

Project profile:

Amplifying community voices for sustainable peace in Kenya

Introduction

In September 2019, Saferworld began working with four partners to reduce violence and conflict in five counties in Kenya. This two-year project aims to create safe spaces where people from different communities, ethnic minorities and commonly excluded groups can come together to build resilient relationships and engage in conversations on key issues that drive conflict.

Background

The 2017 general elections in Kenya were hotly contested, leading to tensions, protests, excessive police responses and loss of life in some parts of the country. The elections confirmed the persistence of deep-seated divisions in Kenya and tested the independence of institutions involved in the electoral process, particularly the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, the National Police Service and the judiciary. The country witnessed a period of polarisation along political and ethnic lines, until the president and the leader of the opposition agreed to a truce in March 2018 that restored a sense of calm. While this truce (dubbed ‘the handshake’) ended the post-election chaos, it immediately generated new cracks in the ruling party, culminating in pro- and anti-‘handshake’ factions and a resulting flurry of political activities that pushed the country once again into ‘electioneering’ mode – two years before the next general elections in 2022. These political divisions, coupled with other unresolved governance challenges such as weak institutions, corruption, exclusion and high rates of youth unemployment, are likely to polarise the country as well as create hostilities between and among single/mixed identity groups – such as ethnic, political and religious groups – that have coexisted peacefully in the past.

Project approach

With our four partners, Saferworld will bring people from different political affiliations and ethnic groups together to **interact constructively in safe spaces**. The project will work with these groups to break down barriers, increase appreciation of each other, build mutual trust and forge resilient relationships for sustainable peace. The project builds on the understanding that while people of different ethnic groups, political party affiliations, age, gender and other identities live together and have contact through day-to-day activities, they still have limited opportunities to discuss and hold dialogue around issues of concern, which are magnified around election periods and which could potentially lead to violence.



Project location

Bungoma, Kiambu, Kisumu, Nairobi and Uasin Gishu counties

Donors/project budget

United States Agency for International Development (USAID): USD\$1,269,000.00

Project duration

Two years (September 2019 to September 2021)

Partners

Life & Peace Institute, Universities and Colleges Students' Peace Association of Kenya (UCSPAK), Pamoja for Transformation, Catholic Diocese of Eldoret

Anticipated results

1. Safe spaces and mechanisms are created for peaceful community interaction across existing intra- and inter-group fractures.
2. Local communities, ethnic minorities and commonly excluded groups such as women and youth are constructively engaged in county and national conversations on key issues that drive conflict.

Project approach

Project aim: Violence and conflict is reduced among single/mixed identity groups in Bungoma, Kiambu, Kisumu, Nairobi and Uasin Gishu counties in Kenya.

Project outcome: Individuals and groups across ethnic, gender, age and political divides in five counties develop cohesive and resilient relationships that promote mechanisms to resolve conflict peacefully, and collectively engage in county and national dialogue processes.

Activities

■ Facilitate dialogue between and within selected conflicting and adversarial communities and groups.

The project will support 75 dialogue sessions between single and multiple identity groups at the community and county levels, to consolidate key conflict drivers, develop recommendations for conflict resolution, and engage in relevant county and national conversations to promote social cohesion for sustainable peace in the country.

These dialogues will have three levels: **community-level dialogues** involving communities with histories of ethnic and political divisions; **youth-specific dialogue** in which young people will be supported to develop a shared vision, with a focus on increased engagement in governance processes, including devolution, and peace and security structures; and **selected inter-county dialogue**, which will bring representatives from the target counties together for candid discussions on enhancing cohesion by demystifying existing stereotypes and myths around social interaction, politics and leadership that exist between communities in these counties.

■ **Identify and train local mediators so that they can effectively respond to localised conflicts.** There will be two training sessions targeting 75 local mediators identified through a conflict assessment and community dialogue activities. The project will also facilitate interaction between the mediators and key structures at the county level, including County Directorates for Peace Cohesion (where they exist), local peace committees and inter-religious peace forums, with a view to developing effective and sustainable responses to local conflict.

■ **Strengthen the advocacy capacity of community representatives to engage at county and national levels.** In the first year, the programme will support one training session in each of the five counties targeting 20 representatives, who will be identified in the community dialogues based on their ability to articulate, synthesise and collate community issues. These representatives will develop a common understanding of community issues identified in the intra- and inter-county dialogue, and equipped with advocacy and community skills for engagement with authorities at county and national levels.

■ **Support conversations between communities and local authorities on peace, security and development priorities identified during the community dialogues.** There will be 35 town hall meetings targeting representatives from different community groups, county and national governments, and gender and other minority groups across the five counties. The meetings will give communities the opportunity to communicate their peace, security and development needs with local authorities and receive feedback on possible government interventions to resolve these concerns. The town hall meetings will also facilitate discussions on issues such as real or perceived concerns that certain communities are being marginalised in the development process, as well as addressing grievances relating to devolution.

■ **Support the participation of communities, civil society organisations and religious leaders in ongoing national dialogue processes.** The project will support two national-level conversations that will bring together 100 interlocutors to discuss specific issues of national interest. Ten representatives will be drawn from each county – particularly those trained in advocacy – and will include civil society, youth and women. The conversations will also target national-level peace and cohesion stakeholders, such as the Uwiano Platform for Peace, the Dialogue Contact Group, the Dialogue Reference Group, the Inter-Party Youth Forum and the Peace Actors Forum. By sharing the issues raised during these national conversations with relevant government actors, the meetings will create a shared consciousness on desired changes or reforms, reawaken a need to pursue the reform agenda, and contribute to reconciliation processes led by the national government.

Partners



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Photo: Participants deliberate on issues that affect their communities during elections. © Saferworld

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