



KENYA'S PEACEFUL REFERENDUM AND CHALLENGES FOR THE 2012 ELECTIONS

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A Short Background

The violence that followed the 2007 general elections came as a surprise to the local people and the international community. It destroyed economic structures, in turn hindering the country's economic growth. The impact on the people of Kenya was severe with an estimated 1,000 deaths and 350,000 IDPs.

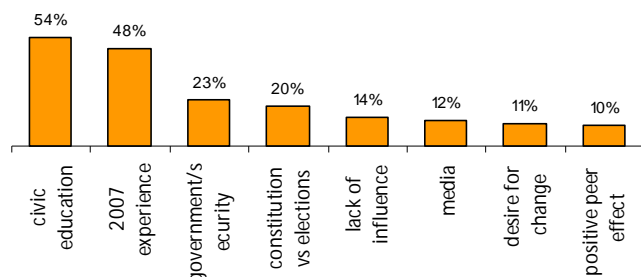
The Post Election Violence (PEV) lasted 32 days before fading away mainly due to the intervention of external forces such as the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who brought the two sides to the negotiating table. On February 28 2008, the National Accord and Reconciliation Act was signed, establishing the office of Prime Minister and creating a coalition government.

A new constitution was passed and promulgated in a peaceful referendum last August despite initial fears by some that it could trigger a new wave of unrest in the country. Kenyans voted in large numbers and overwhelmingly in favor of the new constitution.

COPA's research project: 'Kenya's Peaceful Referendum and Challenges for the 2012 Elections' identifies the reasons why violence was prevented during the referendum, based on the views of a sample of community members and IDPs in areas affected by violence as well as members of CBOs. The study further attempts to identify the potential challenges for the 2012 general elections and highlights some of the interventions that need to take place to ensure peace in the country.

The study summarises the views of 163 individuals affected directly or indirectly by the PEV from different communities on why the referendum was peaceful. It was carried out in areas around Eldoret (Timboroa, Kesses, Kapteldon, Burnt Forest), Mount Elgon (Kopsiro and Chwele), Nakuru and Kiambu.

Graph: Factors which contributed to the peaceful referendum, % of respondents



Civic Education Matters

The graph presents the main reasons for the peaceful referendum according to the individuals' responses. The role of civic education, the painful 2007 PEV experience, and the fact that this was a referendum for a new constitution and not an election are amongst the most prominent reasons for a peaceful referendum according to the respondents. As the majority of the people interviewed have received civic education, more than half of the respondents i.e. 54%, referred to it as being an important tool for peace and thereby one of the major factors which contributed towards the peaceful referendum.

The 2007 Experience and the Personal Choice to stay in Peace

The personal choice of Kenyans to remain in peace and in cases urge others to do so was highlighted. This has undoubtedly been influenced by the experience of the 2007 PEV loss and survival. This experience is still very much engrained in the minds of people and there seems to be recognition that what happened must not be forgotten; it must remain as a collective scar on the public conscience to prevent repetition. The trauma from 2007 had also made Kenyans less prone to manipulation. Accounts include that: "In 2007 Kenyans lost a lot... After that we realised we were the losers because the people who made us fight were safe somewhere else. People learnt from that experience" (Kapteldon respondent). Similar responses implied an increasing distrust of politicians.

Furthermore, experiences of 2007 also influenced the positive peer effect demonstrated in respondent's accounts (10%). This includes accounts given of neighbors from different ethnic groups reassuring and offering protection to each other in the event of violent outbreak following the referendum. These ethnicity-transcending acts of kindness are surely a symbolic positive for the future. Engaging such people into civic education in training or similar capacities should be explored as a peace-building initiative.

It is particularly interesting that positive peer effect as well as personal choice following 2007 PEV memories were given by respondents as being important factors for a peaceful referendum. This demonstrates that people were able to exercise their own agency in determining their actions regardless of external influences.

Referendum vs Elections

20% of the people denoted as a major reason for peace the fact that this was a referendum for a new constitution and not an election involving politicians. As one person stated: "The referendum was about the people, the elections are about the government and the politicians" (Kiambu respondent).

Role of the Government

The positive role of the government in keeping peace during the referendum was also mentioned. References were made to the presence of heavy security in risk areas and the Peace Committees. In addition, the fact that most of the government was united after the integration of different sides following the 2007 experience was held by some to be significant.

Challenges for 2012

The combination of different factors contributed towards a peaceful referendum in 2010. However, respondents do not expect peace to automatically occur in 2012. Nearly 2/3 of respondents are afraid of a potential PEV in 2012 compared to less than 1/3 fearful of referendum related violence. This in itself is not necessarily negative as it shows that respondents are aware of work needing to be done to maintain peace.

Continuous Civic Education

Civic education has since the PEV of 2007 played an essential role in maintaining peace in the 2010 referendum, according to the respondents. They therefore hold its continuation as being an important determinant of peace for 2012. However, it is important that civic education will continue immediately: "The problem with Kenya is that we wait until the last minute to do something. But in 2012 we should be very serious; civic education should start now to ensure peace in 2012" (Nakuru respondent). Widespread civic education from the bottom up has a role to play, making people aware of what different political parties represent, empowering them to make an informed decision whilst voting.

Empowering Individuals and Connecting Communities

One of the recurring themes in responses throughout the interviews was the notion of empowerment. This included individuals being empowered to stay in peace, whether through civic education or the raw memories of 2007 violence. Issues of unemployment and poverty seem to be particularly sensitive regarding future peace: "Youth need to be empowered and get jobs so as to have to lose things. If we don't have anything to lose then we can do anything. If all sides lose by fighting each other then we will not fight." (Kapteldon respondent). One participant mentioned the example of a joint project between members of two historically conflicting communities and the positive outcomes this is having in the relationship between them. If more communities were to engage in similar mutually beneficial initiatives then there would potentially be less incentive for people to engage in violence.

Continuous Research

This research covers only a small area both geographically and in terms of sample size and does not claim to be representative of the total population. Considering the fluidity of the situation, more in depth research which will cover a broader area is essential so as to better capture the current dynamics as well as perceptions and attitudes of the people. This will enable international institutions and the civil society to increase their understanding of the situation and decide upon appropriate and timely interventions so as to ensure sustainable peace in the country.