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**Gender Mainstreaming and the Promotion of Peacebuilding Initiatives in  
Kakuma Refugee Camp, Turkana County, Kenya**

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The main purpose of this study was to examine how gender inclusion contributes to peacebuilding outcomes in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. The study examined how gender inclusion, economic empowerment, cultural factors, and institutional support contribute to peacebuilding outcomes in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya.

**Material/methods:** The study was based on Social Relations Theory and Conflict Transformation Theory, which explain how gender and inequalities contribute to peacebuilding outcomes. The study used a descriptive survey research design, which combined quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data was collected from 805 respondents using structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify relationships between study variables.

**Findings:** The results revealed that gender inclusion and economic empowerment have a positive and significant effect on peacebuilding outcomes. On the other hand, culture has a negative and significant relationship with peacebuilding outcomes. This implies that the culture of patriarchy is a major obstacle to the inclusion of women, youth and the vulnerable. On the other hand, institutional support had a positive effect on peacebuilding outcomes, although it was challenged by issues of sustainability and donor dependency.

**Conclusion:** From the study, it is evident that gender mainstreaming is essential for effective peacebuilding. However, the potential of gender mainstreaming to bring the much-needed change is limited by the structural and cultural barriers that prevent the effective participation of women.

**Value:** This study has contributed to the existing literature on gender and peacebuilding. It has provided valuable insights on the development of gender sensitive frameworks for peacebuilding.

**Keywords:** Gender mainstreaming, peacebuilding, refugee camps, Kakuma, gender equality, conflict transformation.

**Paper Type:** Research Article

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## **1. Introduction**

Gender mainstreaming is increasingly being recognized as an essential strategy for building and sustaining peace in conflict and humanitarian situations. The idea of gender mainstreaming came into global prominence after the formulation of international instruments such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognize the important role that women play in peacebuilding processes (United Nations, 2000; UN Women, 2015). The instruments recognize the need to integrate gender perspectives into all stages of policy formulation and implementation.

In refugee situations, the need to apply gender mainstreaming is even more evident. Refugee camps have complex social structures characterized by resource constraints and vulnerability. The complex situations in refugee camps have been characterized by persistent conflict risks. In such situations, pre-existing gender inequalities have been evident. The inequalities have limited women's, youth's and the vulnerable access to resources and opportunities for leadership (El-Bushra, 2017; UNHCR, 2022). However, women youth's and the vulnerable have been at the forefront of informal peacebuilding processes.

The Kakuma Refugee Camp is an interesting case for examining the interface between gender mainstreaming and peacebuilding. Since its establishment in 1992, the refugee camp has hosted different categories of refugees from nations that have been affected by prolonged periods of conflict, including South Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The coexistence of these nations in a resource scarce environment has created conditions for tensions arising from cultural differences, resource competition, and historical grievances (UNHCR, 2022; Betts et al., 2021).

Several humanitarian and development agencies have been instrumental in establishing peacebuilding initiatives in the Kakuma Refugee Camp. However, the effectiveness of these peacebuilding initiatives remains in doubt. Although gender mainstreaming is integrated into policy frameworks and program designs, its actual implementation remains wanting in most situations. Women are still underrepresented in formal governance and decision-making structures. Their contributions are limited to informal decision-making and peacebuilding processes. This raises critical questions regarding the actual effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding in refugee contexts (True, 2016; UN Women, 2020).

This study seeks to bridge the gap by conducting an empirical analysis on the impact of gender mainstreaming on peacebuilding in Kakuma Refugee Camp. By examining critical factors such as gender inclusivity, economic empowerment, cultural sensitivity, and institutional support, the study hopes to provide evidence-based findings that can inform policy development and program implementation.

## **2. Theoretical Literature**

The basis of the analysis of gender mainstreaming and peacebuilding is founded on theoretical frameworks that emphasize the need to consider the importance of social structures and power relations in the development and humanitarian field. Social Relations Theory is a critical tool for understanding the inequalities between men and

women and how these inequalities are reflected in institutional and social structures. According to Naila Kabeer, access to resources, opportunities, and power is mediated by social relations, with men having an advantage over women in this case (Kabeer, 1994). In the case of refugees, structural inequalities are likely to be exacerbated by their situations, thus limiting the active contribution of women to formal peacebuilding and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

As a complement to this approach, the Conflict Transformation Theory provides a deeper understanding of the ways and means to achieve sustainable peace through structural transformation. This theory, developed and advanced by John Paul Lederach, goes beyond the conventional approach to resolving conflicts, which often focuses on short term solutions. It instead highlights the need to address the underlying causes of conflicts, including the systemic inequalities and injustices that exist (Lederach, 1997). Under this approach, gender mainstreaming is not just a process but a transformation that seeks to change the dynamics of power relations and exclusion, and promote inclusive participation at all levels of society.

The integration of the above theories provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender equality and peace. It reveals the intrinsic link between the two concepts and demonstrates that peace is not the absence of conflicts but the presence of gender equality.

Achieving lasting peace in refugee environments is characterized by the need to address the issue of gender disparities through the enhancement of resource availability and the empowerment of women in decision-making processes at both formal and informal levels (True, 2016; UN Women, 2020).

### **3. Empirical Review**

#### ***Gender Mainstreaming Concepts and Active Participation in Peace Processes***

Ochieng (2020) researched the status of gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda using a mixed-methods approach to evaluate women's involvement in leadership structures. The study found that while there was nominal awareness and understanding, only 45% of women could explain the operational application of gender in resolving conflicts, while 70% were aware of gender terminology. Gebremariam (2019) also researched and found that in the Mai-Aini Refugee Camp in Ethiopia, while international frameworks such as UNSCR 1325 helped increase female membership in peacebuilding structures to 38%, only 15% of women were holding positions in peace committees, implying that there was a glass ceiling in humanitarian governance. Mukamana and Ingabire (2018), in a stratified survey-based analysis of the Mahama Refugee Camp in Rwanda, found that longer duration of stay correlated positively with gender awareness, as longer staying residents were exposed to more intensive periods of sensitization. In a similar longitudinal case study of East African Refugee Camps, Lischer (2021) found that newly arriving refugees tended to focus on survival needs over other activities and thus exhibited significantly lower levels of peacebuilding conceptual understanding. In terms of Kakuma Refugee Camp specifically, Smith (2020) found that despite intensive NGO led training initiatives, a knowledge gap remains in that 60% of refugees perceive peacebuilding as a male oriented activity. In terms of country specific studies, there are several nuanced factors to consider. For example, in a study of Kenyan host community

residents in proximity to Refugee Camps in East Africa, Mwangi (2022) found that patriarchal values significantly influenced the relationship between training and actual engagement, such that educated women faced more resistance than less educated women.

### ***Women's Leadership in Peacebuilding Committees and Conflict Resolution and Social Cohesion***

Puechguirbal (2010) undertook a study on the impact of the representation of women in the resolution of conflicts in 12 post-conflict zones in the world and concluded that committees that had a higher percentage of women in leadership positions had a 25% higher success rate in de-escalating inter-communal conflicts. Similarly, Anderlini (2007) undertook a qualitative study of various UN peace processes and concluded that the participation of women had a direct impact on social cohesion through the introduction of new relational competencies, thus proving the role of gender diversity in the promotion of peace in the world. Other research studies support these findings. Tripp (2002) undertook a study on African peace initiatives and found that female leadership had a significant impact on the agenda set in negotiations, incorporating the welfare of families and the protection of children in the process. Ahmed and Harper (2021) undertook a study in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh and noted that female led mediation in community dynamics reduced retaliatory actions in the community. Enarson (2007) undertook a study and noted that the introduction of a gender mainstreaming approach in economic initiatives had a significant impact in reducing resource conflicts among the community. Similarly, Zimmerman (2003) noted that the introduction of inclusive decision-making structures in the peace initiatives had a strong correlation with the reduction of Gender Based Violence (GBV). Hassan et al. (2020) noted a significant positive correlation between the planning of infrastructure in the refugee camps in Somalia and the resilience of the infrastructure, suggesting the need for reforms in the systems to reduce the dominance of males in the planning process. Thompson and Ahmed (2018) found that there were long term correlations between the presence of females and the quality-of-service delivery in Sudanese settlements, although there was a lack of directionality in short term data. Valji (2005) found, utilizing a dynamic systems approach to African settings of refugee populations, that gender mainstreaming was key to rapid recovery of the social sphere in comparison to settings where exclusion was prevalent. The meta-analysis conducted by True (2013), which drew on 29 studies, further supported the fact that tokenistic inclusion of women was detrimental to peace processes, while substantive inclusion of women was key to legitimacy and sustainability. Yusuf et al. (2014) found a causal relationship between the exclusion of women and the continuation of the cycle of violence. This further supports the fact that the exclusion of women from peace processes is detrimental to the peace process. Furthermore, the fact that the inclusion of women was found to be most effective with the support of institutional quotas further supports the fact that the tokenistic inclusion of women is detrimental to peace processes. All of the above studies support the fact that the exclusion of women from peace processes is detrimental to the peace process.

### ***Moderating Influence of Sociocultural Norms and Patriarchal Values on the Effectiveness of Gender Mainstreaming Strategies in Peace Processes***

Swaine and Sisley (2007) undertook research on the moderating effect of sociocultural norms on gender mainstreaming effectiveness in 15 humanitarian interventions using regression analysis and found that patriarchal societies negatively moderated the effectiveness of training programs in actual influence for women. Another study by Swiss (2018), using ARDL estimation for Sub-Saharan African refugee camps, found that cultural beliefs negatively moderated the effectiveness of gender sensitive policies, even at high levels of funding. This study also highlighted the need for cultural transformation alongside gender policy. Other studies also support this finding: Nkosi (2016) used panel data for refugee contexts in South Africa and found that cultural resistance negatively impacted gender quotas. Another study by Cislighi and Heise (2019) using normative change models for 175 nations found that cultural gender norms negatively impacted the efficacy of legal reforms by 30%, particularly in traditional societies. Omondi (2020) confirmed the case of Northern Kenya, where cultural factors of male dominance influence the lack of investment in women's leadership and mobility. In the displacement contexts of the Horn of Africa, Kagwanja & Mulugeta (2018) demonstrated the strong relationship between clan-based social hierarchies and the marginalization of women from formal peace structures. Other studies have also demonstrated the universality of the moderation effect. In the Turkana host communities, Vemuru et al. (2016) demonstrated a significant negative relationship between traditional power structures and women's bargaining power, suggesting the need for community dialogue approaches to break the normative resistance. Zinn (2022) also demonstrated the long-term relationship between informal social relations and the failure of formal gender policies, although suggesting the potential of targeted male engagement forums as a mitigant. Liani (2021) has demonstrated the effectiveness of programs based on a social relations approach, as opposed to those failing to consider informal power structures, in the context of East African displacement camps. Further, the meta-analysis study by El-Bushra (2017) on various cases of humanitarian crisis situations showed that the sustainability of programs is always negatively impacted by cultural barriers, particularly in refugee situations that are protracted in nature. The study by Hovil (2018) revealed the causal impact of cultural barriers on the superficiality of peace agreements, thus showing the impact of culture in fostering the issue of exclusion in peace processes. The study by Crawford et al. (2019) on socio-economic challenges in 50 camps showed that the interaction between cultural values and poverty creates a "double burden" on the female population, thus stressing the point that the provision of resources is not the answer in the face of cultural barriers.

### ***Role of Financial and Institutional Support in Enhancing the Sustainability and Effectiveness of Gender Mainstreaming in Refugee Camp Peacebuilding.***

In the study conducted by El-Bushra (2017), the impact of resource availability on the sustainability of gender mainstreaming in 20 conflict zones across the world was analyzed, and the findings indicated that the influence of short-term donor projects on the sustainability of gender mainstreaming practices was negligible. In the study conducted by Hudson (2021), the GMM approach was used, and the findings indicated the influence of the interaction of funding and projects on the sustainability of the capacity of the actors, which resulted from the training programs. These findings were also supported by other studies, as the study conducted by the World Bank (2021) used the panel ARDL approach, and the findings indicated the influence of inconsistent resource allocation on the sustainability of peacebuilding reforms, which was conducted across 81 developing economies. In the study conducted by True & Riveros

(2019), the longitudinal approach was used, and the findings indicated the influence of the project approach on the reduction of per capita peace dividends, particularly in refugee contexts. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) further validated the fact that sporadic attempts to promote empowerment resulted in the curtailment of the formation of social capital and the ownership of the communities. Furthermore, Moser and Clark (2001) found a strong association between the provision of institutional support and the scaling of gender sensitive policies within the Latin American post-conflict zones. Other studies have further emphasized the need to understand the significance of the continuity of resources. KKCF (2019) found a significant negative relationship between the effectiveness of women led initiatives and the short-term nature of the resources provided to the women of Kakuma. O'Reilly et al. (2015) found a long-term relationship between the provision of resources and the internalization of policies, but emphasized the need for resources to be provided alongside technical support. UNDP (2018) found, through the application of a dynamic evaluation model on the humanitarian operations of African nations, that the provision of resources to programs resulted in the development of a robust peace system, as opposed to other nations suffering from aid volatility. Interpeace (2020), through a meta-analysis of 30 peace foundation initiatives, found that the lack of resources resulted in the poor outcomes of gender sensitive initiatives.

Namakula and Witter (2014) established the causal effect between underfunding and the weakening of health and peace infrastructures, thus establishing the causal effect between finance and vulnerability. Grabska (2011), in examining resource inputs in refugee camps for 25 years, established that resource inputs are subject to decreasing returns, where initial resource inputs ensure high returns but decrease rapidly without follow through, emphasizing that institutional quality determines the extent of resource inputs. Overall, these studies established that resource volatility hampers peacebuilding performance in refugee camps by deterring long-term planning, allocating human resources inefficiently, and encouraging inefficiencies in gender mainstreaming.

According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, 2001, behavioral adoption and conceptual understanding require repetitive exposure and practice over time. In the context of refugee camps, this indicates that the longer the duration of stay, the greater the exposure to humanitarian interventions. In this context, Mungai and Wambua's 2023 research, which examined UNHCR's programming in Kenya between 2018 and 2023, found that refugees with longer tenures demonstrated significantly greater levels of conceptual understanding with respect to gender equality. The research found that new arrivals were overwhelmed with meeting their immediate needs, including access to food, shelter, and security, and thus did not have the cognitive bandwidth to engage with complex issues such as gender mainstreaming, unlike long-term residents, who had been repeatedly exposed to NGO forums and peace committees. Similarly, in a comparative study of East African refugee camps, Lischer, 2021, found that camp socialization was critical to civic engagement. Long-term residents were found to have denser social networks and greater familiarity with the humanitarian architecture, thus increasing the likelihood of attending meetings and developing cognitive understanding with respect to peacebuilding.

This is as opposed to new arrivals, who are more on the periphery of community governance. In a study on the diffusion of knowledge in Kakuma, Smith (2020) noted that, although 60% of the new arrivals were unaware of the gender mainstreaming terminologies, the percentage reduced drastically among the populations that had lived in the camp for more than five years, attributing the difference to the exposure of the participants to dialogues from the community as well as radio programs. Other studies have also shown the link between length of residence and community integration. Gebremariam (2019) conducted a study on the Mai-Aini Refugee Camp in Ethiopia, where the findings showed that length of residence had an indirect influence on community integration through social capital. On the other hand, Williams (2017) proved that in Sub-Saharan Africa, newly arriving populations are significantly behind in terms of understanding their rights and protocols. Mukamana and Ingabire (2018), in a study on the Mahama Refugee Camp in Rwanda, proved a positive correlation between the duration of stay and gender sensitive program participation. In other words, long-term residents were more likely to have internalized gender sensitivity due to long periods of sensitization. However, other studies emphasize that long periods of stay are not in themselves a guarantee for internalization. Swiss (2018) proved that in certain camps, long periods of stay led to "norm fatigue" due to overexposure to gender sensitivity. Nevertheless, in active environments such as Kakuma, long periods of stay are a guarantee for a deeper understanding of gender sensitivity. In fact, according to Zinn (2022), long periods of stay in environments such as those in the Horn of Africa are a guarantee for a positive influence on civic engagement, provided that such environments are conducive to a transition from passive observation to active engagement. In conclusion, based on the review of literature on the subject.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

This study used a descriptive survey research design in establishing the influence of gender mainstreaming on peacebuilding initiatives in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Turkana County, Kenya. The reason for using this research design was that it allowed for the collection and presentation of data that would describe and establish the status of gender mainstreaming, its strategies, and outcomes without interfering with the research environment. This research design also helped in establishing relationships and differences in gender mainstreaming while at the same time providing an accurate representation of the research situation as it was in the field. The study was conducted in Kakuma Refugee Camp, which was chosen because of its diverse multi ethnic population compared to other refugee camps in Kenya, thus providing unique challenges and opportunities for research.

The target population for the study was 177,638, comprising refugee women, men, youths, community elders, humanitarian aid agencies, peace building committees, and administrators. The sample size of 805 respondents was obtained using Cochran's formula for a 95% confidence level and a 7% margin of error. Stratified random sampling was used to select respondents from the refugee community to represent different gender and age groups. On the other hand, purposive sampling was used to select key informants from different agencies, such as humanitarian agencies, peace building committees, and government administrators, based on their expertise in peace building initiatives. Structured questionnaires were used for quantitative data collection, while in-depth interview guides were used for collecting qualitative data. The questionnaires and interview guides were pre-tested in Kainuk, Turkana, to check for their validity and reliability.

Quantitative data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to describe the demographic profile of the participants. Additionally, the quantitative data were analyzed using inferential statistics, including Pearson Correlation and Chi-Square, to examine the relationships between gender mainstreaming variables and peacebuilding outcomes, as well as the hypotheses of the study. On the other hand, the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved the process of coding, categorization, and the identification of recurring patterns of cultural norms and institutional support. Data triangulation was used as a means of validation, where the findings of the study were validated using both the quantitative survey data and the qualitative interview data. The study ensured the use of ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

## **5. Results And Discussions**

This section outlines the empirical findings with regards to the impact of gender mainstreaming on peacebuilding initiatives in Kakuma Refugee Camp. The findings will incorporate descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and thematic analyses based on a sampling of 805 respondents, including refugees and institutional actors. The findings will be presented with the intention of addressing the underlying research objectives, including the status of gender mainstreaming, its implications for peace, and the strategies used to promote it. The findings will thus offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of gender on conflict transformation in the refugee camp.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The descriptive statistics of this study offered insights into the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the prevailing state of gender integration within the peace architecture of Kakuma. The gender composition of this study's population was relatively even, as the proportion of female respondents was 52%, and that of their male counterparts was 48%. The duration of stay of the residents in the camp also showed considerable diversity, as 25% of the respondents had been living in the camp for less than five years, 35% had been living in the camp for between six and ten years, and another 40% had been living in the camp for more than eleven years. The diversity of this variable was important in assessing the extent to which the residents had been exposed to humanitarian interventions and how this affected their awareness levels. The level of education of the residents was another variable that showed considerable diversity, as 20% of the population had no formal education, 54% had attained primary or secondary education, and only 15% had attained advanced levels of education.

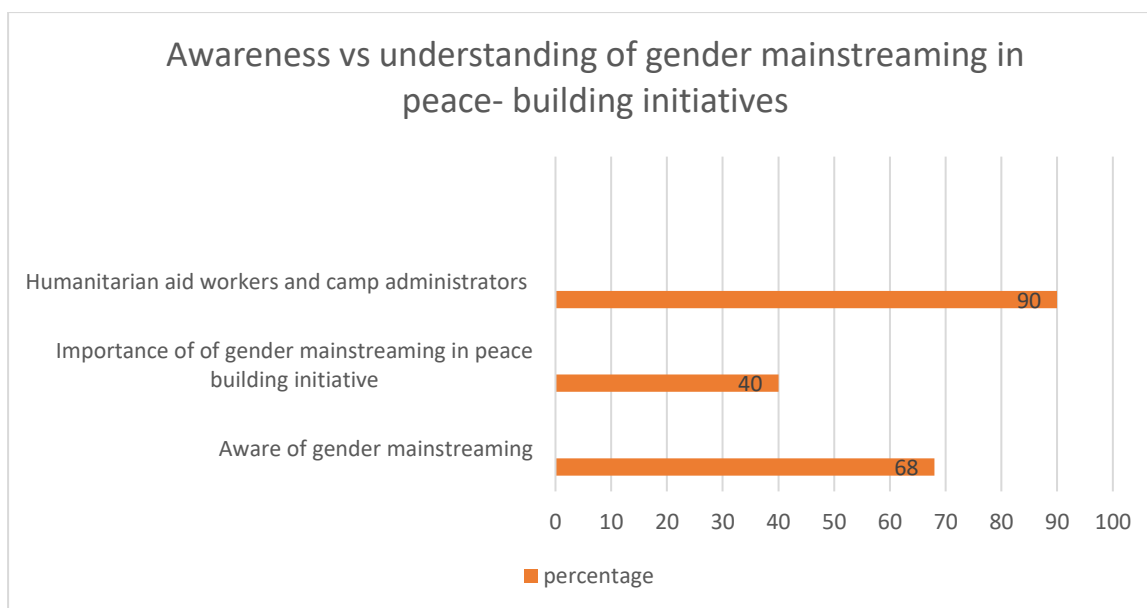
As to the state of gender mainstreaming, statistics showed a significant gap between awareness and understanding. On one hand, a significant number of respondents, 68%, claimed to be aware of the term "gender mainstreaming." On the other hand, only 40% of them were able to define correctly the operational meaning or outcomes of gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding. The gap between claimed awareness and understanding is 28 points. In other words, gender mainstreaming is merely superficially known. Other statistics on representation revealed significant inequalities. For instance, although 35% of peacebuilding committee membership is composed of women, they only represent 18% of the leadership.

**Table1: Gender Representation in Peacebuilding Committees**

| <b>Role</b>                            | <b>Women<br/>(n)</b> | <b>Women<br/>(%)</b> | <b>Men<br/>(n)</b> | <b>Men<br/>(%)</b> | <b>Total<br/>(n)</b> |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Peacebuilding Committee Members        | 14                   | 35                   | 26                 | 65                 | 40                   |
| Leadership Positions within Committees | 7                    | 18                   | 33                 | 82                 | 40                   |

From a strategic perspective, the study established that exposure to gender mainstreaming information was intermittent, with the majority of respondents reporting occasional, as opposed to sustained, engagement, particularly with donor project cycles. With regard to cultural factors, this was established as the main barrier to gender mainstreaming, with 50% of respondents reporting patriarchal values as the main barrier, followed by limited education levels at 30%, and resource availability at 20%. In relation to peacebuilding, while social cohesion was established as being moderate, with an average score, qualitative results established that efficacy was highly dependent on gender balance within the mediating body. Overall, this study has established that while gender mainstreaming has achieved some level of traction in Kakuma in terms of awareness and nominal engagement, it has been hindered by cultural factors, with limited transformative power due to cultural resistance, tokenistic representation, and intermittent resource support.

In order to validate the hypotheses of the study, Chi-Square tests were conducted to evaluate the relationship between categorical variables, such as awareness levels and participation, while Pearson Correlation was used to evaluate the relationship between continuous variables, such as representation levels and efficacy. In the data set, 68% of the participants were aware of the term "Gender Mainstreaming," but only 40% had a substantive understanding of the operational meaning of the term. What the data showed as a critical difference, however, was the level of engagement. Those participants with high levels of substantive understanding, primarily humanitarian workers and leaders of the communities, had a 90% level of engagement in structured peacebuilding activities, such as mediation and leadership of committees. In contrast, those participants with nominal awareness, the majority of the general population, had a passive level of engagement, primarily attending meetings without participating in decision-making.



**Figure 1: Bar chart showing awareness vs. understanding of gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding.**

In cross-tabulation of the awareness levels with personal involvement, the data showed that those who were able to expound on the concept were three times more involved in the volunteer work of peace projects or dialogues than those who were simply aware of the terminology. The qualitative data showed that knowing the word does not mean knowing how to apply it towards peace. The 28% difference between awareness and understanding translated into the difference between personal involvement.

Currently, women leadership structures are at 18% as opposed to 82% of men. However, when women were involved as chairpersons or chief mediators, there were qualitative reports of a marked shift in the way conflict resolution occurred. The key informants characterized these female led forums as "less confrontational," "more empathetic," and "more focused on family welfare and long-term cohesion." The respondents from these communities, which were led by women, reported higher trust levels and experienced a perceived increase in de-escalation of inter-communal tensions by 25% compared to those from communities dominated by male elders, who relied on authoritative decrees. The women leaders were credited with introducing dialogue-based approaches to address the root causes, as opposed to merely addressing symptoms. In contrast, in male dominated committees, respondents reported that decisions were made in haste, but there was no buy-in from all members of society, leading to further conflict. Although the number of female led committees is low due to structural barriers, the performance differential in those that do exist is significant

The study assumed that the deeply ingrained culture would function as a moderating constraint, reducing the effectiveness of the formal strategies. The data unequivocally confirms  $H_3$ . The study found that despite the availability of training programs and the existence of guidelines that mandate inclusion, 50% of the respondents cited cultural norms and patriarch values as the biggest constraint in the participation of women. This is significantly higher than the constraints faced in terms of education, which was 30%,

and resources, which was 20%. The qualitative study showed that even when women are given training in leadership, patriarch values would prevent their exercise of power. The study showed that even though women are included in the decision-making process, the final choice is left to men, as illustrated by the statement that "women are included in the room, but men make the final choice." The data unequivocally shows a negative moderation effect, where the higher the patriarch values, the lower the effectiveness of the gender strategies in terms of actual power and influence. Thus, H<sub>3</sub> is confirmed, and the most significant moderating constraint is indeed the culture of patriarch values. This hypothesis indicated that short-term funding in the form of episodic funding would have a negative impact on the sustainability of peace building outcomes. The results have confirmed this hypothesis quite conclusively. The dominant theme in the qualitative results was the "project cycle syndrome," in which the respondents indicated that "aid programs come and go, but the change is not sustained." Programs that had been initiated as a result of short-term donor funding projects, which had a duration of six to twelve months, showed a significant spike in effectiveness but then a sharp decline in effectiveness as the funding was withdrawn. The programs that had longer-term funding or had a consistent NGO presence showed sustained effectiveness in outcomes, such as the establishment of women's networks and sustained conflict resolution processes. The results indicate a direct and positive correlation between the consistency of resources and the depth of the change in behaviors. The hypothesis that sustained resources are essential for effectiveness is thus confirmed in the results.

The analysis of "Length of Stay" and "Awareness Levels" revealed that there is indeed an increasing trend. The population that had been living in the camp for over 11 years, which made up 40% of the population, had a much higher level of awareness of gender issues than those who had been living in the camp for less than 5 years, which made up 25% of the population. The newer arrivals were more concerned about their basic needs and thus had lower levels of awareness of civic and peace issues. The longer-term residents had been "socialized" into issues of gender through their interaction with NGOs and their access to radio programs and other community dialogues. For instance, 65% of the longer-term residents were able to explain what gender mainstreaming in peace means, compared to only 22% of the newer arrivals. The data thus affirms that length of stay in the camp is positively related to awareness levels and thus confirms H<sub>5</sub>.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study concludes that although the process of gender mainstreaming has created a foundational presence in the architecture of peacebuilding in Kakuma Refugee Camp, the process of moving from a foundational presence to a transformative process is still incomplete. The empirical evidence indicates a critical dissonance between the intention and the reality of the process, as although the knowledge of the concepts of gender is at a moderate level of 68%, the actual understanding is at a low of 40%, thus creating a knowledge action gap in the process. The critical issue of the bottleneck in the process is the 35% numerical representation of the women in the committees and the 18% in the leadership positions, thus illustrating the point that numerical value is not a guarantee of the dismantling of the patriarchal power structures in the process.

The results reinforced that gender mainstreaming is a powerful catalyst for building social cohesion and honing conflict resolution techniques, specifically in relation to building relational skills such as empathy, dialogue, and consensus building. However,

this is subject to significant moderation by deeply seated sociocultural beliefs and practices, which were identified by 50% of respondents as the main barrier to meaningful engagement. Furthermore, the episodic nature of donor funded interventions also acts as a barrier to sustainability, as it creates a cycle of dependency whereby capacity building is compromised as soon as project cycles are completed. As such, sustainable peace in Kakuma cannot be achieved through technical interventions and short-term workshops in isolation. Rather, it requires a holistic approach that works at multiple levels and in multiple ways at once. This research highlights the importance of gender mainstreaming in refugee contexts, not only as a process requirement, but also as a strategic imperative for achieving sustainable peace. The achievement of this, however, will require a shift from the 'add women and stir' approach to a transformative framework that involves men and boys as agents of change, incorporates gender quotas with consequences, and secures long-term financial support for grassroots initiatives. Through the integration of Social Relations Theory and Conflict Transformation Theory, this research suggests that sustainable peace in Kakuma will only be achieved if gender equality is not only reflected in the balance of peace committees, but also becomes part of the social relations and cultural practices of the refugee camp. As such, future research will need to focus on developing adaptations of international policy requirements that address the gap between global and local contexts, ensuring not only the presence of women at the table, but also their active role in setting the agenda for peace.

## **7. Policy Implications**

The implications of this study provide critical evidence-based knowledge that calls for a paradigm shift in the conceptualization and operationalization of gender mainstreaming in the context of humanitarian peacebuilding frameworks, particularly in contexts of protracted refugee situations such as Kakuma. The disconnect between high levels of nominal awareness and low levels of substantive understanding, as well as the significant gap between the holding of women's committee membership and leadership, suggest that current policies may be merely performative. The following policy implications are thus derived to inform UNHCR, the Government of Kenya, and other actors in developing enhanced peacebuilding strategies.

The current policies, which emphasize only headcounts to meet donor compliance, may end up reinforcing patriarchal structures, relegating women to secretarial and advisory positions. The policy frameworks need to shift from soft targets to hard policies and enforceable gender quotas, not only requiring the presence of women, but also requiring minimum percentages of women in positions of leadership, such as Mediators. UNHCR and the Refugee Affairs Secretariat need to institutionalize the requirement of a fifty-fifty rule in positions of leadership in all structures of camp governance, with consequences for non-compliance. The policies need to require substantive participation indicators, including the rate of women led mediations and the inclusion of women proposed items in the resolution, to go beyond mere tokenism. The realization that short-term and project-based funding models cause capacity building to diminish and community confidence to dwindle points to the major problem of the existing humanitarian financial systems. Peacebuilding and cultural transformation are long-term processes that cannot be achieved through short-term projects. Donor agencies and other international partners must transition away from short-term project-based grants that have a lifespan of six to twelve months and into multi-year core grants

that have a lifespan of three to five years and are dedicated to gender responsive peacebuilding. Policies must focus on flexible funding that allows women led organizations within the community to strategically plan and ensure that they have the human resource and mentorship programs beyond the lifespan of the donor project.

Since patriarchal norms were seen as the main obstacle to the participation of women, with half of the respondents citing this as the case, policies that do not consider the socio-cultural setting will be for naught. Technical knowledge will not do much to change existing patriarchal convictions that believe leadership is a masculine domain. Humanitarian policies must incorporate a Gender Transformative Approach, which will include the need to engage men and boys as agents of change. The policies must include the need to incorporate Male Engagement Forums and dialogue with elders and religious leaders to renegotiate patriarchal norms. The policy guidelines must include the need to ensure that all peacebuilding program proposals include a social norms analysis and activities to address cultural resistance, so that gender mainstreaming is seen as a cultural shift and not a women's issue.

The gap between awareness and understanding points to the fact that current sensitization efforts are too basic and focus more on the dissemination of terminology rather than building operational skills. What is required is a standardized competency-based curriculum for gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding, supported by UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior. Training policies should also shift from singular events to more iterative learning cycles, including simulation and mentoring, and follow-up activities. What is also required is the establishment of formal Knowledge Diffusion Mechanisms, such as peer-to-peer educator networks, to ensure that the high levels of understanding that exist in the minds of humanitarian staff are effectively diffused down to the community level, bridging the gap between elite and popular understandings.

This study shows that there is a lack of good data on the quality of women's participation. Most of the monitoring is quantitative in nature and focuses on the number of trainings that have taken place or the number of women who have attended. The policy guidelines need to ensure that Monitoring and Evaluation systems are revamped to ensure that qualitative changes and relational changes are taken into account. Agencies need to be made to collect and report data on the influence of women in terms of decision-making, control of resource allocation, and success rates of conflict resolution for both women and men. The establishment of Gender Audits that take place every year and are conducted independently can help to ensure that the institutions are made accountable for delivering peace dividends.

The fragmented approach by different NGOs and the disconnect between international policies and ground realities point to the need for greater coordination. A Unified Gender and Peacebuilding Task Force consisting of UNHCR, Refugee Affairs Secretariat, NGO consortiums, and elected refugee representatives with assured female leadership should be set up to ensure greater coordination and harmony between different entities. The policy should ensure that all peacebuilding initiatives are co-designed with local structures in the community to ensure greater cultural appropriateness. This collaborative approach to governance will ensure that there is no duplication of work, all entities are sending consistent and cohesive messages, and there is a sense of shared responsibility for gender-sensitive peace.

By adopting these policy implications, the stakeholders will be able to move from a compliance-oriented gender mainstreaming approach to a transformational

peacebuilding approach. This is critical not only for ensuring the rights of refugee women in Kakuma refugee camp but also for achieving a lasting, inclusive, and sustainable peace for all in the refugee camp.

### **8. Further Research Recommendations**

Though this study has been instrumental in yielding valuable insights into the nature and nuances of gender mainstreaming and peacebuilding in Kakuma Refugee Camp, there are certain aspects that are under explored and need to be explored in more depth by other research scholars in order to gain more in-depth knowledge about these complex interactions. Future research in this area should focus more on conducting in-depth research into the cultural nuances and traditional belief systems that are still impeding gender mainstreaming in this refugee camp. A qualitative ethnographic research study could be conducted to explore in depth the nuances and interpretations of patriarchal societies and cultures among different ethnic groups.

There also exists a critical need for specific research on the perceptions, attitudes, and involvement of men and boys in the process of gender mainstreaming. Men are the majority holders of leadership positions, thus gatekeepers of women's involvement. It would, therefore, be essential to understand men's perceptions of gender equity, men's fears of the shifting balance of power, as well as men's potential as allies. Such a study, based on the theme of men's engagement, could help identify the best ways of changing men's identity, thus creating a conducive environment where men actively support the involvement of women, rather than simply tolerating it. This would fill the existing gap in the literature, which has primarily focused on women's experiences without any reference to the male side of the gender equation.

Moreover, there is a need to conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term sustainability of gender mainstreaming interventions. This is because most humanitarian interventions are implemented on a short-term basis due to the nature of donor funding. As a result, little is known about the long-term impact of gender mainstreaming interventions on the sustainability of peace dividends. It would be invaluable to monitor the dynamics of gender and peacebuilding over a period of ten to fifteen years to establish the long-term sustainability of gender mainstreaming interventions. This would help policymakers and donors to invest in interventions that yield long-term peace dividends.

Lastly, further studies need to be conducted on the interlinkage of gender identity with other minority groups, such as the disabled, the aged, and the LGBTQ+, within the framework of peacebuilding structures in the refugee camp. This current research was mainly focused on the duality of men and women, but the disabled, the aged, and the LGBTQ+ have additional layers of exclusion that are often invisible to the lens of gender identity. Studying the interlinkage of gender identity with other minority groups would be a major focus of future studies on peacebuilding and would be a major contribution to the development of global standards on inclusive peacebuilding and a major lacuna to be filled in the current knowledge on the management of refugee camps.

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