

Pokot-Turkana Pastors Forum: Peace through Healing, Reconciliation and Forgiveness

The North Rift Valley Province of Kenya continues to experience violent conflicts that constrain efforts aimed at realizing sustainable food security, livelihoods, development and thwart initiatives aimed at realizing the rights of all people especially the children- in education, water and healthcare access and safe neighborhoods. The volatility of the North Rift make the Pokot-Turkana peace forum a leading community owned entry strategy for World Vision Kenya to realize its goals in Transformational Development, Humanitarians Affairs and Advocacy.

The Pokot – Turkana conflict in the Turkwell corridor has been one of the most protracted and intractable conflicts in the post independent Kenya with varied actors involved along the over 300Kms stretch. The conflict affects over seven (7) districts including: Turkana South, Turkana East, East Pokot, Loima, Pokot North, Pokot Central and West Pokot. The conflict in this region is characterized by raiding and counter raiding (cattle rustling), increased illegal possession of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), loss of livestock and livelihoods, loss of lives, increased insecurity that has muzzled investments in the region and high school drop outs and/or poor school enrolments that provide a pool of teenagers deeply inculcated into the culture of ethnic hostility and violence. The Turkana and Pokot communities and by extension, the Samburu community traditionally fight over access and control of natural resources including water points and grazing lands as well as the contested Turkwell Gorge power plant over allegations of one community benefiting more than the other. The issue of boundaries between the Pokot and Turkana communities still continues to heighten tensions between the two communities leading to violence at the slightest provocation.

Many actors have stepped in to promote peace and inter-community cohesion but sustainable peace has remained elusive. The Pokot –Turkana Pastors forum has come at a time when a radical approach to the process of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation is necessary. As a disciple of Jesus Christ and as a practitioner in peace building and conflict management, I have no doubt in my heart that the role of the Church remains central to sustainable peace and development.

In 2010, between 15th October to 11th December, I coordinated the Turkwell Peace process covering Turkana South, Loima, Pokot North, Pokot Central and West Pokot district in the region. This process brought together the Regional Commissioner, the District Commissioners, the area Members of Parliament (MPs), District Peace Committees (DPCs), the Chiefs, Civic Leaders, warriors (morans), women leaders and elders from the Pokot and Turkana Communities that they dialogue on how best they can resolve the conflicts in the region. One resounding remark from the community and the leaders is the role of the Pastors in peace building and conflict management. Their role has gained great consensus amongst church leaders in the region on the need to be proactive in ‘bearing witness’ about the conflicts and to engage directly in peace building. This transformation has resulted in a number of initiatives that have placed religious leaders at the heart of efforts to support resolution of the conflicts and to address the consequences of the violence.

During the peace process, it was humbling to hear testimonies from the combatants on how they got transformed after receiving Christ. On 20th November 2010 at Kotoruk (Loima district), a combatant from the Pokot community testified and said, “I had been given the heroic name *Lokiroye* by my community for killing many people (the Turkana) but now I am a changed person. I have gone to Church and been baptized as Paul.” He added, “I will go and tell my parents, fellow combatants (*Morans*) and my people (the Pokot) about peace.”



From a fierce combatant to a peace ambassador

After a peace meeting in the same venue, a Pastor came in to share the word of God on the need for forgiveness and reconciliation. I have never seen such a thirst for the word of God in such a remote area.



A Pastor from the Pokot-Turkana Pastors Forum sharing the word of God on healing, forgiveness and reconciliation during a public inter-community peace meeting



The two communities responding to prayers offered by the Pastor