



RADIO FOR PEACE IN KENYA

AN ISLAMIC RELIEF CASE STUDY



THE CONTEXT IN MANDERA COUNTY

Mandera County, in the northeast corner of Kenya, is a very insecure place that shares a long, porous border with Somalia and Ethiopia. Most people living in Mandera County are ethnic Somali and belong to one of five clans: the Garre, Murulle, Degodia, Marehan and 'Corner Tribes' (a grouping of smaller clans). There is also a small population of Kenyans who are not ethnic Somali living in the area, usually called 'non-locals'. Most of these people have either been posted to the area to work as government workers, doctors, nurses or teachers, or have migrated to work another trade.

Inter-clan conflict is a recurrent problem in Mandera County and surrounding border areas as clans compete for pasture, water and elections. Competition over water and pasture has intensified due to climate change, while governance of clan grazing areas still uses colonial-era grazing laws, which are themselves a source of contestation. Elections can also be a source of conflict. Devolution of governance in Kenya has intensified competition in elections because winning political power is perceived to guarantee access to economic resources to 'winning' clans, to the detriment of 'losing' clans (NCIC and Interpeace, 2017).

Armed groups based in Somalia, such as Al-Shabaab, also pose a very serious security threat to the residents of Mandera County. The Kenyan military's interventions in Somalia has led to a violent backlash by Al-Shabaab against anyone perceived to be linked to the Kenyan government in Mandera, such as non-local teachers, doctors and government workers. As a result, many qualified non-locals have fled the area, leading to a decline in education, health care, social services and business investment.

Development indicators are now extremely poor in Mandera County. Only 24% of women and 62% of men aged 15-49 are literate (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The last time maternal mortality was surveyed in 2014, 3,795 women died for every 100,000 live births, making it the most dangerous place in the world to give birth (Stewart, 2015). Only 36% of births take place in a health facility (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014), but even travelling to a centre to give birth is fraught with danger. In December 2020, Al-Shabaab attacked an ambulance taking a woman in labour to El Wak hospital and the husband of the woman was killed (Wasike, 2020).

In the midst of this insecurity, uncertainty and fear, people need reliable information about security



A mother listening to the radio in Mandera County, Kenya
[Photo: Islamic Relief, 2021]



issues, escalating disputes, elections, pastoral movements, flood or drought warnings and other issues that may cause an escalation of conflict in the area. They also need advice from trusted sources about how to respond or protect themselves and their families during crisis and conflict.

RADIO FOR PEACE PROGRAMMING AROUND THE WORLD

Radio messaging has long been used by politicians and conflict actors around the world as a tool for propaganda and a means to incite violence. For example, local radio station RTLM was famously used to incite violence against Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, sparking genocide. Kenyan local radio stations were also accused of spreading messages of hate and inciting inter-ethnic violence during the 2007/8 elections (Somerville, 2011).

Radio programming can also be used to promote peace. United Nations (UN) agencies, churches, NGOs and donors have all funded radio stations to support peacebuilding. For example, Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mega FM in Uganda, Mikado FM in Mali and Radio YNP (Youth

Network for Peace) in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In northeast Kenya, Star FM, Kenya's oldest Somali-language broadcaster, has worked with USAID to promote peace, while Wajir Community Radio has worked with NGOs to give reliable information about weather events (floods and droughts) and ways to mitigate the effects of climate change to prevent conflict over shrinking resources. The UN and NGOs have also worked to professionalise radio journalism as a way of improving conflict-sensitive reporting and broadcasting and preventing radio programmes from being exploited by conflict actors.

Media can play many roles in the prevention and management of conflict including challenging prejudices and stereotypes, transforming attitudes, educating, confidence building, promoting reconciliation, giving voice to marginalised groups and framing or explaining conflict.

LISTENING TO THE RADIO REMAINS POPULAR IN KENYA

Radio is the most popular form of mass media in Kenya and especially in Manderla County, according to the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey.

Since listening to the radio does not require literacy (as reading a newspaper does), electricity or high expenditure (as owning a TV does) it is extremely popular. In Mandera County, 30% of women and 54% of men listen to the radio at least once a week (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Since this 2014 survey, however, social media use through mobile phones has greatly expanded and the spread of misinformation and incitement of violence through platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram and Instagram is now thought to be a significant exacerbating factor in conflict (NCIC and Interpeace, 2017). That said, social media is also a potential platform for peace.

BROADCASTING PEACE IN MANDERA COUNTY

Islamic Relief, through its Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding programme, has been supporting women and youth to lead community peacebuilding in Mandera County since 2018. Radio broadcasting has formed a key part of community outreach and mobilisation.

Radio talk show programmes are organised monthly to discuss emerging tensions involving elections, pastoral movements, drought or floods, COVID-19, climate change and natural resource management. They are also organised rapidly in emergency situations, such as when a violent inter-clan conflict erupts.

Speakers include subject matter experts (such as officials from the National Meteorological Department, Mandera County Cohesion Department or the National Drought Management Authority), women and youth group representatives, clan leaders and faith leaders. Each talk show lasts for 45-60 minutes and all of the main local languages spoken are represented (Somali, Oromifa, Kiswahili). Some shows are pre-recorded while others are live, allowing listeners to call in and ask questions or offer their opinion.

Women and youth speakers are an important feature of the radio talk shows because their perspectives are too often marginalised in the patriarchal culture of Somali society.

THEORY OF CHANGE

- Peace will come through transformative attitudinal and behavioural change of a mass of individuals, particularly women and youth, and key institutional partners.
- Peace will emerge through the breaking down of isolation, polarisation, division, prejudice and stereotypes within and amongst groups.
- If we mobilise enough support for peaceful resolution of disputes and for promotion of tolerance, then political leaders will listen and take action.
- If formal and informal institutions within government, civil society and the private sector perform in an effective and responsive way providing reasonable livelihoods, stability and quality of life then the extent of core grievances and conflict would decline.



ABDI WELI (26 YEARS OLD – A YOUTH PEACE COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE)

We youth play a key role in community peace. Peace work is now more our role than the elders' role, as it used to be, however, we still have a long way to go to convince our leaders and elders about our role in peace activities. I come from El Wak and I am now in Mandera town for the Garre-Murule inter clan conflict resolution dialogue, representing youths from El Wak sub-county.

The radio program is critically important in our county. Our people are pastoralists and have little access to news updates using TV and other media, so the only way they can be reached is through radio programs. Nowadays people have cell phones and these are used [to listen to the radio].

The youth air their message using their own language. When my fellow youth talk over the radio, I would prefer to listen to what a youth like me is saying rather than our elders. This is because young people can easily be convinced by their peers.

LOCAL MUSLIM FAITH LEADERS' GUIDANCE FOR PEACE AND SOCIAL COHESION

“Lack of rain water is causing limited water availability, which is causing conflict. So people are moving towards the water source and that is causing further conflict.” – Quote from an Islamic scholar on an Islamic Relief radio broadcast in Mandera County.

The most influential radio speakers are people who are highly respected and trusted by the community. Traditional leaders and faith leaders have historically played an important role in mediating and arbitrating inter-clan conflicts in the Kenya-Ethiopia-Somalia border triangle. Faith leaders in particular are widely trusted because of their perceived impartiality, moral integrity and legitimacy.

Local Muslim faith leaders (Imams and madrassa teachers) in Mandera County are very influential advocates for peace among Somali Muslims, but they have not always been very proactive at preventing conflict and they have not been very adept at using the media to get their messages out to a wide audience. Islamic Relief has helped them to broadcast messages of peace from an Islamic faith perspective to a much wider audience through the radio.

“We have to look after the land, so that we can reduce conflict, so that there is more grazing land available as God intended.” – Quote from an Islamic scholar on an Islamic Relief radio broadcast in Mandera County.



WATCH THIS VIDEO of an Islamic scholar and madrassa teacher on a radio programme in Mandera County in 2020 explaining what the Qur'an says about peace. [Click here to watch.](#)

SUPPORTING CUSTOMARY CLAN LEADERS TO MANAGE COMMUNITY TENSIONS

In Kenya, tribal or clan leaders continue to play a very important role in governance of their members. Ethnic Somali clans have traditional systems of managing pastoral movements and scarce resources, and disputes within or between them are very often resolved by traditional justice systems. Islamic

Relief recognises the importance of traditional clan governance alongside the formal Kenyan governance system and works with both sets of governance actors to improve conflict prevention and management. Providing a platform for customary clan leaders to address the local population through the radio has helped to minimise misunderstandings between clans and calm tensions that might otherwise have escalated into violence.

MOHAMED ABDI (A COMMUNITY ELDER)

As a community affected by chronic insecurity, some of our sub-counties are not accessible and as a community traditional leader we are required to talk, educate, inform and alert our community to issues affecting our livelihoods. We must reach them by any safe means that minimises risks.

The talk show introduced by Islamic Relief's peacebuilding project has really helped us. We managed to air our voice through the local FM radio and this created awareness on many issues. Periodically there are resource-based conflicts that result in tension and conflict in our pastoral community. Through the radio program we were able to message peace to our community and this has really changed many individuals' attitudes.

Our community is informal and they love to listen to radio programs, so this has really improved peace in our county.

I received information from some community members saying *"We heard your voice on the radio and we cascaded the same peaceful information to other members at the grassroots level"*.

I have used the same platform to reach out to youth and women to spearhead peaceful community engagement because they are the most vulnerable and susceptible to conflicts.

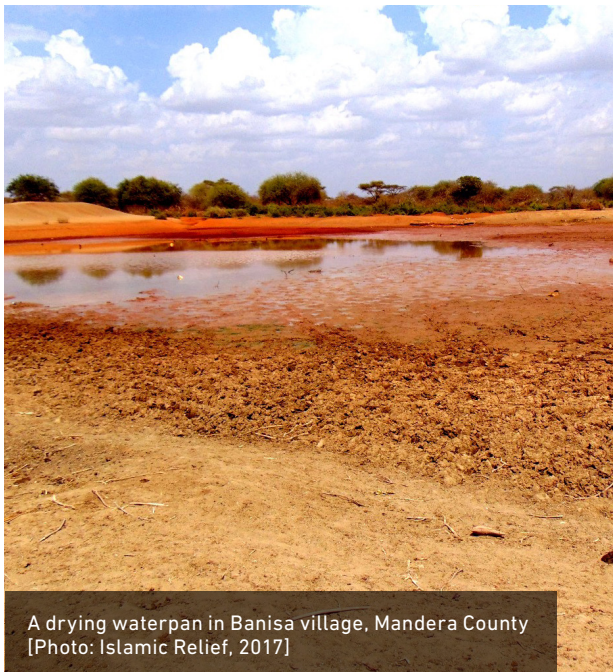
Thanks to Allah, we have achieved relative peace through Islamic Relief's support to the radio talk show.



EDUCATING COMMUNITIES ON CLIMATE ADAPTATION METHODS TO PREVENT CONFLICT

Mandera County is an arid region of Kenya where climate change is already producing much more frequent extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods. Water, arable land and pasture are all shrinking resources, which together with the increasing enclosure of land, population increase and deforestation for charcoal production, are putting extreme pressure on pastoral communities. Land loss and competition for control of water points, pasture and arable land, combined with a flood of light weapons from Somalia's civil war, unfortunately tip these pressures over into violence.

Addressing violence and insecurity in this area inevitably means supporting communities to adapt to the effects of climate change. Some communities have already been permanently displaced as the land they used to live on can no longer support life. Others are having to abandon pastoralism as a way of life and shift to alternative livelihoods. Islamic Relief's radio talk show programme educates communities on climate mitigation measures and works closely with local faith leaders and women's groups to raise awareness of climate change, local adaptation and the links to conflict.



A drying waterpan in Banisa village, Mandera County
[Photo: Islamic Relief, 2017]



LADAN HUSSEIN (AGED 28)

I am a mother and youth living in Mandera town. I own 30 shoats (sheep and goats) in my compound and listen to radio every day.

Listening to Islamic Relief's radio talk show on peace helped me understand more about what is happening in our surroundings. For example, my parents are pastoralist like me and during dry periods they move out of their village to look for alternative pasture and water. Resources are scarce and many times I hear they have problems with their neighbouring pastoral groups. I know that for decades drought in our county has been affecting the pastoralists. I know my father and mother both use cell phones and tune in to the local radio stations. I listen to news and other important updates.

Last month I was listening to Dawa FM where experts on climate change were educating the community on the impact of climate and mitigation measures. This message was reaching hundreds of people and it helps. Compared to ten years ago when we had little information, nowadays we understand our environment. Radio is an important platform for passing important information. Thanks to those involved in the programme.

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