

Assessing the Effect of Truth-Seeking Initiatives on Post-Conflict Community Coexistence in Isiolo Central Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to find out the influence of truth-seeking initiatives on post conflict community coexistence in Isiolo Central Sub-County, Kenya. A mixed method research design was adopted. The target population for the study was 121,066. Convenient sampling was used to select 399 respondents from the community. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics comprising of frequencies and percentages. Chi-square statistics was utilized in testing the association of the dependent and independent variables. From the findings, it is evident that truth seeking practices have been applied in transitional justice to a great extent. Application of truth-seeking practices has a statistically significant effect on peaceful coexistence of the community. The study therefore recommends that there should be measures for witness protection so to enhance truth telling. This should be through reforming witness protection institutions to enhance their effectiveness in protecting those who come out to disclose the truth.

Key Words: Kenya, Isiolo, truth-seeking, initiatives, peaceful, post-conflict, coexistence, community, peacebuilding

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Introduction

Truth seeking is an approach in transitional justice. Truth-seeking in post-conflict situations enable investigation of past violation of human rights (Owiso, 2021). It is undertaken by truth commissions, inquiry commissions and other missions involved in fact finding. While undertaking truth seeking, core activities include collection of victims' and witnesses' statements, conduction of thematic research such as analysis of violations involving gender and children rights, organization of public hearings and other programmes in awareness creation and publishing of final reports on findings and recommendations (Bisset, 2022). Therefore, truth-seeking aims to unravel the truth under past abuse of human rights while operating under mandates that are narrowly defined.

The search for the truth in post-conflict is critical to facilitating the recognition of victims as well as creating a platform for reconciliation between the victims, witnesses, survivors and the perpetrators. Forgiveness at its minimum can only base at confessions on the part of the perpetrator. Truth promotes respect for individuals and supports their autonomy (Mwonzora, 2021). Mihr (2020) stipulated that the four pillars of transitional justice revolve around knowledge of the truth; in absence of the truth, criminal procedures cannot be initiated or completed. He further noted that only the knowledge of the truth can trigger the reconciliation process but presenting the idea of reconciliation without the truth can be a source of provocation to the protesters. "The truth must first be attained and reconciliation second, because denial and silence increase the community's distrust"

According to Kochanski (2020), truth commissions are established to investigate serious human rights violations, war crimes, or other serious abuses that took place over the years. They aim to identify the causes and consequences of abuses. They provide a forum in which all victims and perpetrators can tell their story and have it publically acknowledged. This is believed to have a cathartic effect on post conflict societies. Truth telling is a key process of healing through social reflection (Niyindora, 2019). In this sense, truth commissions play a role in restorative justice. In this sense, truth commissions are also important for enabling a society to look at its broader illness by highlighting roles that the state and social institutions played in past abuses and the way in which the political, economic and social structures made abuses possible. Truth seeking often proves instrumental in restructuring these institutions to strengthen the rule of law. By documenting atrocities, the commissions also collect and preserve evidence that, under the right circumstances, could be used to prosecute perpetrators (Davis, 2022).

Nevertheless, the contributions and benefits of truth seeking remain underdeveloped and undervalued. However, post-conflict community coexistence has been hampered by unaddressed grievances based on economic underdevelopment, ethnic and religious differences, and constraints in state capacity and lack of political will among other factors in Isiolo Central Sub-County. The concept of truth seeking as an approach in transitional justice is therefore a

necessary step in moving from a divided and painful past to a commonly shared and developed future. This study therefore sought to find out the influence of truth-seeking programmes on post conflict community coexistence in Isiolo Central Sub-County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Truth seeking is expected to bring about peaceful coexistence between and among communities in conflict. However, in spite of its application in communities' post-conflict situations, conflicts have persisted, even more and worse conflicts emerge, thus rendering truth seeking efforts less effective. This is especially true in Isiolo Central Sub-County, where peace has not been fully realized, as evidenced by the recurring inter-communal conflicts relating to ethnic and religious differences, sexual and gender-based violence, land disputes, grazing lands and water for livestock, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, domestic violence, unemployment and economic under-development, gender imbalance and illiteracy among others. Left unaddressed, more loss of lives and livelihoods will upsurge. This has devastating impact on the social, economic, political well-being of the community as well as the state.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess the effect of truth-seeking initiatives on post-conflict community coexistence in Isiolo Central Sub-County, Kenya.

Review of Related Literature

In view of Zvobgo (2020), the history of racial exclusion in South Africa Apartheid led to the establishment of a truth commission early 1990s in order to address longer histories of exclusion and marginalization constructed along fault lines of race, class, ethnicity, religion and gender. Public testimonies from both victims and amnesty applicants were delivered, forgiveness and reconciliation was facilitated. The black South African's testimony-covered on radio and TV-shattered their previously ordained identities as mere labor providers and potential threats to privilege.

Magara (2021) evaluated the peace process in South Sudan and how the timing of truth seeking has been critical towards reconciliation and peace creation in the country. The study found a need for truth seeking in South Sudan. The study established truth seeking to acknowledge wrongs done to victims and a form of recognizing and restoring the victims' dignity. Further, truth seeking in South Sudan enabled injuries' recognition thus acknowledging direct victims' dignity.

In another study, Willems and Deng (2016) studied transitional justice mechanisms in South Sudan. The study demonstrated that close to three quarters of the citizens in South Sudan supported truth seeking. The study found truth seeking as a channel through which South Sudanese would unearth the truth. Further truth seeking was found to guide other initiatives such as prosecutions, accountability and reparations.

Deng (2017) evaluated truth seeking process in South Sudan under the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing and the South Sudan National Dialogue. The study found truth seeking processes to address past conflicts, promote peace and ensure national healing and reconciliation for peaceful coexistence among communities in South Sudan. Specifically, the study found truth seeking process under the South Sudan National Dialogue to focus more on

views collection from the citizens on conflict resolution and one that fostered reconciliation and healing more than the Commission for Truth Reconciliation and healing. Truth seeking process was further found by Deng (2017) to involve conducting of hearings, gathering and analyzing of information from citizens of South Sudan. In addition, truth seeking processes in South Sudan have culminated into national peace conferences with publication of findings and well documented reports.

Solvin (2021) utilized quantitative data from Post Conflict Justice and Uppsala Conflict Data Program to analyze the impact of truth and reconciliation commissions on recurrence of conflicts. A negative relationship was found between establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions with conflict recurrence.

Theoretical Framework

The study applies conflict transformation theory by Galtung (1964). According to Galtung (1964), conflict transformation theory makes distinction of the peace theory; between “negative peace” and “positive peace”, characterizing the former by the absence of direct violence and the latter by the elimination of structural violence and cultural violence. Borrowing from Galtung (2018) view of positive peace, the effectiveness of transitional justice would be determined by the integration of human society. The state and non-state actors and all peace-making, peace keeping and peace building stakeholders must in cooperation and collaboration with the community, not only seek to end direct violence (negative peace), but most importantly aim towards promoting ending indirect violence (positive peace), which is attained through ensuring justice for all. Galtung (1964) developed the distinction between direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence. He submits that we end direct violence by changing conflict behaviours, structural violence by removing structural injustices, and cultural violence by changing attitudes.

Lederach (1997) utilized conflict transformation theory in explaining peace building process. Based on Lederach (1997), peace building process is multifaceted and changes that envision transitioning from war to peace are guided by values based on peace, mercy, truth and justice. Therefore, for peace to exist, transitional justice systems should adopt varying mechanisms with the aim of promoting peace such as truth seeking. The theory broadly supports the study, linking with truth seeking as a transitional justice approach. Truth seeking, when effectively used aim to rapidly influence satisfaction of community needs and largely to promote peaceful coexistence among community members in Isiolo Central Sub-County.

Methodology and Design

The study adopted a mixed method research design. The study was undertaken in Isiolo Central Sub-County, Eastern region of Kenya. The target population of the study was 121,066. Convenient sampling was used to select 399 respondents from the community. A questionnaire was used to collect data. The study generated quantitative data which was analyzed using descriptive statistics comprising of frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistics comprising of chi-square statistics were utilized in testing the association of the dependent and independent variables.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Based on Table 1, 61.1% of the respondents were male; 61.6% were aged between 30-59 years; 47.3% had stayed in Isiolo Central Sub-County for more than 15 years; 89.9% had post-primary level of education while 44.3% had a professional experience of more than 15 years.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	218	61.1%
	Female	139	38.9%
Age Bracket	20-29 years	43	12.0%
	30-39 years	73	20.4%
	40-49 years	77	21.6%
	50-59 years	70	19.6%
	60 years and above	94	26.3%
Duration stayed in Isiolo Central Sub-County	Less than 1 year	12	3.4%
	1-5 years	17	4.8%
	6-10 years	76	21.3%
	11-15 years	83	23.2%
	Above 15 years	169	47.3%
Highest level of education	Primary	36	10.1%
	Secondary	113	31.7%
	College	126	35.3%
	Degree	67	18.8%
	Postgraduate	15	4.2%
Professional experience	0-5 years	47	13.2%
	6-10 years	82	23.0%
	11-15 years	70	19.6%
	Above 15 years	158	44.3%

Source: Field Data (2023)

Extent of Truth-Seeking Practices Application

Respondents were first presented with truth seeking practices and were required to indicate their extent of application in the context of Isiolo Central Sub-County. The findings are as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of Application of Truth-Seeking Practices

	To no extent	To a less extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent
Statements' collection from victims and witnesses	11 (3.1%)	20 (5.6%)	193 (54.1%)	133 (37.3%)
Thematic analysis on gender violations	26 (7.3%)	39 (10.9%)	180 (50.4%)	112 (31.4%)
Thematic analysis on abuse of children rights	27 (7.6%)	48 (13.4%)	170 (47.6%)	112 (31.4%)
Public hearings on conflicts and violation of human rights	4 (1.1%)	13 (3.6%)	188 (52.7%)	152 (42.6%)
Publishing of findings and recommendations	14 (3.9%)	110 (30.8%)	97 (27.2%)	136 (38.1%)

Source: Field Data (2023)

Based on the findings in Table 2, 54.1% (193) of the respondents opined that there was statements' collection from victims and witnesses to a great extent. Also clear from the results is that 81.8% (292) of the respondents indicating that there was thematic analysis on gender violations to a great extent and very great extent. According to 79.0% (282) of the respondents, thematic analysis on abuse of children rights was to a great extent and a very great extent. Further, 85.3% (340) of the respondents indicated that public hearings on conflicts and violations of human rights were conducted to a great extent and a very great extent. On publishing of findings and recommendations, 65.3% (233) indicated it was to a very great extent and a great extent.

Overall application of truth-seeking practices was determined through the use of mean of the responses on extent of application of truth-seeking practices. Further, the mean was then recoded into four categories: less than 1.5 indicated application of truth-seeking practices to no extent, 1.5 to less than 2.5 indicated application of truth-seeking practices to a less extent, 2.5 to less than 3.5 indicated application of truth-seeking practices to a great extent and 3.5 and above indicated application of truth-seeking practices to a very great extent. The findings on overall application of truth-seeking practices are as tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3: Overall Extent of Application of Truth-Seeking Practices

	Frequency	Percent	Measures of central tendency and variance
To no extent	2	.6	. Mean=3.1406;
To a less extent	27	7.6	Median=3.2000; Std.
To a great extent	253	70.9	Deviation=.46815;
To a very great extent	75	21.0	Minimum=1.00;
Total	357	100.0	Maximum=4.00

Source: Field Data (2023)

From the results in Table 3, it is evident that on overall 70.9% (253) were of the opinion that truth seeking practices were applied to a great extent in Isiolo Central Sub-County. On overall, the mean application of truth-seeking practices was 3.14 (standard deviation=0.47) and the median was 3.2. This further confirms that truth seeking practices were applied to a great extent on overall.

Influence of Truth-Seeking Practices on Peaceful Coexistence of the Community

Respondents were further presented with Likert scale statements on influence of truth-seeking practices on peaceful coexistence of the community in Isiolo Central Sub-County. The results are tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4: Likert Scale Responses on Truth Seeking Practices Effect on Peaceful Coexistence

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Strongly Agree
The search for the truth in post-conflict has been critical to facilitating the recognition of victims towards peaceful coexistence	15 (4.2%)	37 (10.4%)	89 (24.9%)	129 (36.1%)	87 (24.4%)
The search for the truth in post-conflict is critical to creating a platform for reconciliation between the victims, witnesses, survivors and the perpetrators for peaceful coexistence	21 (5.9%)	33 (9.2%)	78 (21.8%)	142 (39.8%)	83 (23.2%)
Truth telling is a key process of healing through social reflection	34 (9.5%)	64 (17.9%)	82 (23.0%)	96 (26.9%)	81 (22.7%)
Truth seeking often proves instrumental in restructuring justice institutions thus strengthening the rule of law	37 (10.4%)	51 (14.3%)	83 (23.2%)	105 (29.4%)	81 (22.7%)
Truth seeking contributes to peaceful coexistence of communities	38 (10.6%)	56 (15.7%)	69 (19.3%)	107 (30.0%)	87 (24.4%)
There can be peace without truth seeking commissions	87 (24.4%)	123 (34.5%)	55 (15.4%)	50 (14.0%)	42 (11.8%)
I trust truth seeking commissions in mitigation of post conflict violence	54 (15.1%)	28 (7.8%)	66 (18.5%)	80 (22.4%)	129 (36.1%)

Source: Field Data (2023)

The results clearly demonstrate that a total of 60.5% (216) of the respondents were in agreement that the search for the truth in post-conflict has been critical to facilitating the recognition of victims towards peaceful co-existence. Further, 63.0% (225) of the respondents were in agreement that the search the truth in post-conflict is critical to creating a platform for reconciliation between the victims, witnesses, survivors and the perpetrators for peaceful coexistence. According to 49.6% (177) of the respondents who were in agreement, truth telling is a key process of healing through social reflection. In total, 52.1% (186) of the respondents were in agreement that truth seeking often proves instrumental in restructuring justice institutions thus strengthening the rule of law. Additionally, 54.4% (194) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that truth seeking contributes to peaceful coexistence of communities. It is clear from the results that 58.9% (210) of the respondents were in disagreement that there can be peace without truth seeking commissions. According to 58.5% (209) of the respondents who agreed and strongly agreed, the community had trust in truth seeking commissions in mitigation of post conflict violence.

Post-Conflict Community Coexistence among Community Members in Isiolo Central Sub-County

The dependent variable was peaceful coexistence among community members. Respondents indicated the status of peaceful co-existence among communities residing in Isiolo Central Sub-County and the findings are as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Status of Peaceful Coexistence of Community in Isiolo Central Sub-County

	Frequency	Percent
There is no peaceful coexistence	111	31.1
There is relative peaceful coexistence	154	43.1
There is very peaceful coexistence	92	25.8
Total	357	100.0

Source: Field Data (2023)

From the results in Table 5, 43.1% (154) of the respondents indicated that there is relative peaceful coexistence among communities in Isiolo central Sub-County; 31.1% (111) indicated that there is no peaceful coexistence and 25.8% (92) indicated that there is very peaceful co-existence among communities.

Inferential Statistics on the Effect of Truth-Seeking Practices on Peaceful Coexistence among Communities Residing in Isiolo Central Sub-County

The association between truth seeking practices and peaceful co-existence was evaluated. The independent variable was categorical with the categories being: to no extent, to a less extent, to a great extent and to a very great extent. The dependent variable, peaceful co-existence was also categorical with categories: no peaceful co-existence, relative peaceful co-existence and very peaceful co-existence. Therefore, Chi-Square test of association was utilized in determining whether there is any significant association between truth seeking and peaceful coexistence. The results of the Chi-square test shown in Table 7 indicate a statistically significant association between peaceful coexistence among communities residing in Isiolo Central Sub-County and truth seeking practices.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test Results on the Association of Dependent and Independent Variables

		Status of peaceful co-existence among communities residing in Isiolo Central Sub-County			df	Pearson Chi-Square (P-value)
		There is no peaceful coexistence	There is relative peaceful coexistence	There is very peaceful coexistence		
Overall application of truth seeking practices	To no extent	0	1	1	6	18.810 (p-value=0.0004)
	To a less extent	7	17	3		
	To a great extent	78	102	73		
	To a very great extent	26	34	15		

Source: Field Data (2023)

Discussion

Among the truth-seeking practices applied included collection of statements from victims and witnesses, analysis of gender violence and abuse of children rights, public hearings on conflicts and human rights violations and publishing of findings and recommendations. Further, the study found majority of the respondents being in agreement that truth seeking facilitated victims recognition, created a platform for reconciliation, enabled social reflection and is instrumental in restructuring of institutions of justice. Further, the study found that truth seeking contributed to peaceful co-existence of communities.

These findings align with Owiso (2021) who found that truth seeking in situations of post-conflict enhance investigation of past human rights violations. Through truth commissions, inquiry commissions and other commissions truth seeking involves core activities such as collecting evidence from victims and witnesses, thematic research analysis on violation of human rights for special groups such as women, children, victims of sexual abuse and persons with disabilities. Truth seeking also involves public hearings and publishing of findings and recommendations (Bisset, 2022).

The findings further agree with Mwonzora (2021) who noted that searching for truth after conflict is critical towards enhancing recognition of victims in addition to creating a platform for reconciliation among victims, witnesses, survivors and perpetrators. Further, truth seeking promotes individuals’ respect and supports their autonomy. A study by Mihr (2020) is supported by the findings in the current study where truth seeking triggers the reconciliation process. Mihr (2020) noted that reconciliation idea cannot be presented without knowing the truth as victims would perceive this as provocation. Truth must first be known after which reconciliation process begins since denial would increase distrust in the community.

The findings of the study are in agreement with Niyindora (2019) who stated that the aim of truth seeking is to identify causes and consequences of conflict by providing a platform where victims and perpetrators can share their experience and have it acknowledged in the public. This is believed to have a significant effect on post-conflict societies. Therefore, truth seeking is a key process of healing since it enhances social reflection. Further, the results of the study agree with Davis (2022) who noted that truth seeking is instrumental in restructuring of institutions responsible for strengthening the rule of law. This is achieved through documentation of atrocities, collection and preservation of evidence which at the right time could be used in prosecution of perpetrators.

Truth seeking has a significant effect on the process of reconciliation as noted in this study. These are also the findings in Zvobgo (2020) who examined the process of truth seeking in South Africa's Apartheid rule. The study established that through truth commissions in the 1990s, longer histories of exclusion and marginalization were addressed. Further, public testimonies from victims and perpetrators applying for amnesty were obtained which facilitated forgiveness and the process of reconciliation.

The findings also concur with Magara (2021) who demonstrated that truth seeking has been critical towards reconciliation and peace creation in South Sudan. Magara (2021) further established that truth seeking acknowledges wrongs done to victims and ensured that the dignity of the victims is restored. Willems and Deng (2016) further established that truth seeking promoted reconciliation in South Sudan by guiding other initiatives such as prosecutions, accountability and reparations. Truth seeking was also found by Deng (2017) to address past conflicts, promote peace and ensure national healing and reconciliation for peaceful co-existence among communities in South Sudan. Truth seeking process was further found by Deng (2017) to involve conducting of hearings, gathering and analyzing of information from citizens of South Sudan. In addition, the truth-seeking processes in South Sudan have culminated into national peace conferences with publication of findings and well documented reports (Deng, 2017). The findings of the study however contradict those of Solvin (2021) who established that a negative relationship existed between establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions and recurrence of conflicts in multiple jurisdictions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings, it is evident that Truth seeking practices have been applied in TJ to a great extent. Application of these truth-seeking practices have a statistically significant effect on peaceful coexistence of the community. The study therefore recommends that to enhance truth telling, there should be measures for witness protection. For instance, through reforming witness protection institutions to enhance their effectiveness in protecting those who come out to tell the truth. For example, the Witness Protection Agency of Kenya should be empowered so as to improve its effectiveness and efficiency in the protection of witnesses.

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