The Role of Higher Education Institutions in Community based Peacebuilding in South Africa

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Abstract: The escalation of internal feud and conflicts between individuals or communities based on ethnicity or social prejudices could result in maiming, arson or destruction of lives and properties. These have been witnessed at several communities in South Africa in recent times. Local ownership has become increasingly central to peacebuilding, since, it recognises that policies imposed from the outside may at best be accepted superficially and that peace has to be built by those who live with it. This study investigates the role of higher education institutions in creating sustainable community-based peacebuilding using a participatory approach. Semi-structured pre-tested key informant interview guide was used as data gathering instrument. The sample size of the study comprised of 20 respondents from two villages and the University of Venda participating as key informants. A purposive sampling was used to select these respondents from various stakeholders including traditional leaders, students and academics. Data analysis was done by qualitative methods using the analysis of qualitative textual, graphical, audio and video data recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy on ATLAS.ti Version 7.5.10. The study show areas of possible involvement of the university including academic research, awareness creation, skills development programmes and job creation for people in the rural communities and eventually improve peacebuilding efforts in the area. The study recommends that the university should join hands with the government and the community in entrenching the sustainable peacebuilding efforts in the community.

Key words: Conflicts, peacebuilding, protests, tertiary institutions, higher education, rural community

INTRODUCTION

Education is key to uniting nations, bringing human beings closer together. In many parts of the world, civil society suffers because of situations of violent conflicts and war. According to Annan (2014), West Africa, East and Central Africa have been grappling with violent conflicts and civil strife for decades. These violent conflicts destabilized many countrie's economies (Aning and Bah, 2009) thereby, directly and indirectly, affecting the civil society, particularly women and children. Countries that were mainly affected are Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire (Aning and Bah, 2009). Sub-Saharan Africa has also been inundated by persistent war and conflict for many decades (Clempson, 2012). This has significantly affected the onward development of this continent (Chabal, 2009). This persistence is evident as about 47 civil wars occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1946 and 2002 (Ree and Nillesen, 2009). According to the same researchers, these wars caused 1.37 million deaths on the battlefield and death of a larger number of civilians. Furthermore, Obi (2012) postulated that the root causes of conflict are but not limited to socioeconomic factors, international forces, poor governance, violation of human rights, ethnic marginalisation, historical factors, poverty and local struggles.

Several initiatives that include deployment of peacemakers, intervention by the African Union (AU) and other international bodies. The joint UN-AU visit to DRC and Nigeria in July, 2017 focused on the importance of women's participation in peace and security processes (Anonymous, 2017). Other objectives of the visit included fostering stronger women's mobilisation and bringing greater visibility to the consequences of conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls. Urgent action is needed on the meaningful participation of women in peace

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processes. The importance of advancing gender equality as a precondition for sustainable development for all was also highlighted during the visit (Anonymous, 2017). Among these interventions, education is one of the key strategies that are used to unlock the potential of peace in many nations (Anonymous, 2017). It is, therefore, important to recognise the crucial role of education in necessitating a culture of peace.

According to Chinyere (2013), education is the tool in combating poverty, promoting peace, social justice, human rights, democracy, cultural diversity and environmental awareness. Higher education all over the world is considered as a life transforming activity that empowers its recipients to contribute positively to the growth and development of society. The decade-long war in countries like democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan destroyed the infrastructure of the education system and it is important to encourage greater cooperation by the government including ending the ongoing violence against civilians and removing impediments to both humanitarian access in the area (Anonymous, 2017; Brown, 2012). Education was dramatically affected by the civil war in Congo DRC, particularly in the country's rural areas where, it was almost entirely halted, World Bank and Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). In order to influence peace building agenda, agencies involved in the education sector in conflict-affected states need to develop a peacebuilding lens at all stages of policy and programming and must be able to articulate a coherent vision of the role of education in peace building (Alghali, 2009).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was qualitative in nature and the sampling method was purposive, a sub-type of non-probability sampling. The researcher used open-ended questions as a form of self-administered questions to ensure the respondents have the chance to provide answers in more details. Semi-structured pre-tested key informant interview guide was used as data gathering instrument. The sample size of the study comprised of 20 respondents in two villages in Malamulele, Vuwani and the University of Venda participating as key informants. The villages were selected due to the impasse about new municipality demarcation in the area. A purposive sampling was used to select the 20 respondents from various stakeholders including traditional leaders, students and academics. This method was used in order to target those who are directly connected as stakeholders. Data analysis was done by qualitative methods using the analysis of qualitative textual, graphical, audio and video data recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy on ATLAS.ti Version 7.5.10.

The participants were informed about the purpose of the study. The researcher assured these youth about their safety during the course of the study. They were also briefed about their answers being treated anonymously. The researchers alluded to these young people that participate in the study is voluntary and that their privacy and confidentiality will be fully respected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges to peacebuilding efforts: The study identified a number of challenges faced by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in their peacebuilding efforts. Resistance to change among some elements in the community could jeopardise peacebuilding efforts while tribalism, nepotism, corruption, intolerance due to political or ethnic differences may aggravate government peacebuilding efforts as shown in Fig. 1.

The study revealed that the university failed to recognise the community as an important stakeholder in the community in which they are located. Lack of resources, especially, experts in community participation could be responsible for this view. Lack of communication and false promises have resulted in a lack of trust among the community members in accepting the HEIs propositions. Some of the respondents said the community sometimes expects too much from the university and they believe HEIs has the solutions to all their problems including poverty levels.

Approaches to peacebuilding efforts: The study shows that peacebuilding efforts should include strengthening social and cultural capacity to resolve disputes and promote ethnic group interactions (Fig. 2). Some respondents mentioned that peacebuilding efforts should focus on entrenching social cohesion within the community members. Community leaders and civic authorities should be involved in peacebuilding for sustainability purposes.

Others approaches include neighbourhood watch, community policing forum, traditional authorities, project task teams and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) as some of the existing peacebuilding efforts in the community. Some of these bodies have structure and policy for conflict management and resolution.

Skills requirement for peacebuilding efforts: The study shows certain skills such as conflict management,
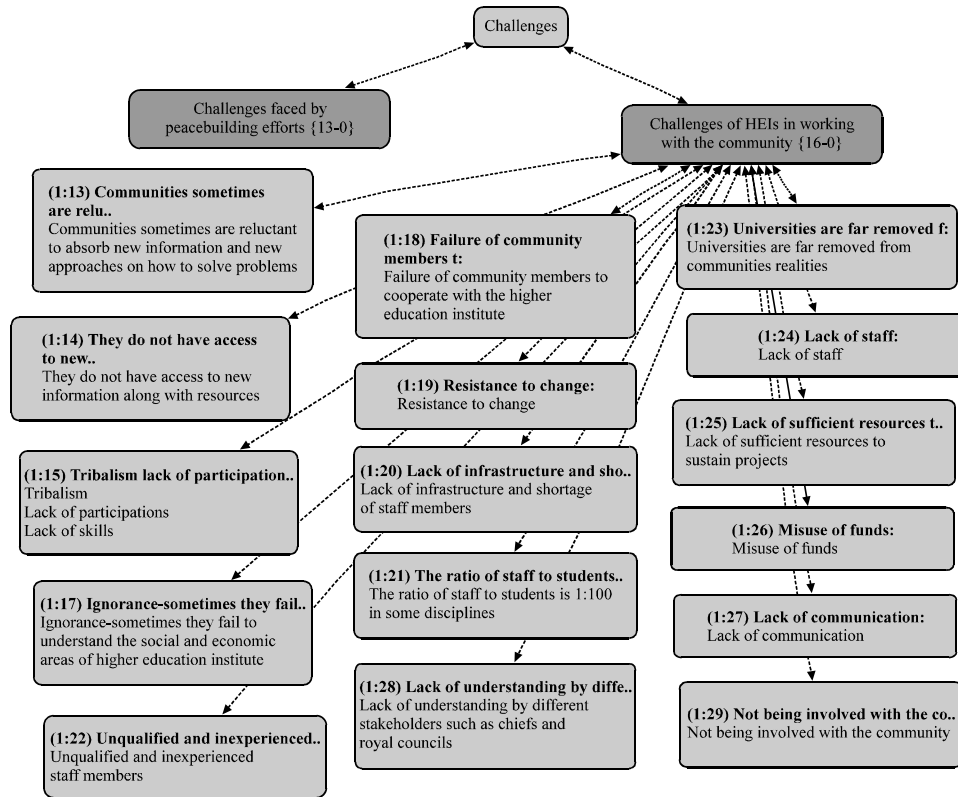
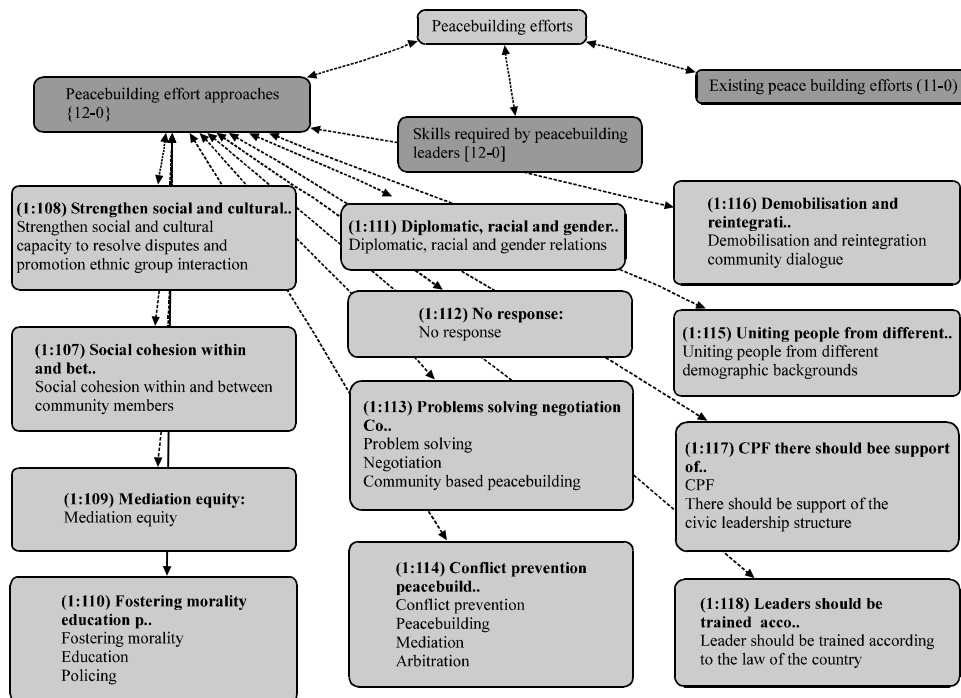Fig. 1: Challenges faced by higher education institution in peacebuilding efforts

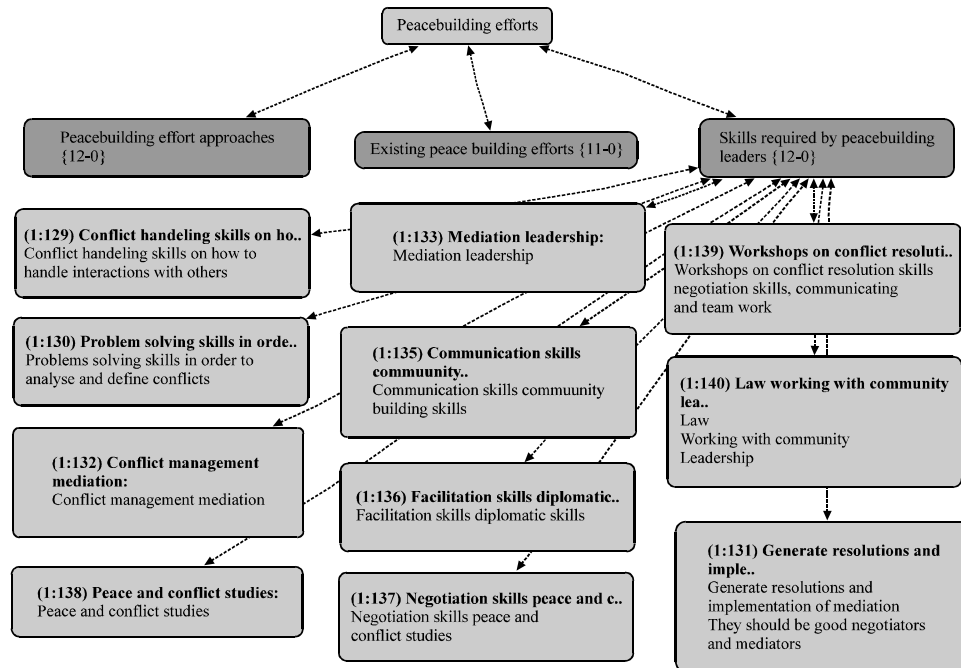Fig. 2: Approaches to peacebuilding efforts

Fig. 3: Skills requirement for peacebuilding efforts

Table 1: Role players in peacebuilding efforts

Role players	Community structures	Human rights activists	Government agencies
Chiefs	Civic	NGOs	Councillors
Teachers	SANCO	Religious groups	Police
Workers	CBO	Religious leaders	Security agents
University leadership	Community policing	Women/youth groups	Political parties
Traditional authorities	Neighbourhood watch	Organisations	Military personnel
Students	Project task teams		Law enforcement agents

communication, leadership, mediation, negotiation and problem-solving skills that are in dare needs by the leaders in peacebuilding (Fig. 3). Some respondents says conflict related modules at the university are offered only at the humanities and social science faculty. They mentioned that the understanding of conflict management and its dynamics at various faculties will help built respect among university students and the community.

Peacebuilding leaders: The role players in peacebuilding efforts include university leaderships, teachers, religious leaders, social workers, students, community members, human right activists, law enforcement agents, government, chiefs and traditional authority (Table 1). Leaders are expected to be trained through a workshop to have the basic knowledge about peacebuilding in the society and what their roles should be (Fig. 4).

The role of HEIs and other stakeholders: The study revealed that the roles of the government, HEIs and other stakeholders are very crucial in peacebuilding in the

community. They should provide quality education and training, bring people together to achieve peace in the community, create awareness, facilitate mediation, provide adequate security and promote peaceful co-existence among the people in the community (Fig. 5).

In Table 2, HEIs plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap by providing a conducive learning environment for the community. To educate and help the community with the issue of development through research and community engagement programmes. It is mentioned in Fig. 6 that the HEIs could overcome the challenges of peacebuilding at the community levels by involving the community in issues relating to their development and giving them adequate feedback on research projects in the community.

In Fig. 7, a some leaders (29%) have been identified by the respondents as being involved with peacebuilding efforts in the community while more than 20 different types of challenges such as resistance to change, lack of skills, ignorance, political differences, tribalism, government imposition and others have been mentioned
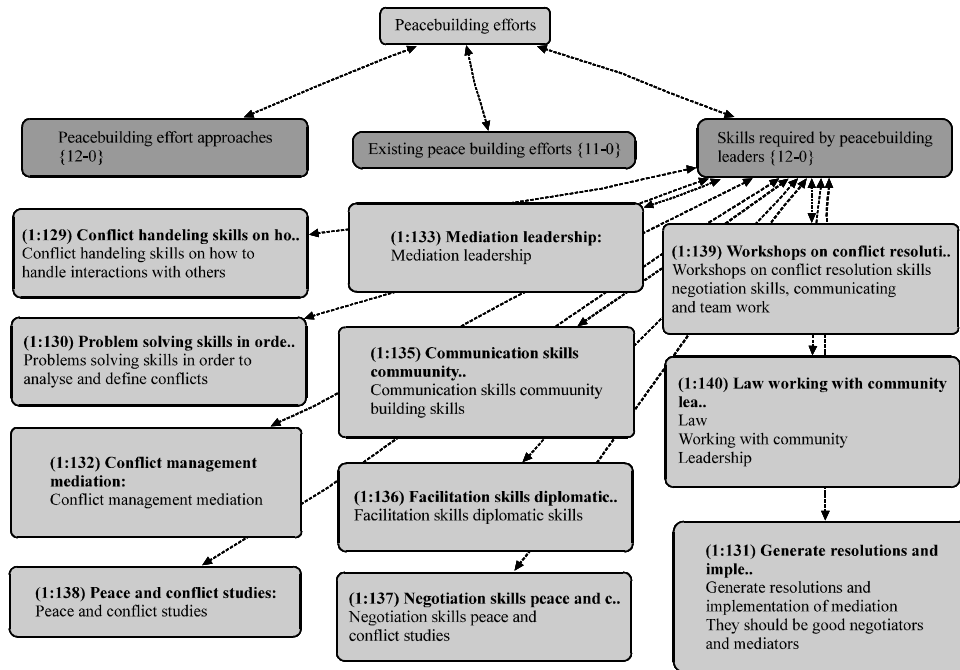
Peacebuilding efforts

Peacebuilding effort approaches {12-0}

Existing peace building efforts {11-0}

Skills required by peacebuilding leaders {12-0}

(1:129) Conflict handeling skills on ho..
Conflict handeling skills on how to handle interactions with others

(1:133) Mediation leadership:
Mediation leadership

(1:139) Workshops on conflict resoluti..
Workshops on conflict resolution skills negotiation skills, communicating and team work

(1:130) Problem solving skills in orde..
Problems solving skills in order to analyse and define conflicts

(1:135) Communication skills commuunity..
Communication skills commuunity building skills

(1:140) Law working with community lea..
Law
Working with community
Leadership

(1:132) Conflict management mediation:
Conflict management mediation

(1:136) Facilitation skills diplomatic..
Facilitation skills diplomatic skills

(1:131) Generate resolutions and imple..
Generate resolutions and implementation of mediation
They should be good negotiators and mediators

(1:138) Peace and conflict studies:
Peace and conflict studies

(1:137) Negotiation skills peace and c..
Negotiation skills peace and conflict studies

Fig. 4: Skills required by peacebuilding leaders

HEIs and other stakeholders role

Peacebuilding efforts of government and other stakeholders {11-0}

Roles of HE {12-0}

Overcoming challenges {11-0}

(1:98) Education training leaders:
Education training leaders

(1:103) Support them with resources to..
Support them with resources to solve problems

(1:106) Commending the support of chei..
Commending the support of cheifs
Introduction of CRF structures
Improvement of police visibility
Employment of councillors

(1:102) Government's role is to suppor..
Government's role is to support parties to negotiate

(1:101) Provides security negotiation..
Provides security
Negotiation
Conflict resolution
Problem solving

(1:196) Police stations, hospitals, tr:
Police stations, hospitals, tribal organisations and human rights activists in order to resolve conflicts in a non-violent ways and also social workers to curb violence from social ills

Coming up with organisations t..
Coming up with organisations that promote peace

(1:105) Bringing people together to ac..
Bringing people together to achieve

(1:197) Capacity building training:

(1:99) They have put law
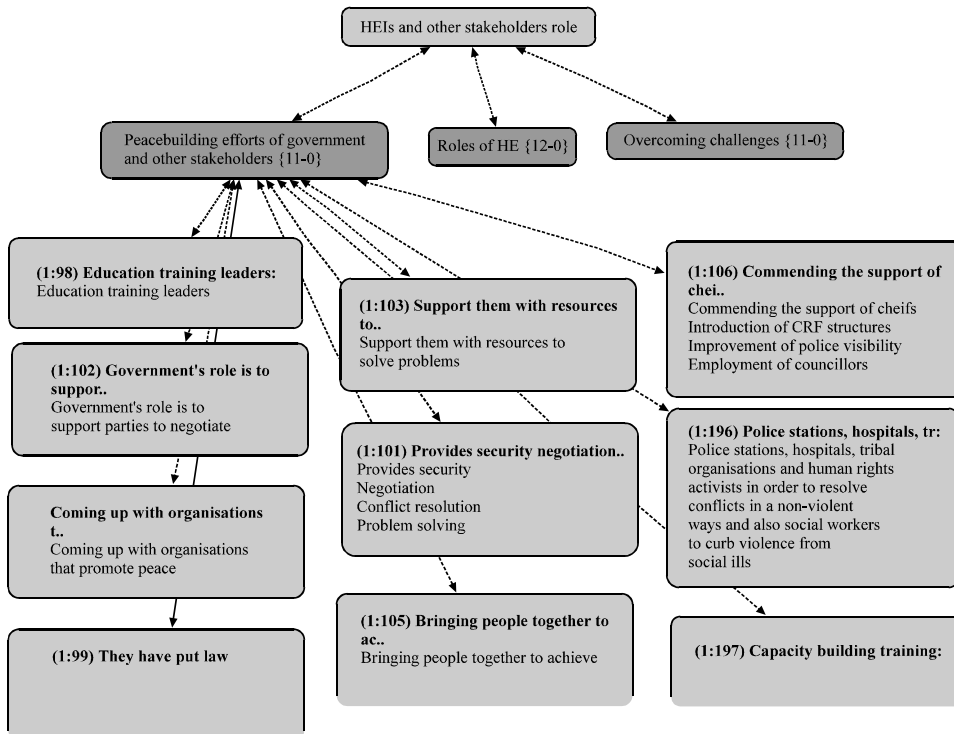
Fig. 5: The government and other stakeholder's influencing in peacebuilding

Table 2: HEIs roles in peacebuilding

Challenges	Peacebuilding effort	Roles of HEIs
Lack of skills	Workshop and training	Skills development and training
Lack of participation due lack of capacity	Community projects involving students and the community members	Community engaged research
Ignorance	Campaigns and information dissemination	Awareness creation
Lack of resources and knowledge	Groupings and cooperative formation for possible resource access	Knowledge generation
Poverty	Recruitment for support service jobs	Job creation
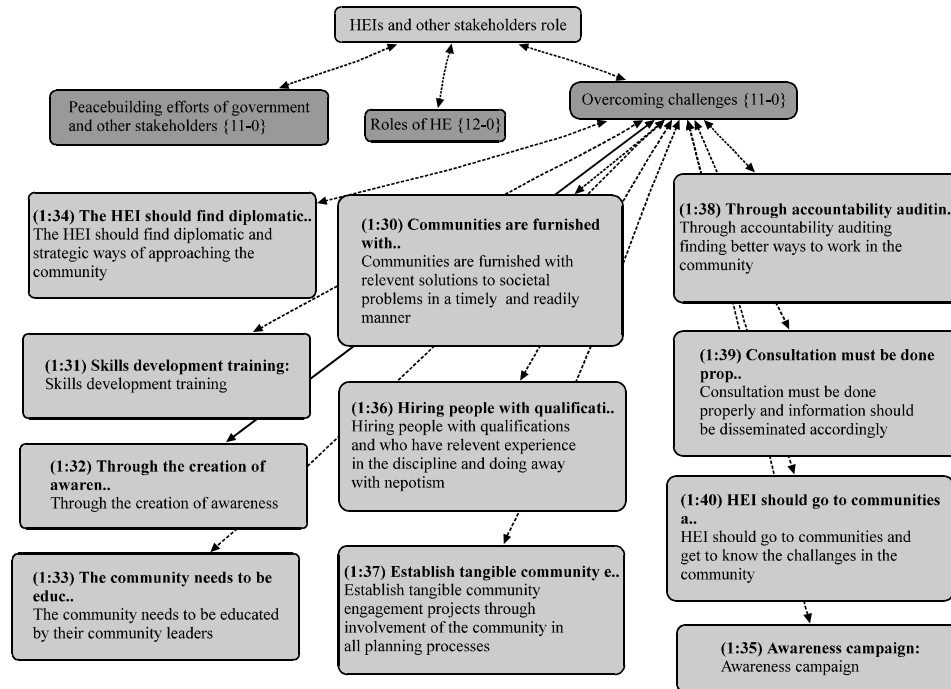
Fig. 6: HEIs and other stakeholder's role in overcoming challenges in peacebuilding
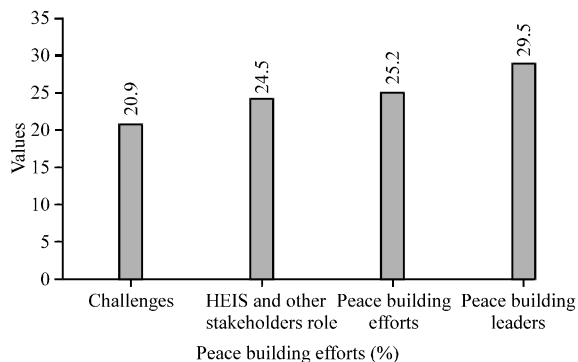
Fig. 7: Level of peacebuilding efforts in the community

as hindrances to peacebuilding efforts in the community. HEIs can improve in their peacebuilding efforts by communicating more with the community to be able to address their needs.

The study revealed that there are a number of peacebuilding efforts that exist in the community but many of these activities are not properly coordinated.

These peacebuilding efforts include Community Policing Forum (CPF), the traditional authority and the civic, law enforcement agents, police stations, community project committee, task team and stakeholder committees. The community is not fully involved in the planning of the government peacebuilding efforts and hence they do not own it putting the sustainability of many of its efforts at risk.

According to Omeje, peacebuilding efforts need to be comprehensively planned, embedded and implemented both within and outside the different levels of the educational sector. Hence, whilst the formal educational sector comprising the primary, secondary and tertiary levels are recognised as key to a vibrant peacebuilding effort, many experts also recognise that in order to register the maximum impact in society, peacebuilding efforts should also integrate the informal and semi-formal training sectors (Haider, 2009). In agreement with this assertion, the study identified various training and workshops that could provide adequate capacity building and skills for leaders of peacebuilding efforts

in the community such as conflict management, mediation, negotiation, leadership and communication skills.

The findings from the study show a number of inadequacies in the programmes offered at the university. Many courses relating to peacebuilding and conflict resolutions are found in what is regarded as social sciences and humanity based faculties (Stiasny and Gore, 2014). They do not fall into the main stream of hard sciences and engineering. This basically puts the categories of students in the hard sciences to be underprepared for peacebuilding efforts in the community. Some of the respondents suggested that all-inclusive participation should be encouraged to expose more stakeholders to conflict related training. The university can at least make some of these courses optional courses for those outside the social sciences and humanity cores.

The study pointed out that peacebuilding efforts should be owned by the community with the support of the government which plays a mediation role from time to time. If conflict issues in the community are left to drag for a long time without being resolved it may lead to the destruction of lives and properties. Peacebuilding efforts is a very sensitive issue and should be given the utmost priority before it escalates beyond control. As we have seen from the study area, unattended conflicts may escalate into arson, looting, killing and a total breakdown of law and order in the community. The leaders in the community have the potential capacity to restore peace if they are giving all the necessary support needed to function in that role. They can also serve as ears to the government and give meaningful advice to douse conflicts in the community. Community-based processes and their participatory community forums can also be used to build social capital in divided societies by providing safe spaces for interaction, communication and joint decision-making (Haider, 2009). Such processes can help to overcome mistrust and set a precedent for a peaceful and constructive management of local disputes.

CONCLUSION

Peacebuilding efforts can be successful with the help and participation of all and sundry and strategic involvement of the grassroots will bring about a long lasting peace in every community. The study shows HEIs as a strategic stakeholder in awareness creation and in building a community of peace builders among the students who will eventually become leaders in their

communities. The curriculum design should speak to this and through conscious efforts connecting with the community to entrench long-lasting peacebuilding efforts among them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The university should be involved with the communication of relevant information, engage with the leaders in the community to know what their needs are. They should provide the solution to societal problems in a readily and timely manner and hire qualified community members and provide scholarship for deserving young people from the community.

The findings from the study show the need for universities to provide the lead as it encourages participation of all students in acquiring knowledge on peacebuilding education. It was observed that courses in social sciences exclude the vast majority of university students in noncognate courses such as the natural and applied sciences from the vital knowledge and skills of conflict-sensitive education and peacebuilding. This is the fact that the students are the future leaders and they live in the community where they will be able to spread the knowledge and understanding about peaceful co-existence among the people.

The university has a pivotal role to play in joining hands with government and the community in directing the peacebuilding lens at all stages of policy and programming to articulate a coherent vision of the role of education in peacebuilding (Alghali, 2009). This could be achieved through research that will bring them closer to the community as they develop programmes that will enlighten the community and improve their standard of living. Short courses on home economics, health and nutrition, safety and security, computer literacy, record keeping and entrepreneurship at a reasonable cost could be of help. The leaders and the HEIs have critical roles to play not only during conflicts but on a regular basis in creating awareness, connecting with the community through participatory research activities, community development initiatives, capacity and skills development programmes in a more sustainable way.

A bottom-up approach as shown in this study requires the involvement of the primary stakeholders in every aspect of peacebuilding efforts of the government for it to be successful. University should work with the government to identify important stakeholders and assigned them to tasks as early as

possible, so as to entrench a lasting peace in a conflict area. The study recommends that community leaders should be trained to be more skilful in their peacebuilding efforts.

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