

## **Impact of Sabaot Land Defence Force Conflict (2006-2008) on the Roman Catholic Church in Cheptais, Mount Elgon Region, Bungoma County.**

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**Abstract:** In the society, the Church has been seen as one of the crucial uniting institutions. An example is that of National Council of Churches of Kenya (henceforth NCCCK) and the Roman Catholic Church (henceforth RCC), that are renowned for remarkable peace building critical contributions. Additionally, the Ecclesia has been seen to embrace people indiscriminately from various backgrounds for the good of the humankind family. Conflict is viewed to be a major threat to Church unity as well as to the welfare of the families in contemporary Kenya and the world at large. Such a background triggers curiosity to understand the striking problems the Church as the Family of God faces in concrete human existence as a result of the crookedness arising from the above scenario. The current study, therefore, investigates the problems the RCC in Cheptais is faced with and still encounters during and after the notorious Sabaot Land Defence Force (henceforth SLDF) conflict (2006-2008) in Mount Elgon region, Bungoma County. The study engaged qualitative research and used the case study design to collect related secondary data from documented sources and also employed the use of questionnaires and interviews to obtain first-hand information from the affected community members. It spells out vital problems and impacts thereby encountered by the RCC during and after the SLDF uprising. The assumption is that there are significant difficulties that have and still do impacted heavily upon the Church owing to the SLDF conflict that is rationale enough for our academic engagement. The striving effort by the Ecclesia in her fundamental ministry of uniting different communities under whatever situations in life, in her capacity as the community of communities thanks to her Family of God model, is of great need to be complemented with our kind of academic undertaking to help improve the effort for better. The study thus proposes a couple of helpful issues that the Church, the families and the government can take into account in order to create harmony and friendlier environment for human existence and meaningful healing to the parties concerned thereby implementing Christ's principle of relating as brothers and sisters as documented in the Our Father prayer (Mt 6:7ff; Lk 11:2ff). It, moreover, uncovers various challenges of parenting, displacement and increased number of orphans that the family and the Church encounter for a more profound perspective towards a better ministering. Hence, it calls for responsible coordinated efforts by the Church, government and the society to build up an inclusive community that will unite and help them curb the arising disturbances and prevent the potential ones thereby bringing about healing, reconciliation and harmonious living.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Church/Ecclesia, Families

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

It is important for the contemporary Church to put her attention on a pluriformity of families especially those in areas affected by conflict. A good number of scholars have given striking definitions of the Church. Among them is that the Church is the community of those who have devoted themselves to the Person of Jesus Christ and who bear witness, and cultivate hope for all men and women (Kung 1995:78). The Church, therefore, forms a comprehensive community with the others thereby being their uniting factor. In addition, the Encyclicals and Exhortations like that of Synods of Bishops in Africa provide the image of the Church as "Family of God" (Ecclesia in Africa 1995:63). A clear indication shows that conflict contribute to malicious effects of such ecclesial model. The phenomenon has vividly undermined the progress of the Church in her effort to carry out fruitful evangelization and endeavor to realize the aforementioned ecclesial image. The RCC in Mount Elgon region, in particular, faces numerous challenges that have collectively post bitter economic hardships, displacements of people, mutual malicious suspicion and death among the flock. This has spearheaded tragic surroundings within the families in the region. Quite a number of families are living a

reckless life since they lost their loved ones who were breadwinners. Children also lost their parents during the conflict thus taking the initiative to head the families. The RCC as well lost its members as a good number of them were displaced as they fled for their safety while others are in yonder life. The Youth did not escape the effects of the since many of them were recruited to participate in the Sabaot Land Defence force (hence forth SLDF) conflict. A good number of them lost their lives keeping in mind that the youth are expected to be the future leaders of the Church and family uniting agents. Wholistically it is understood that the parents, youth and children who were affected by he conflict were the members of the Church in particular.

History has it that land dispute has been a problem in the region and the country at large even before colonial era. The dispute has affected the Church both directly and indirectly. The conflict in Mount Elgon region was organized and controlled by SLDF and was the most devastating in the religion. The government of Kenya is mandated to protect citizens and their property as entrenched in the Constitution of Kenya (Constitution of Kenya 2010, Art. 60 (1), (b)). It endeavored to bring sanity in the region although there was extreme harm already done to the environment and humanity. The evils caused by the conflict also affected the Church directly and indirectly. It is clearly known that the Church has been on the forefront in offering assistance to those affected, especially families under very difficult circumstances. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), for instance, advocated for peaceful co-existence and reconciliation in order to enhance harmony through mediation and pastoral support (NCCCK, 2008). The RCC particularly in Cheptais has been on the lead in promoting peace among the communities and has to a wider extent shared her reputable instructions to the people in order to inform them about the importance of maintaining peace within the family as the domestic Church and the Church at large. Such ecclesial engagement is imbued with problematic issues that merit academic scrutiny triggered by SDLF challenges and effects of conflict to the RCC especially in Cheptais Mount Elgon region thus stimulates the study to deliberately focus on investigating the challenges faced by the Church and the impact that resulted from SDLF conflict.

## **II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Church, and particularly the RCC, has been in existence in the affected area with the goal of preaching a holistic Gospel since early missionary enterprise. The mandate of the Church has been characterized by preaching the Gospel for spiritual nourishment, provision of education, building hospitals and mediation in community or family conflicts for the purpose of transforming the society into Godly communities that live in harmony and *agape* (disinterested love) . The influence of the Church as an unbiased institution and peace maker (Mt 5:9) cannot therefore be underestimated. The RCC in particular with her coherent hierarchical systems, vast presence, great scholars among the clergy cum lay people and as a structured institution was not adequately involved as SDLF conflict emerged. At the end, it became a huge responsibility for the Church to deal with the issues that emerged during and after the SLDF conflict as a result of her omission despite her Christic commission to convert community members as brothers and sisters of the same Father.

Nyamiti notes that communality, as one of the five aspects in African worldview, influences the fullness of life (Nyamiti 2005:9ff). The SLDF conflict contributed to enmity and blame in families. Thus, Cheptais RCC and other Churches had to put focus on families by ensuring there was unity, peace, reconciliation and also acting as a consoler to victims of conflict, bearing in mind that the Church is the 'Family of God' as seen in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Ecclesia in Africa 1995:63). It is needless to mention that Cheptais RCC and other Churches faced and continue to encounter existential problems .Considering that the Church is open to everyone regardless of how they contributed or participated in conflict the above accruing problems and the arising consequences provoked our study.

The conflict directly affected the community in the area in practically all aspects that united them. The Church was not left behind as it was affected heavily either directly or indirectly. Biblically, there are land interrelated hostility recorded in human existence (Gen 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8; Num 33:53). The Promised Land, named after Abrahams grandson Jacob, whose descendants are the Jewish people. They were promised a good land, flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3:8). However, the land was constantly abused by conquerors that were firm to make the land not fit to live in for the Jews. It led to conflicts with dare consequences on the losing parties. It is noticeably asserted in the Bible that the land was God's promise to the Israelites. The task of the Church has been seen to be on the forefront to ensure that harmony prevails in areas that experienced conflict. In the case of Mount Elgon region, the Church and families are totally encouraged by the lessons learnt from the beatitudes: "Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Mt 5:9). With that in mind, the Church is seen as a body that has to be involved in peacemaking in the society. Nevertheless, owing to the overwhelming scenario in the above conflict, it is of immense importance to dig deep into the consequences of the occurrence to the RCC in view of recommending our humble way forward.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wachege discusses overwhelmingly different categories of single mothers without the exclusion of single fathers. He precisely focuses on the causes of their status and the challenges attached to each type of single motherhood (Wachege 2003:130ff). However, he does not converse the single mothers as a result of conflict. The study opts to focus on parenting challenges as a result of SLDF conflict in Mount Elgon region. Other scholars have discussed on the issues of land violence in Kenya which have existed since the colonial era. It is clearly understood that causes of land violence affects the foundation of society and the monetary growth of the country (Getui 2003:57ff). Nevertheless, a shortcoming is identified where the author does not mention land disputes in a particular place and how it affects the Church. The study therefore sought to investigate the challenges encountered by the Church during the SLDF conflict that took place (2006 -2008) in Mount Elgon region.

The models of the Ecclesia, outlines the Church image as, “Church as the Sacrament,” “Church as an Institution,” “Church as Herald,” “Church as Mystical Communion,” and “Church as Servant.” (Dulles1987:34-102). Dulles’ work which is fundamental in the study, does not mention the model of the Church as the “Family of God.” In relation to that, the Synods of African Bishop recognize the interdependence of the Church images cited by Dulles. The Synod, therefore, identifies the Church as the “Family of God” (Ecclesia in Africa1995:47) building on the aforementioned types. It points at the element of affection in humanity bond, union, dialogue and hope. The Synod calls for integral association of other images of the Church with the latter as the “Family of God” in order to have fruitful contributions in the reconciliation process and true communion among families in Mount Elgon region, Bungoma County. Yet, paradoxically, the Family of God image guides our study best. The above will then enable the Church to propagate effective ways of embracing the challenges faced by solving them amicably.

In conflicts, localities where there is scramble for resources is where violent evils occur in their true colors. It is thus expected that justice and reconciliation be done adequately. The community or a nation may have experienced conflict at hand, faced the consequences brought about by the conflict to human life and the entire creation (Magesa 2016:158ff). Therefore, reconciliation is a suitable way of resolving differences through dialogue or sincere communication. In progression of reconciliation, the “Word” is very essential in addressing integrity, peace and reunion. Primarily, it does not mean uttered speech since it goes further than that. The words echo individual qualities and attitudes which possess the power to heal or kill. It is noteworthy to point out how the resolution process is important. However, Magesa does not discuss the nature of conflict and some of the difficulties recognized as a result of the conflict. This gives important steps to the Church to enhance reconciliation by focusing on challenges triggered by SLDF conflict. It is useful in carrying out comprehensive interviews in thoughtfulness and conducting reconciliation process in Mount Elgon region.

In human existence, God plays a key role as the absolute Liberator of the oppressed (Cone 1997:134ff). This illustrates His love to humanity by His act of liberation portrayed on the cross which was the apparent conflict *par excellence*. The authentic liberation of human beings is attained particularly in the terrain of an oppressed community in the struggle for liberty. The significant understanding is that God’s freedom for humanity is the amusing liberation of those who are oppressed in whichever way. Human freedom as response to God’s liberation is an act of love and goodwill for individuals who are oppressed. Cone points out that freedom cannot be appreciated except when the hungry are fed, the sick are healed and justice is given to the poor. The Church therefore has to play a major role of comforting the oppressed and seeking justice for them. The study thus, sought to center on those oppressed as a result of SLDF conflict in Cheptais, Mount Elgon region, Bungoma County. Hence, have appropriate structures to aid them prevail over their challenges as the family of God.

In order to transform the society, Magesa has it that the Church should be well geared up to consciously get involved in seeking solutions to the ongoing challenges encountered in the modern-day society. The Church has to take its role in handling awkward issues that surround the community in order to reinforce and make its mission valuable. The image of the Church has to be centered on the uprightness to the poor and being truthful hence strongly determining her position to resolve challenges in the society as a community. The Church should observe her efforts and directives on upholding justice. She should mirror herself through her action in what she asserts as the Gospel of God. She should be on the service of its people regardless challenges but endeavor to extend the love of God to them. She should genuinely denounce evil and establishing justice and mercy without fear or favor (Magesa 2016:97) as She proclaims the Gospel of love. The Church should describe that all characters of injustice done in the society are driven towards transformation in order to restore peace and reconciliation. Our study complements Magesa by concretizing the above ideas he raises.

Pope Francis’ aspiration for the Church is to have the Church that is inclusive of the poor and for the poor which is cultivated with the fullness of mercy and love. The Pontiff notes that love and sympathy makes the Church practical in her mission and the task conferred to her. He reflects on “the Church that is close to the people, a Church that hears the plea of the poor crying for justice. The Church has to keep in mission and

Church which is motherly and with open heart” (Orobator 2016:51). In the cause the Church will be talented to unravel the disturbing concerns in their surroundings and provide approach for the Gospel of God. The Pope encourages the Church to condemn what is evil and agree to what is good and benevolent so as to deal with the inequality that generates violence. A Church should be general in ensuring that it is on the forefront, to be concerned and cooperative to make advancement in its evangelization task. Hence, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation are reinstated in the society. These general ideals are made specific in our case study for pragmatic purposes.

In African worldview, an individual does not and cannot exist alone but within a community. Thus, the community is accountable in creating and making the individual, because one is dependent on the communal group. In addition, the individual and the community have a close affinity and indispensable mutual concern hence Mbiti’s assertion: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.” (Mbiti 1982:108ff). Such a concern enables Bujo to state that for the African community, the aspect of concern is illustrated in African thought and actions which are determined by the community (Bujo 1998:182). He notes that a person’s moral conduct impacts on whole community; the good action promotes life while evil destroys life. The community takes a profound logic of concern especially when adversity and sicknesses are realized in the community life. Bujo’s ideas are tangible, significant and of great help to the Church particularly in Mount Elgon region. Though these reflections are rather general, we fill the gap by contextualizing them. We also appreciate that the Church in light of Vatican II and Post-Conciliar documents, describe the hierarchical nature of the Church that is composed of the clergy and the laity. Since the latter are common ministers by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation, the former are ordained ministers. As such, the study is enabled to demand that the two inter-related hierarchical categories should necessarily pair up in evangelizing in the aforementioned locality and elsewhere. The two are thus noted to be important agents for handling issues like conflicts. They should unite also in tackling problems affecting the Family of God. We are talking of issues like population explosion, famine, poverty, conflicts, political oppression corruption among others (Kinoti 2000:73ff).

Christian faith is not based on one’s own faith; within ones experience in faith and ones decisions (Moltmann 1974:18ff). But an individual’s believe in the crucified Christ is more than one’s own faith, where faith is understood only to be fundamental in human existence. Relatively, the crucified Christ is perceived as the liberator and Jesus Christ is portrayed as the authority of God’s love (Sobrino 1993:230ff). It is noted that Jesus’ cross is the expression of God’s love and that human beings did not love God but it is God who loved them and sent His son to be the atoning sacrifice for their sins (1 John 4:10). As a consequence of our wicked character, Christ died to save humanity, a sign of imperative conduct of presenting the integrity of God’s love as well as the significance of Jesus the liberator who instigates the believers to be His vigorous agents. The Church members and the Church in Mount Elgon region therefore, have to express their faith and hope in Christ in order to be redeemed from the challenges they encounter.

#### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

Three theories were used in the study namely: Redaction criticism theory, Mediation theory and Choice theory. Mediation theory provided the researcher with three important aspects that are fundamental in Christian liberation. It consists of socio-analytical mediation, hermeneutic mediation and praxis mediation (Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff 1987:24-35). The social analytical mediation granted the researcher means for inserting himself into the situation on the ground in Cheptais, Mount Elgon region in order to get first hand information on the challenges encountered by the Church owing to SLDF devastating conflict. Hermeneutical mediation empowered the researcher to relate the findings gathered to the will of God based on the Bible in order to determine if it is the will of God for the Church and the families in Mount Elgon region to encounter the challenges they face as a result of the severe conflict, for instance death, hatred among others. Finally, the praxis aspect triggered the possible way forward which will contribute to necessary steps to enable the Church put on innovative structures and more effective methods of ministering necessary to curb the disturbing phenomenon thereby promoting harmonious living, amicability, peace and acceptable integrated healing in the region.

The second theory is the redaction criticism theory discussed by scholars like Bornkamm, Kasemann and Fuchs (Collins 1983:196-229). The theory aids in carrying out a proper exegesis founded on inspiring pertinent Biblical texts. It is clearly approached by sourcing from the Bible the relevant texts for the purpose of having a proper perspective that will enable the researcher to draw inspirations from the Scriptures in a scholarly manner for the good of the Church in Mount Elgon region.

The study was also guided by Choice theory propagated by Glasser. Choice theory recommends that in the human environment, human beings are prone to making options on how to behave. Where the face of the action is reflected from individual inclination (Glasser1999:1ff). The preferences are instilled with an inherent force which is linked to certain basic needs that are set up in the inherited structures of humanity. These basic needs are articulated through personal power, freedom, love and ability to survive. Furthermore, Glasser notes that prior to the contentment of the named basic needs, an individual has to carry out himself, take action, reason

and feel. All these elements in regard, present a podium to get what one wants in the society and in life. A divergence between what a person wants depending on his needs and interest and what one has that belongs to him/her motivates the commencement of a growing internal behavior system. The theory is instrumental in the study because it attempts to explain how the Church efforts in promoting peace, reconciliation and harmony in Mount Elgon region. It has to be based on a mindful choice in order to institute structures that will demand long enduring solutions in regard to making a practical outcome of solidarity, love and unity among the members of the Church as the 'Family of God' in Mount elgon region. It is significant to note that the responsibility of the Church in promoting peace has to be contextualized by first involving the individuals in making rational choices. Reasons being that the Church covers individuals who are required to attend on their daily needs; hence, encouraging them to become rational in order to satisfy their needs. At times there are conflicts within an individual which results from a disagreement in internal feelings and what one is forced to do. In such situations then, it is important to initiate harmony which results to making rational choices for own and communal satisfaction.

In addition to the above, the study adopted a case study research design (Kombo and Tromp 2006:72) to investigate the vital problems encountered by the Church during the SLDF conflict in Mount Elgon region Bungoma County. A sample of 40 respondents was selected from the population consisting of Church leaders, parents, youths and local administrators in Cheptais Mount Elgon region. Purposive sampling method was used to sample five Church leaders, ten youths, twenty parents and five local administrators. Questionnaires and structured interviews were the instruments used to collect the primary data. The researcher ensured that the questionnaires administered were checked comprehensively prior to collection from the respondents. Both the validity and reliability of the questionnaires were cross checked by the supervisor who further reviewed it and advised on necessary corrections to be made.

## **V. FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Problems Facing the Church**

As a result of SLDF conflict in Cheptais Mount Elgon region, the Church encountered a devastating moment that required appropriate attention. The study findings showed that the Church experienced quite a number of challenges which include: Displacement crying for accommodation, Ethical challenges, Doubt and mistrust, Death, HIV/AIDS, Increase of orphans and Betrayal.

#### **5.1.1 Accommodating the Displaced**

It is one of the inevitable effects that are directed towards humanity within the locality where serious conflicts erupt. A good number of Church members particularly in Cheptais had to move from their original home to settle in other places for their wellbeing and safety. The families were not exempted from losing their properties and their loved ones during the malevolent conflict. Such problems expose how the once united social family or ecclesial family was severely affected. The RCC premises were used as oasis of peace and welfare centers in accommodating an overwhelming number of the escapees virtually reducing it to a refugee camp. Among the critical tasks imposed on the Church was to provide shelter, food, clothing as well as guidance and counseling to the families who were greatly affected. The Church as community of communities was regarded as a secure place by the displaced. Hence, it was a real burden for the Church to handle a huge number of people by providing them with the fundamental requirements for their upkeep thanks to the SLDF conflict effecting a huge number of destitute families fleeing for their safety outside Mount Elgon region to RCC premises and elsewhere. Many traumatized victims sought never to turn back again thus affecting the Church overwhelmingly. It lost majority of its members as well as the Church leaders who were also the victims of the conflict. For that reason, the Church had to reorganize its steps to take the responsibility of encouraging the people in the region and particularly in the Church so that they can play the role of giving hope to the displaced ones assisting them to have a homecoming. In addition, the Church was committed to locate the members who ran for refuge away from the region.

#### **5.1.2 Ethical Issues**

Ethics is very fundamental in any given society because it encompasses the beliefs and values that unite the society to strive ahead. In real life situations, individuals sometimes find themselves in difficult situations where they experience two ethical principles colliding. The above may lead to differences and dilemma among the priests as well as the Church members. Thus, making a concrete solution to certain problems becomes hectic. The Church in Mount Elgon region was expected to give hope and model the members by imparting desirable values in them in order to restore ethical values that had been abused during the conflict. Some of these ethical issues that faced the Church in Mount Elgon include:

### **5.1.2.1 Involvement in Paradoxical Church Affairs.**

Rape is a subject that is hardly ever mentioned in a male subjugated society. Rape is an open infringement of the victim's body, dignity and self-determination; it may contribute to massive consequences either socially, physically or emotionally. It leads to life threatening physical problems i.e. trauma, unplanned pregnancy and infection including sexually transmitted diseases (Kunhiyop 2008:275). A good number of women and young girls in Mount Elgon region disclosed that they were gang raped. This entirely affected their emotional and social environment which was saturated with guilt, shame, anger, powerlessness, anxiety and fear thus affecting their self esteem. Some women were divorced by their inconsiderate insensitive husbands just because they were raped by the SLDF militia. However, divorce is noted to be undesirable, psychologically traumatic and socially disruptive to the parties that were formerly united (Kunhiyop 2008:255). It as well contributes to the damage of the marital unity which entirely contradicts Gods purpose for marriage; this has been seen to bring about disillusion, recrimination insecurity and guilt (Stott 1999:320). A number of young girls were not exempted from the consequences of rape; they had to embrace their single motherhood without their consent rather than procure abortion since Christianity is emphatic on total respect for human life. Such experiences of exploitation, dehumanization and deficiency of respect from the rapists make an extensive number of women decide not to associate with men as matrimonial partners ending up being in the category Wachege calls raped single mothers (Wachege 2003:75).

The Church leadership, as well as the priests find themselves in a dilemma as to how they should assist the above victims of rape. They are in a stretched spot as to whether both the traumatized victims and the inhuman offenders should be given positions in Church fellowship or not, whether they should allow the divorce experienced as a result of rape? The same shepherds have a duty to reconcile both the afflicted and the inflicted but it is not an easy task for them due to the animosity between the two. Similarly, they are concerned of how they should handle husbands who have divorced their wives and also those who have been divorced under the above circumstances. Such shortcomings trigger a challenge to the Church to solve such issues in that scrupulous atmosphere.

### **5.1.2.2 Drop in RCC Participation.**

The Churches in Mount Elgon region experienced some of the SLDF militia confessing their evil deeds and requesting to be accepted back in Ecclesia community thus showing remorse and readiness to make amendment. They also urged the community to accept them back and engage them in various Church activities, despite their evil deeds that led to havoc in the community. The members of the Church interact in doubt; some faithful even fail to attend Church services because of fear of the Ex-SLDF militia who are accommodated back to the Church doubting their sincerity. The Church leaders are in difficult point to make decision on whether to allow such members of the militia to participate in Church programs or not. They find themselves in a dilemma. What then should the Church leadership do to accommodate both the victims and the accused as the people of God? Perhaps if they allow the penitent ex-SLDF militia to participate, then the government and the community might be suspicious of the ecclesial leaders. Conversely, if they do not accept them back as prodigal daughters and sons (Lk 15:11-32), the Church will be blamed for putting them in custody from salvation. As such, the Church would be contradicting Christ's categorical instructions of summoning the sinners to repentance in the community of the absolutely merciful Father (Mt 9:10-13; Lk 15:1-10). They will obviously feel neglected, demoralized and finally condemned while still on earth. The Church therefore has to face such challenges in order to bring harmony in the region and to have fundamental structures of integrating its members with God's purpose of love. The Church should be reminded of its "tremendous power and obligation of duty to identify and transform salvific woes into salvation." (Wachege 2000:73). The Church therefore has to realize that salvation is designed not for the chosen few but for all humanity. That is why we strongly suggest that the RCC leaders retrieve the values taught by the Founder Jesus namely: "Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me" (Jn 15:4).

### **5.1.3 Consoling the Orphans**

In modern-day Africa, the huge increase in the number of orphans is triggered by a series of unpleasant factors. It is not only lack of parenting but also other basic needs such as food, clothing, home, discipline as well as education (Kunhiyop 2008:263). A good number of orphans are abused by their own family members and abandoned hence lacking a family to associate with. The circumstances have entirely raised a multiple street children and child headed homes (Kunhiyop 2008:259). The scenario has contradicted the traditional African family that engages the children as part and parcel of the community at large. Children born out of wedlock and those whose parents died belonged to the entire society. Orphans were then to be adopted by the family members and integrated into the community as valued members. For the Africans, it was considered evil to neglect a child just because he or she lacked both parents.

The RCC in Mount Elgon region was heavily affected by SLDF conflict in that there was immense increase of helpless orphans. Family breakup was experienced due to death of parents that affected the entire community. Quite a number of children were abandoned by their parents during displacement as an aftermath of the malicious conflict. Parents were killed by the SLDF militia leading to lack of parental care to the children. Some SLDF militias who were also parents and headed their families were also killed by the KDF soldiers during the insurrection. Some parents escaped leaving their children behind with hopes that SLDF militia would not punish their children. The above circumstances contributed to immense increase of straying orphans in the region. Some of them dropped out of school at a very tender age since they were unable to reunite with their families. This was highly felt by the impoverished society and overwhelmed RCC. Due to poverty levels and painful situation at home, the children decided to escape from home to survive in the streets rather than experiencing biting crisis encountered at home. The Church had to involve herself profoundly to console and embrace these young children. It had to provide necessary support to them for instance food, clothing and shelter from her meager resources. Furthermore, the Church was to be in charge of fostering them and enlightening their hopes and dreams in their lives. Accommodating such a huge number of children affected by the conflict and in their level of oppression was and remains a heavy responsibility. The Church had to strive and support them in their education by providing academic support from well wishers, the Church members and scholarships from other institutions. The unfortunate phenomenon, on the positive side, should be a reminder to the clergy that apart from them anointed ministers analogically<sup>12</sup> (Mt 10:1ff; Mk 3:13-19) there is also a huge number of dormant common priests symbolically 70/72 (Lk 10:1-16). As such, complementarity among the two intertwined yet distinctive categories would necessarily go a long way in a more significant pastoral engagement towards the above as willed by Jesus Christ Himself.

#### **5.1.4 Interference with Communal Aspects**

In the African world-view integrated factors which include life, dynamism, sacrality, communality and anthropocentrism (Nyamiti 2009:9ff), are important aspects that enhance communal cohesion. Application of these elements characterizes a community full of life and harmonious interactions for the well-being of the society. The deficiency of such elements, leads to weakening of the community leading to negative individualism among other undesirable characteristics in life.. Mount Elgon region gives a good example of how such elements were interfered with by SLDF conflict. There was absence of warm relationships, concern, unity and love among the members of the society in Mount Elgon region. Selfishness and mutual suspicion has become the order of the day. The Church was not exempted from such challenges. She has to play an important role in uniting the faithful and others under such demanding delicate circumstances. A good number of families were displaced to different areas in the region and the social interaction with the new environment which was problematic yet the Church was expected to restore such unity values which had been greatly affected by the SLDF conflict. That contributed to negative impacts to the family, community and the ecclesia at large. The Church's involvement and the total expression of concern remains merely the tip of the iceberg because people still live in fear that they may be followed up by the seemingly subdued SLDF militias. There was minimal social interaction due to doubt and mistrust among the people – both the victims as well as the aggressors. Efforts to restore the intended fullness of life (Jn 10:10) based also on Nyamiti's African values remains an ongoing ideal to cultivate within the community.

#### **5.2 Further Impacts of SLDF Conflict to the RCC**

Among additional elaborate effects of SLDF conflict upon the RCC in the aforementioned locality are: widespread single parents; psychological trauma, flourishing of HIV and ADS; and increment of divorce. Let us elaborate the issues more:

##### **5.2.1 Widespread Single Parenting**

Wachege's profound discussion on single mothers, focusing on the causes and respective challenges they face (Wachege 2003:130ff) makes a significant contribution to the study because he points out 31 categories of single mothers in the society. Mount Elgon region cannot escape the increasing number of single parents as a result of the SLDF conflict which has extended to the Church. The single parents are bogged down with the burden of bring up their children singly, calling upon the Church to assist them especially by instilling moral values to these young teenagers especially at their adolescent stage. Some of the single parents are unable to attend and participate in the Church activities due to numerous challenges they face at home particularly that of unsupported parenting.

These single parents are also left with loneliness as their immediate counterparts were killed. They require attention not from anyone else but the Church thus calling the Church to have an effective concern to their cry. Some of the single parents neglected to attend the Church services for some time due to painful situation they encountered during the SLDF conflict which left them hopeless. Moreover, the membership of the

Church is saturated with women with a minimal number of men because so many men died during the memorable conflict. Hence, the Church leadership positions held by men as the heads of family and Church are merely vacant. It is therefore prudent for the Church to chip in and actively participate in assisting the single parents to cope up with their life and accept them as part and parcel of the family of God as taught by the Synod of Bishops of Africa (Ecclesia in Africa 1995:47). It is also important to realize that single parenting is not the confine of single mothers. It also embraces single fathers (Wachege and Cheron, 2016, 23-28) who are very real in the locality though not so pronounced.

### **5.2.2 Psychological Trauma**

A good number of RCC members in Mount Elgon region were victims of psychological challenges. The SLDF adopted various forms of torture like threats, intimidations and harassments. As per the respondents these forms of violence were to “hypnotize” the victims to admit and submit to the will of the SLDF. Because of the above, a vast number of Christians were involuntarily compelled to submit to the SLDF will which was contrary to Ecclesia values. The residents who were handled by SLDF were forced to rape, kill, punish and to inflict pain to the families and the entire society a refusal of which meant torture unto death. Such kinds of brutal acts realized and done by staunch Christians made them regret in their life thereby being subjected to disturbing memories. Their will to oppose such acts were overpowered by the SLDF assertive command, unheard and non-existent cry. This made their hope for salvation to be crushed down. To date, a good number of them are haunted with the guilt of what they were forced to do; they live in fear and wonder if actually God can forgive them. Others have decided to retrench themselves from participating in Church activities.

Depending on the type of trauma, different people will be affected more than others. There are times when people undergo the same experience, yet one is more affected than the other. A huge number of the respondents were affected with trauma in different ways; some had constant anxiety, stress and fear to express their feelings (Gichinga 2005:62) and some sought to engage in risky behavior for instance drinking alcohol. Trauma leads to physical, emotional, social challenges which if not handled keenly, may lead to posttraumatic disorder. Furthermore, children were also traumatized with personally witnessing the torture and elimination of their parents through brutal death, displacement among others that contributed to a chain of worries. As a result, some children no longer attend school and Church services opting to be street urchins. The issue impacts heavily on the Church whose enhanced obligation is to tackle such challenges by offering guidance and counseling session to the congregation and society at large – among other pastoral duties.

### **5.2.3 Flourishment of HIV and AIDs**

The above is another acute problem that impacts heavily on the Church. A good number of the Church members were infected with the HIV and AIDs pandemic through numerous rape cases. It is realized that HIV and AIDS is not only a scourge but a disaster that has claimed the lives of a number of families and posing a challenge to the nation at large (Wachege 2005:186). AIDS was used as a silent tool by the SLDF in the region; women who were infected with dreaded ailment eventually spread it to the families and the rest of the community in an immense manner thus causing many divorces, a considerable number of separations, terrible suspicions and scaring deaths. The Church had to assist its members by providing the possible assistance for instance, the introduction of ARVs drugs for medication purposes to the infected and also to offer guidance and counseling to them. Since the number of those affected was large, the Church could not entirely provide medication to all of them for quite a long period of time hence a disturbing recurring issue. The SLDF ruins very many families in Mount Elgon region in the most humiliating way possible which heavily demoralized their role in the society and in the Church.

The pandemic's spread has heavily contributed to a low ratio of men to women thus for the women to satisfy their sexual inclinations they ended up sharing men in the area. The young teenagers do not escape the “curse” since they are also badly infected and in turn spreading it to their boyfriends and girlfriends. The disease, therefore, weakens them and as a result, deprives them of the opportunity to play their roles in the community and society at large as the future leaders of the Church and homesteads. The disease impacts on the Church negatively as clearly seen that a good number of those infected are not in position to play strenuous activities in the Church and even at their homes. Moreover, some of them die due to psychological trauma leaving behind a burden to the Church to care for the orphans. As a result, many deaths greatly destroy the family as a unit as a harmonious entity. Women are left to head households where their husbands die of the disease or decide to abandon them as has turned out to be the in thing. To such families, disillusionment and loss of hope became the order of the day. The families which were united by a harmonious life and togetherness were now disintegrated by HIV and AIDs as a result of conflict.

#### **5.2.4 Increase of Divorce**

The Church discourages consorts from unjustifiable divorces because of ethical concerns and all that appertains to the sacrament of matrimony instructions. From the Scriptures God's plan for marriage is to enhance a basic unity between the man and his wife endowing them with fecundity to "create" children in order to experience a happy married life. They are to be bound together by the trust and love amongst themselves (Gen 2:24). For Christians, marriage is expected to be a lifetime union between the spouses. Additionally, married and family life is intended to be enjoyable, accommodating and fruitful (Gen 2:24; Matt19:5-6; Rom7:2-3). Instead of considering divorce, couples should resort to settling the issues that tend to weaken their union. With that kind of maturity in handling their marital challenges, they will be able to keep their families intact and avoid unnecessary break ups which will not only affect them but also their children.

According to the traditional Sabaot community, cases of divorce are highly discouraged. Customarily, divorce was rare and as a last resort. Husbands and wives are socialized to unite for the establishment and good of the family and the community at large. However, as a consequence of SLDF conflict, some husbands opted to abandon their wives and sought to remarry. A good number of men were also divorced by their wives, particularly those who had families and joined the SLDF leaving behind their responsibilities as the heads of the family to their wives. Upon their return, they were feared by the family members who were hurt by their evil deeds of rape, murder among others that the SLDF militia soldiers were doing to the residents of Mount Elgon region. The wives also feared their husbands who had become SLDF militia. They thus opted to divorce them because they depicted them as murderers, inhuman and disease carriers. Such cases have contributed to increase of single parents more of the category of the divorced ones thus disintegrating the unity and social fabric experienced in the families. The Church at large is flooded with single parents where some even fail to attend Church services because they have lost confidence in the Church that used to bring hope in their lives. The question remains, how the church should treat such single parents who decide to divorce. How to significantly shepherd such a flock remains an unfinished business.

#### **5.3 Ecclesia and Government Contribution**

The RCC as an institution has taken a commendable responsibility to make necessary effort and calling for peace throughout the universe. In Mount Elgon region, particularly the RCC in Cheptais. She has been seen preaching peace and promoting unity upon the family to embrace reconciliation and healing. The members of the Christian family as the domestic Church are where the evangelization that contributes to peace and love begins and converges. It is the pillar for the society to undergo rapid and profound changes that has to unite the diverse people in the family. Hence, establishing a basic foundation to embrace peace and shun violence and malevolent conflict transmitted acquired values from their first Christian life 'a school for human enrichment' and 'Domestic Church' which is home (Ecclesia in Africa 1995:70). With such inspirations, the RCC in Mount Elgon region has taken a bold initiative in making deliberate efforts to accommodate the youth and mentor them fruitfully in the region rather than being used to cause chaos and engage in conflict participation. The Church has encouraged them to take part in Church activities such as youth initiative programs, evangelization programs, peace initiatives programs among others. This has been seen to unite some youth together within the umbrella of whole Church as the family of God.

It has also been seen that the RCC has accommodated some family members who were affected by the SLDF conflict. In that scenario, it has sought to make a practical impact in their life by shepherding them accordingly notwithstanding various problems resulting mainly from SLDF conflict. She has taken the responsibility to create awareness in the society that they still remain to be one and a family of God; hence no one should be subjected to any form of stigmatization, like those who were raped. Nevertheless, the practical aspect of the ideal is bogged down by the after effects of the above conflict. The Church ministry has, in a rather limited way, also taken the mandate to appreciate the single mothers and single fathers in their struggle to come in terms with their situation by taking the responsibility to minister to their families.

For those affected by the HIV and AIDs, the RCC has made some effort in accommodating them by showing them that they are acceptable in the society and that they have diverse opportunities to conduct themselves with respect as well as dignity taking after the suffering servant of Yahweh called Jesus Christ. She has provided a mechanism to guide them during counseling sessions in order to focus on their religious, social and ethical aspects that guide their interpersonal activities though not strongly so. The above has been greatly realized through the Small Christian Communities (SCCs). With such contribution, she has been seen to minimize the hostile environment, segregation, harassment and alienations from the society. In a wider perspective, she has somehow shown that those affected are part and parcel of the Church, society and as described in African Synod's, they are the family of God.

The government on its effort has contributed to a peaceful co-existence by providing security in the region after the bloody confrontation with SLDF. It has focused on the factors that have contributed to the unfortunate conflict that vividly affect the families and the Church at large. The government has handled the

issues of small arms possessions and trafficking, that spearheaded the survival of SLDF. It thus contributes to restoring peace and security in the region through reconciliation and healing. The presence of military camp in Kapkota in Cheptais has also gone a long way in minimized the cases of insecurity hence providing a way to a peaceful future in Mount Elgon.

In collaboration with other Faith Based Organizations (henceforth FBOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the government may be said to be taking the initiatives in helping the members of the community to embrace peace by accepting each other and building trust among them. Their effort has been seen to be somehow effective through the involvement of the County and local administrators. The above organizations have not been left behind but have also been seen to promote and provide guidance and counseling to those who underwent an immense post-conflict trauma though not adequately so. In our opinion, a better coordinated effort and collaboration between the ecclesial and civil authorities would result in a more meaningful service to all indiscriminately.

## **VI. IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Drawing from what has been treated thus far, we are now in a position to articulate the implications of the study, the recommendations and the conclusion of entire study.

### **6.1 Implications**

- 1) The families in Mount Elgon region encountered a good number of difficulties that calls for the RCC in particular and the Church in general to tackle these problems that undermine the progress of the God mandated ministry to all whether they are aggressors like SLDF or the victims – also whether Christians or belonging to other faith affiliations or even atheists. It dismantles the progress of the cultural, social, economic and religious efforts in the contribution to improve and build the livelihood of the community and the nation as a whole. Issues like death, divorce and HIV and AIDS endanger the families hence the Church and in a big way. It led to poor Church turn out and half hearted participation. Domestic family is the basis foundation of the Church; it is where evangelization is entrenched and thus contributes to proper pastoral ministry in the society when prudently and efficiently handled. It is wise, therefore, for the RCC to apply necessary expectation of these families like that of providing concrete persuasive support which is essential in uniting and helping them to tackle the existential issues they face. Therefore, the Church, the community as well as the government have a desirable duty in advance. These institutions have to put in place structures that will assist the families in the region to be proactive in the Church and the community.
- 2) The communal aspects are important points of focus in the society because they promote cohesion and shared aims. As a result of SLDF conflict in the region, the harmony of the community was no doubt distracted thus affecting the Church and the family, undermining the growth and progress in the region. The government and the Church have to put directive measures that will promote peace, healing and reconciliation respectively. The Church role is to be inclusive to those afflicted and those afflicting. The Church must demonstrate the compassionate position that Jesus commended in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37) and that of the importunate friend (Lk 11:5-8). A peaceful environment enables Christians to be alert and open to reconciliation thus keeping the issues of peace and harmony in focus (Gerard 1994:329). The critical challenge of avoiding peace and reconciliation would be that the union and solidarity of the community and the Church will be at stake thus contributing to explosive environment. It can be imagined consequently that disintegration of communal aspects will contribute to the threat of having a society that cannot be united, work together for the common good of the families, Church and the civil authority. It may affect the efforts of promoting peace and reconciliation.
- 3) Another significant exposition is that displacement of people contributes to increase in the number of crime activities, low economic growth, violence related issues and family disintegration. The subject of displacement must be taken seriously by the government and particularly on the areas where grave conflicts erupt over land problems. For the healthy growth of the nation, people should be settled harmoniously in order to participate in diverse activities that promote economic growth, nation development and amicable co-existence. Thus, dislocation of people as a result of conflict renders a good number of families to be in precarious living situations and meaninglessness in life. The youths in particular may resort to dropping out of school, recruitment in illegal militia groups like the one mentioned above and engage in crime behaviors which may leading to the destruction of their dreams and vision

### **6.2 Recommendations**

With the above in mind, we now make the following way forward suggestions:

- 1) The RCC, and the Church in general, with the help of the Government and FBOs should come up with a children's home that will assist the orphans from the SLDF conflict in Mount Elgon region. The initiative will enable the children to be taught Christian and viable African values like that of total respect for human life and harmonious living as related members of the family of God that will enable them to be important

members of the Church, society and the country at large. It will give them a sense of belonging and acceptance by the community hence not discouraged. The RCC should also encourage her members to adopt orphans from the community as well as supporting them with basic needs as part of their obligations belonging to the 70/72 others (Lk 10:1ff) complementing the clergy that belongs to the 12 anointed agents of the Gospel (Lk 10:1-16). The Churches in the region can as well come up with full scholarship for orphans. The goal will thus be achieved by raising such needy children in the context of both communal and Christian virtues.

- 2) The government should set laws that will protect the single parents, their property and their rights as well. It has to give support to help their children access education, employment and medication as well as empowering the parents to earn their living not relying so much on charitable church and government handouts. The Church ought to be on the forefront to ensure that the single parents in Mount Elgon region are understood – as Wachege explains – in their peculiar category with specific concerns, needs and talents (Wachege, 2003: 72ff). They need to be accepted, embraced and guided by the pastoral ministers. It would attain the goal by sharing with them the message of love, solidarity and reminding them that they belong to the family of God. Thus, they should enrich them in their parenting responsibility. Those who were involved in sexual violence resulting to divorce should also be well accommodated by the Church as the community of communities.
- 3) On the ethical issues, the Church should develop a department to focus specifically on providing proper training to the Church leaders on how to handle ethical challenges and devastating conflicts. With such department, the Church will be in position to tackle emerging different ethical challenges facing the victims more effectively. The priests and pastors should as well not be left behind but undergo the same but advanced training for proper preparedness to tackle challenges resulting from conflict.
- 4) The Church has to mobilize those in the ministry of health to be of great assistance in educating the faithful and the community at large about HIV and AIDS. Educating them will no doubt provide the basic foundation to combat ignorance and promiscuous behaviour. It is important for the Church to provide sex education so that the members are aware of the spread of the disease and how it can be controlled. However it should also embrace those who are affected to the Church and offer guidance and counseling.
- 5) Government should also be proactive in making sure that it identifies the major problems related to land allocations in the region, historical injustices and ensure the grievances from the people are heard and addressed amicably. Such a process should call upon the involvement of the Church, FBOs and the credible leaders as well as local elders to make their necessary support and contribution. It will reduce the burden of displacement; however the government should as well provide settlement for those who were displaced as a result of SLDF conflict in the region.
- 6) On divorce, the ecclesial community should be concerned about marriages that cannot be salvaged. The Church should find out how to unite such families whenever applicable, because marriage is the fundamental institution that was ordained by God. It should also teach the Christian community on the essential importance of marriage and that problems associated with it be examined and reflected upon in order have amicable solutions. It should be noted that challenges of divorce affects the life of the Church and community as well.
- 7) The communal aspects in African worldview should be put on practice by the community in support of the Church and Government. Both institutions should seek healing and reconciliation, upholding justice, build up an inclusive community; apply love and forgiveness to their enemies. The above will enrich the community and hence building the communal affection and unity.
- 8) The Church should also organize seminars where the victims of conflict are encouraged, offered guidance and counseling especially those who are traumatized. Similarly, they should be assisted in their daily hardships and thus equipping them with vigor to progress in their life for the good of the society and the Church as the “Family of God.” This has to be in such a way that they are not spoiled into slavish dependence yearning for charitable gifts and contributions. The action will promote breaking the vicious circle of trauma that breeds disappointments and hopelessness.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

The study investigated the problems encountered by the RCC in Mount Elgon region during the SLDF conflict (2006-2008) that resulted to negative impacts to the families, using Christian Liberation Approach. It was made clear that families were severely affected hence the serious burden on the Church. Some of the problematic issues that faced the Church include displacement, ethical challenges, increase of orphans, HIV and AIDs among others. The unpleasant factors led to threat of holistic family-hood and the Church in the region. The conflict contributed to devastating effects that undermined the unity of the families in the region thus also disintegrating the Church. The circumstances the Church faced in Mount Elgon region are a reflection of similar and diverse challenges that other Ecclesial institutions encounter where devastating conflict are the contingent

factor. This leads to undesirable welfare of the society and the inhabitants with unpleasant consequences. It is prudent therefore for the families, Church and the government to re-establish peace and reconciliation as the option to create conducive environment for the Church and the society.

In general, the families, the Church, the society and the nation are threatened when peace is undermined in their atmosphere. The government should consider urgently handling land issues and historical injustices which lead to conflict/conflict without taking too long. It should be done for the sake of the community and the nation. At this point it is argued that taking into account the impacts of SLDF conflict, there are challenges in engaging in marriage, parenting and other indispensable aspects of living as people ought to and in accordance with the Our Father prayer/principle of community of communities. The young teenagers drop out of school and engage in immoral behaviors, for instance, criminal activities in the community. It is expected that these youths be productive in the Church and the community. As such, there is critical necessity to address the peril. To curb the problem, parenting should be inclusive of the parents, Church and government through the provision of a promising future to the youths and the parents hence the Church. Therefore, since the study was bound on a case study, it is prudent enough for more research related to the study to be done so as to draw more findings broadly with focus on the impacts of conflict to the family, Church and society.

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