest group was those aged 60-69, contributing 4.0% to the total. The table indicated a relatively young to middle-aged respondent population, with a total of 100 respondents, reflecting a balanced sample across these age categories.

3.4. Role of Pastoral Activities

The study sought to establish the perception of the Maasai community on the effect of Catholic pastoral activities on conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Maasai community. The scale was 1-5, where 5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3 =moderate, 2= disagree, 1= strongly disagree. The researcher calculated the percentage response for each question for straightforward interpretation. The responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Role of Pastoral Activities

Statements	S. Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Moderate (%)	Agree (%)	S. Agree (%)
Catholic Church leaders have facilitated peaceful talks between warring groups within the Lolgorian region over time.	5.0	11.0	14.0	32.0	38.0
Due to interaction with the local community, the Catholic Church leaders have a better understanding of the causes of conflicts and possible solutions.	6.0	10.0	16.0	42.0	26.0
Catholic Church leaders have worked with other community leaders to promote peace initiatives.	4.0	30.0	12.0	16.0	38.0
The formation of small Christian communities has helped the Catholic Church leaders in preaching peace and harmony in the community.	0.0	7.0	12.0	43.0	38.0
Through church Sermons, the Catholic Church leaders have created awareness on the need for peaceful coexistence among the residents of Lolgorian.	1.0	3.0	34.0	32.0	30.0
There is a positive relationship between pastoral activities and sustainable peace resolution among Lolgorian parishioners.	2.0	15.0	22.0	21.0	40.0

The analysis is based on quantitative data summarised in Table 3, which used a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Percentages of responses per statement were calculated to allow for more straightforward interpretation of community sentiment. The analysis also explores patterns, notable deviations, and thematic relationships while interpreting the implications of the findings in the context of existing knowledge and theoretical frameworks.

A clear pattern that emerged from the data was the general agreement on the positive role of pastoral activities in peacebuilding. For instance, 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Catholic Church leaders have facilitated peaceful talks between warring groups in the Lolgorian region. This high level of affirmation suggests that the Church is widely recognised as a central actor in mediating conflicts. It also indicates that the Church's efforts are visible and appreciated by the community. However, about 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed, pointing to a minority that may either be unaware of these efforts or unconvinced of their effectiveness. This discrepancy highlights a potential gap in either communication or reach of such initiatives, which aligns with findings in related studies that emphasise the importance of participatory approaches in peacebuilding (Galtung, 1996).

Another notable trend was observed in the Church's understanding of conflict causes. About 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Catholic Church leaders possess insight into the root causes of conflict and viable solutions due to their interaction with the community. This reflects the embeddedness of pastoral figures in community life, a concept well supported in peace and conflict literature where community-based actors are seen as effective due to their contextual knowledge (Lederach, 1997). The relatively low percentage of disagreement (16%) suggests that most community members trust the Church's understanding of their social dynamics.

While overall sentiment toward the Church's involvement in peacebuilding was positive, some statements drew mixed responses, revealing divergent opinions. For instance, regarding collaboration with other community leaders, 54% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, but a substantial 30% disagreed. This relatively high rate of disagreement signals a potential disconnect or unfulfilled expectations concerning how visibly or effectively the Church partners with other leadership structures in the region. It could imply either a lack of transparency, communication, or inclusive approaches that bring together all relevant stakeholders. This highlights an area for improvement—namely, building broader coalitions for peace by integrating traditional leaders, youth representatives, and women's groups in peacebuilding strategies.

Another area with a wide spread of responses was the impact of church sermons. Although 62% of respondents acknowledged that sermons had raised awareness on peaceful coexistence, a substantial 34% were neutral. This neutrality may suggest variability in how the messages are delivered, interpreted, or retained across different demographics. Factors such as literacy levels, language barriers, or sermon content relevance could contribute to these mixed responses. This is consistent with literature that emphasises the importance of culturally resonant messaging in religious peacebuilding (Appleby, 2000).

Among all the statements, the formation of small Christian communities received the most positive feedback, with 81% agreement and zero respondents indicating strong disagreement. This suggests that decentralised, grassroots religious groups are particularly effective in fostering peace. These findings resonate with the theory of bottom-up peacebuilding, where micro-level structures are seen as more adaptive and responsive to local needs (Richmond, 2007). The small Christian communities likely serve not only spiritual purposes but also create safe spaces for dialogue, mutual support, and local conflict resolution—functions that are critical in communal societies such as the Maasai.

When asked about the broader link between pastoral activities and sustainable peace, 61% of respondents affirmed a positive relationship, while 17% disagreed. This suggests that although a majority acknowledge the role of religious leaders in promoting peace, a significant minority remain sceptical about the long-term, tangible outcomes of such interventions, particularly in addressing structural drivers of conflict like land disputes and resource allocation common in pastoralist settings.

However, the data must be interpreted with caution due to several limitations. First, social desirability bias may have influenced responses, as participants might have felt inclined to endorse the Church's role given its moral authority in the community. Second, high levels of neutrality in some items (e.g., 34% for sermon impact) suggest possible ambiguity or disengagement, which complicates interpretive clarity. Lastly, given the study's localisation to Lolgorian, the findings cannot be generalised to the wider Maasai population without broader comparative research. These limitations reflect common concerns in survey research within community contexts, particularly around respondent subjectivity and contextual specificity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The results align well with existing scholarship on the role of faith-based organisations in conflict resolution. Appleby (2000) highlights the "ambivalence of the sacred," where religious actors can either exacerbate or mitigate conflict. In the case of Lolgorian, the findings suggest that the Catholic Church has played a predominantly constructive role. The results also support the framework by Lederach (1997), who argues that religious leaders, because of their trust and rootedness in communities, are essential in building peace from the ground up.

Moreover, studies in other African contexts (e.g., Nigeria, Uganda) have shown that religious institutions, particularly Christian churches, often fill governance gaps by providing platforms for civic engagement, moral education, and conflict mediation—functions mirrored in the data from Lolgorian. However, the relatively mixed perceptions on collaboration and sermon impact point to the need for continuous engagement and adaptation of methods to suit changing community dynamics.

The data underscore the Catholic Church's central role in peacebuilding within the Lolgorian Maasai community. The positive community perception of pastoral activities, particularly those tied to small Christian communities and direct mediation, demonstrates the Church's potential as both a spiritual and social actor. However, areas such as collaboration with broader community leadership and the effectiveness of public sermons warrant further attention. By strengthening inclusive partnerships and tailoring messages to diverse audiences, the Church can enhance its already significant contributions to sustainable peace. These findings offer both affirmation and direction for religious peacebuilders in pastoralist settings, and they reinforce the importance of integrating faith-based approaches with broader community-led initiatives.

On the causes of the Maasai conflict, the three key informants agreed that:

The conflicts in the Maasai community primarily stem from competition for resources such as land and water, which are becoming increasingly scarce due to environmental changes and population pressures. There are also deep-seated tribal tensions and historical grievances that fuel these conflicts." In addition, political manipulation and external influences further complicate the situation, making it challenging to address and resolve these issues effectively.

In response to the question on whether sermons and pulpit messages by the Catholic priests serve as adequate tool in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Maasai community in Lolgorian Parish, the responses were as follows:

First the Bishop emphasised:

Sermons and pulpit messages are a vital component of our peacebuilding efforts. They provide a powerful platform to communicate the principles of peace, love, and forgiveness directly to the community. Through these messages, we can address ongoing conflicts, encourage reconciliation, and remind the faithful of their role in fostering peace. However, I believe that for these messages to be truly effective, they must be supported by action. We ensure that the teachings from the pulpit are reinforced through our on-the-ground activities, such as mediation efforts and community dialogues, which help to put our words into practice.

Second, Caritas Representative agreed with the Bishop but added:

While sermons are indeed impactful, their effectiveness is amplified when they are part of a broader strategy that includes practical initiatives. We see the pulpit messages as a starting point, a place where ideas and values are introduced, but it's through our work in the community—whether it's through educational programs, workshops, or direct mediation—that these ideas take root and lead to real change. So, while sermons are crucial, they need to be complemented by sustained community engagement.

Third, Peace Service personnel noted:

Sermons play a significant role in setting the tone for peacebuilding within the community. They can inspire and motivate people to pursue peace. However, I believe that their true strength lies in how they are linked with the Church's other peacebuilding efforts. When the messages from the pulpit are directly tied to the Church's actions, such as conflict resolution workshops or peace initiatives, they become much more effective. It is the combination of preaching and practical engagement that truly drives change in the community.

4. Discussion

4.1. Role of Pastoral Activities

The Lolgorian community widely recognises the Catholic Church's significant role in fostering peace and resolving conflicts, with 70% of respondents acknowledging the Church's success in facilitating peace talks. About 68% believe the Church understands the root causes of conflicts. Collaboration with other leaders was viewed positively by 54%, though 30% expressed concerns about its effectiveness. Notably, 81% endorsed the effectiveness of small Christian communities in peacebuilding. Church sermons were seen as influential by 62% of respondents, while 61% connected pastoral activities with sustainable peace.

Despite these positive perceptions, some respondents raised concerns about certain limitations of the Church's pastoral role. A minority of community members felt that sermons and religious gatherings sometimes emphasised spiritual reconciliation at the expense of addressing practical, systemic issues fueling conflict, such as land disputes or political marginalisation. Furthermore, there were claims that pastoral interventions occasionally lacked neutrality, especially when clergy were perceived to favour specific ethnic or political groups. This perception may have weakened trust in the Church's ability to serve as an impartial mediator.

5. Conclusion

The Catholic Church has a central role in peacebuilding within the Lolgorian Maasai community. The positive community perception of pastoral activities, particularly those tied to small Christian communities and direct mediation, demonstrates the Church's potential as both a spiritual and social actor. Thus, through collaboration with broader community leadership and the effectiveness of public sermons will be a platform for peacebuilding for the church within these community. By strengthening inclusive partnerships and tailoring messages to diverse audiences, the Church will continue to enhance its already significant contributions to sustainable peace. The Catholic Church therefore in building strong religious peacebuilders in pastoralist settings, and they reinforce the importance of integrating faith-based approaches with broader community-led initiatives will be able to preserve and attain a sustainable peace within the Maasai community in Lolgorian.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of ethical approval

The current study was conducted following some ethical principles, including autonomy, confidentiality, anonymity, and the protection of vulnerable groups. The participants were not coerced or forced to take part in this study. The consent was stated by a consent form, which they signed before data collection to preserve their autonomy. The do no harm principle was observed to ensure that the study has no physical, emotional or psychological repercussions. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were not allowed to indicate their name on the questionnaire, they were coded. Authorizations were obtained by the researcher not only from Tangaza University but also a research certificate from National Commission for Science, Technology and innovation in Kenya (NACOSTI). These authorizations ensured the participants that the study is only for an academic purpose. Before allowing individuals to take part in the study, the researcher got their consent. The confidentiality of their answers was also guaranteed by the study.

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