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## Organizational Actors and Conflict Management in Rwenzori Sub-Region of Uganda

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### Abstract

This study examined the application of track two diplomacy in the management of the age long conflict in Rwenzori sub-region of Uganda. Specifically, it investigated the role and participation of organizational actors comprising of CSOs, media and academia in the management of the conflict in the Rwenzori sub-region of Uganda. The study was guided by the Conflict Management Model by Thomas & Kilmann, (1974), the descriptive case study design was adopted and a mixed method approach was used in data collection. The study population was 1,022,029, from which a sample size of 384 respondents were determined using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size computation table. In addition, 15 key informants purposively selected by the researcher provided qualitative data, which was used to compliment the quantitative data. The study findings reveal that organizational actors particularly, CSOs and the media played a proactive role in managing the conflict. Notably, the media maintained an objective reportage of the conflict situation and engaged opinion leaders to give perspectives on how to resolve the conflict, which was crucial in de-escalating the conflict. Similarly, CSOs supported the affected community members with basic needs and kept communication widows open, which fostered mediation and reconciliation. Though the academia are required to provide empirical assessment of the conflict and proffer viable solutions, they were barely engaged in managing the conflict, which may impact negatively in achieving a long lasting the peace in the sub-region.

**Keywords:** Conflict management, Peace building, Rwenzori Sub-region, Multitrack diplomacy

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## 1. Introduction

Rwenzori sub-region in Western Uganda has had one of the longest regional conflicts in Uganda, primarily caused by the quest for self-governance among the different ethnic groups that make up the sub-region (Reuss & Titeca, 2017). The earliest ethnic conflict in the region can be traced to 1820 when Olimi Kaboyo the eldest son of the king of Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom (Kyebambe III) made a declaration to secede and establish his own kingdom (Bayanda, 2015). This action is believed to have triggered a conflict between the Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom and the Toro kingdom with its allies; Bamba and Bakonzo tribes.

In 1900, the agreement signed between the British and the Toro kingdom saw the expansion of the Toro kingdom to cover the territories of the Bamba and the Bakonzo. While these two tribes put up resistance to a perceived cultural assimilation, the resistance was defeated following the arrest and execution of its leaders in 1921 (Madinah, 2018). The conflicts between the Bakonzo and Bamba against the Batoro continued to the 1966 following abolition of traditional cultural institutions by Dr. Apollo Milton Obote.

In 2012 a new conflict emerged between the former allies the Bamba and Bakonzo following the growing quest for separation

of traditional cultural jurisdictions. The clashes between the two tribes led to mass bloodshed, a situation that warranted state intervention. The diplomatic and military based state intervention in the ethnic conflict between the Bamba and Bakonzo in 2015 created a new twist in to the conflict. The state was accused of partisan intervention and as such the conflict mutated from an ethnic to an ethnic- civil unrest.

At the height of the three-sided conflict involving the state, Bamba and Bakonzo, the state accused King Charles Mumbere of grooming and financing a rebel group within his Rwenzururu kingdom known as Kirumira Mutima (Bayanda, 2015). Consequently, on 26 November 2016, government forces attacked the kingdom's office of the prime minister, killing at least 8 people. Later that day, community members clashed with the police and at least 14 police officers and 32 civilians died in the attacks (Bayanda, 2015). The army responded the next day by raiding the palace of King Charles Mumbere. during the raid, they arrested the king and over 180 others present within the palace premises (Madinah, 2018). According to Human Rights Watch (2017), at least 153 people, including children died during these clashes, King Mumbere was arrested and charged with treason among other

charges. Following the arrest, King Charles Wesley Mumbere remained in detention until 13 June 2023, when the Director of Public Prosecutions Jane Frances Abodo withdrew charges against him and his subjects (The Independent, 13 June 2023). The Rwenzori sub-region is therefore in a crucial state that requires a review of the role played by different actors in managing the conflict. Consequently, the study focuses on the role and participation of organizational actors in managing the conflict.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The Rwenzori sub-region is endowed with diversified riches in natural resources: fertile land, minerals, forestry and wildlife. Its unique geographical position makes it an access corridor to most countries of the African Great Lakes region, providing significant potential for national development, regional cooperation and economic integration. However, the sub-region has intermittently witnessed violent conflicts that have persisted since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Madinah, 2018). The dynamics of the conflicts in the sub-region have transcended from ethnic conflicts between the Bamba, Bakonzo and Batoro to a violent political confrontation between the Rwenzururu kingdom loyalists and the government of Uganda (Kagenda, 2014).

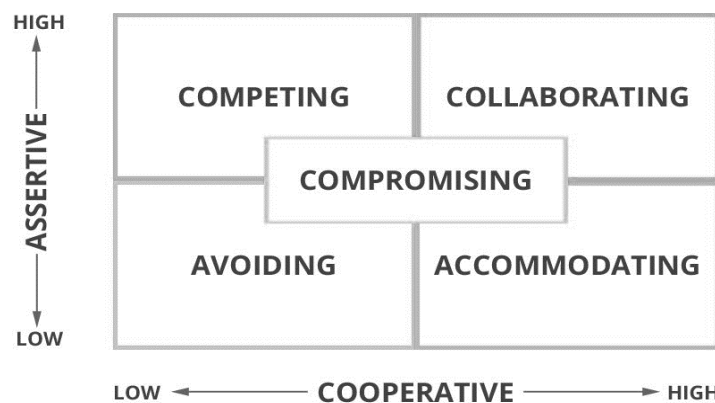
In spite of previous peace initiatives by the government, such as the use of the armed forces, establishment of commissions and board of inquiries to investigate the conflicts and proffer viable solutions to end a reoccurrence, the conflicts in the Rwenzori sub-region continue to relapse (Khisa & Rwengabo, 2022). The recurrence of the conflict has continued to negatively impact on social cohesion, economic productivity and political stability among the different ethnicities in the sub-region (William, 2020). Consequently, the conflict has resulted in poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, teenage pregnancy and deadly hostilities in the sub-region (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Available empirical studies on the management of the conflict focus primarily on the role of state actors: the deployment of security forces, interventions by government representatives, and top district political leaders such as MPs and District Resident Commissioner (RDC) in managing the conflict, thus neglecting the role of non-state actors. The study therefore, examined the role, participation and potentials of organizational actors in managing the conflict in the Rwenzori sub-region.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by the Conflict Management Model developed by Thomas and Kilmann (1974). The conflict management model holds that the parties in a conflict situation may either choose to remain assertive or become cooperative in the conflict. Assertiveness is the degree to which a party to a conflict tries to satisfy

his or her own needs, while cooperativeness is the degree to which a party to a conflict rationally considers the concerns of the opponent (Thomas and Klimann, 1974). The model presents five strategic approaches that could be adopted in the management of a conflict, as illustrated below:

**Figure 1: Conflict management approaches**



The model explains the choices that people make about how assertive or cooperative they will be in a conflict situation ranging from competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating (Zakaria & Lazim, 2018). These five strategic approaches are thus evaluated to give a clearer perspective of their role in conflict management.

- i. **Avoiding:** this is when either parties or one party recognizes the existence of the conflict but avoids

confrontation. This strategy has commonly been adopted and used by parties of unequal power relation, for example between workers and their employers, children and their parents, governments and its subjects. While this strategy is fair enough in maintaining peace in a short run, it leads to continuous buildup of tensions, which may lead to unexpected out bursts and sporadic eruption of a violent conflict.

- ii. Competing: this is also known as the win-lose approach to conflict management. Parties in a conflict that adopts this strategy are excessively assertive rather than cooperative, usually they have one goal, which is to win at the expense of the other party. These group of people are not cooperative at any given level, they are unrelenting and are willing to crush any obstacle that may be perceived to create blockage on their path of winning. The competing approach is most often than not used by parties who believe they have more power to counter any alternative force from their opponent. The parties who use this approach believe giving up or sitting down for negotiation is a sign of weakness. This approach has been used extensively in the ethnic and political related conflicts. This approach unfortunately has far reaching negative consequences in a conflict and reduces chances of effective and peaceful management of an active conflict.
- iii. Accommodating: the approach involves a high degree of willingness to cooperate with the other party in order to salvage a relationship even when the other party is on the offensive. People who are accommodative are willing to let down their guard, neglect their own concerns to satisfy the interests of the other party as a way to ensure peace. They voluntarily give in during a conflict, they choose to bear the pain so that the other party attains the peace, in accommodating strategy, one party may have to work against their own goals and objectives to reach a desired outcome. Comparable to “avoiding”, one party giving in to the other party’s course of direction does not always lead to a satisfactory resolution to an issue, and leaves the door open for more assertive members of the group to take control. While this approach is key in preserving relationships, it’s an exploitative approach especially to the accommodative party and such strength can easily be perceived as a weakness. Failure to balance this approach with others may over time lead to highly regrettable negative outburst. This conflict management style is also known as the lose - win approach.
- iv. Collaborating: this is when parties to a conflict are willing to work

together to identify underlying concerns of the conflict and generate solutions that will help in the mitigation of the conflict. Both parties are usually highly assertive but very cooperative. This approach has and continues to be used in management of protracted armed conflicts and in the management of ethnic conflicts as it paves the way for mediation and reconciliation. The collaborative approach is also known as the win-win approach through which every party walks away contented with the outcomes of the agreed positions.

- v. Compromising: this is a give and take style where parties mutually agree on solutions that partially satisfy both sides. The concept here is that each party to a conflict gives up something so that no party gets or loses everything. This approach is always used when each party to a conflict is unwilling to let go of their position, but for the sake of peace they choose to find a middle ground that does not necessarily address their full expectations, but provides a certain level of relief. This approach is also called a lose-lose situation.

Given the above review, the conflict management model is relevant to the study as it suggests how these approaches can influence the escalation or de-escalation of a conflict. Therefore, the model will be used to assess plausible conflict management mechanisms and strategic approaches that are in place in managing the conflict in Rwenzori sub-region.

#### **1.4 Literature Review**

Organizational actors are part of track two diplomacy approach in conflict management, which was formulated by Joseph Montville in 1981 as an “umbrella term” encompassing a broad range of “backchannel diplomacy” and interactions between private citizens or groups of individuals, sometimes called “non-state actors” aimed at resolving conflicts (Naidoo, 2000). Over the years, the term has come to be used to refer to not only the actors alone, but the processes and mechanisms used by all actors including the civil society, media, academia, businesses, experts and CBOs outside the official state actors. Basically, track two diplomacy involves unofficial, non-structured interaction that is usually open minded, often altruistic, and strategically optimistic, based on best case analysis. Its fundamental assumption is that actual or potential conflict can be addressed by

appealing to human capabilities of rationality and reasonableness (Davidson and Montville, 1981-1982).

According to Davidson and Montville (1981), there are two basic processes in track two diplomacy. The first process consists of the task of bringing members of conflicting groups together to enhance personal relationships and develop a sense of empathy by understanding the conflict from the perspective of others, which then helps to develop joint strategies for solving the conflict. The second process involves working to shift public perception, by reducing the sense of victimhood and guilt among the parties and instead reshape the emotions of the adversary (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, and Gundar, 2009). Track two diplomacy bridges the narrow power-based approaches of traditional diplomacy by replacing nation states, as the primary referent of conflict, with other stake holders of interest (Kaye, 2007). Thus, instead of negotiations centering around the strategic interests of states - represented by state officials, track two diplomacy seeks to include all parties to the conflict. As noted by Havermans (1999), while track two diplomacy is basically a process of developing mutual understanding between larger interest groups in a conflict, track one diplomacy

tends to limit its focus to the narrow participation of politicians acting on behalf of the state.

Track two diplomacy focusses on making an impact on the fabrics of the society through a comprehensive involvement of parties in all levels of the society, rather than inspire politicians to make decisions based on rational evaluation of options and interests of the state, which is the hallmark of track one diplomacy (Jones, 2015). Notably, track two diplomacy is not a replacement of track one, rather it is intended to complement the track one approach. The paramount consideration of track-two diplomacy as against track one is that it has a greater scope for mediation through the participation of diverse actors – such as religious leaders, traditional rulers, academia and opinion leaders as third parties and peace facilitators, particularly where these actors are not parties to the conflict (Abdulrahman and Tar, 2008).

Unlike in track one diplomacy where the agenda is motivated by strategic interest, in track two diplomacy the agenda is set purely by basic human needs (Diamond and McDonald, 1996). Contrary to track one diplomacy that is dominated by state officials representing state interest and usually dominated by males, track two

encompasses diversity with women and young people actively involved, as well as scholars and practitioners. Track two diplomacy is characterized with the development of the framework, ideas and political conditions conducive for mutually respected negotiations (Kelman, 2002). Thusly, the involvement of different levels of stakeholders improves communication between conflicting parties and among mediators, which provides the enabling environment for a mutual agreement to be reached.

For example, the media is considered one of the most powerful tools that shape public perceptions within the society. The role played by the media in conflicts has been a public discourse all over the world, however despite media influence on public opinion, researchers are yet to agree on the degree and magnitude of its influence in conflicts (Kuusik, 2010). In time of conflict or prior to the escalation of conflict, free, independent and pluralistic media can provide a platform for debate, dialogue and sharing diverse opinion (Wolfsfeld, 2004). On the other hand, media can be misused for propaganda purposes, to incite hatred and spread rumors and therefore artificially create tensions and escalate conflicts (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Similarly, lack of information can

at any stage of a conflict make people desperate, restless and open to manipulation. Thus, it is crucial that the media provides information that helps the population to make informed decisions that strengthens societies, foster economic growth, democratic structures, peaceful coexistence and a positive outlook on the future. It was on this premise that the United Nations Millennium Declaration stressed the need “to ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information” (United Nations General Assembly (2000).

In times of conflict, the media is expected to disseminate information, but also counter hate-speech and create an environment of balanced opinions, or a platform for information equilibrium (Koven, 2004). For the media, it can be problematic to find a balance between preventing harm caused by speech and protecting individual expression. Being able to find this balance, however is important especially in conflict situations. To manage a conflict properly, society needs access to news and information; analysis of the status quo, debate, practical information and exchange as well as entertainment, which are provided by the media (Maweu, 2021). The fact that most



contemporary conflicts have governance and not territorial reasons makes the media to be a very important tool of conflict management. This is because parties in most contemporary conflict are often concerned with making sure that the majority of people are on “their” side, which bears a lot of potential for misrepresenting facts and trying to seize control over the distribution of information (Kuusik, 2010). For this reason, the distribution of unbiased information by the media is important not only for the observing public, but also for the people directly affected. Therefore, the media both international and local are vital in conflict management (Kuusik, 2010).

Similar to the media, the academia plays a key role in conflict management by undertaking research on the dynamics of a conflict. In addition, they offer conflict resolution training that helps individuals and groups to manage or resolve conflict situations within or between groups (Pearce & Littlejohn, 2005). Conflict training usually focus on skills that include: negotiation/mediation, dialogue, third party presence techniques, and non-violent intervention (Crawford & Bodine, 1996). In times of conflict, academicians can play a vital role of mediation and negotiation in certain

circumstances and arbitration in some other time to resolve a conflict. In situations where a conflict escalates into violence, the academia as a third force, can intervene by organizing peace marches, sensitization and use other intervention techniques to avert the conflict from further deterioration (Ross, 2000). Moreover, the academia has much to do when it comes to conflict research. Research in this case has a wide range of activities that include exploring the root causes, forecasting future conflict, which the academia handles (Powell & Maoz, 2014). Also, empirical research is needed to validate the effectiveness of different conflicts resolution approaches, document and archive case studies, determine sensitive areas of conflicts and evaluate the impact of traditional conflict resolution methods on conflict management (Tongeren, 2000).

Conclusively, organizational actors undertake a variety of diplomatic efforts to advance peace in a conflicting society. Usually, they employ diplomatic efforts, such as mediation, on the premise that conflicts cannot ultimately be managed or resolved except by engaging the disputants themselves (Enuka & Nwaigbo, 2016). By focusing on bringing parties in dispute together when they otherwise might not

negotiate with one another, organizational actors play a crucial role in conflict management.

### **1.5 Methodology**

The descriptive case study design was adopted for the study. The design was preferred for the study because it helped the researchers to: i). define the real narrative of the conflict situation in the Rwenzori Sub-region of Uganda. ii). identify and describe the important actors and stakeholders involved in the conflict and their actions, thoughts, and opinions. iii). evaluate the main actors' perceptions of the conflict, the solutions they considered, the solution they chose, the process of implementing it, the results, and the current status of the conflict. iv). offer analysis and evaluation of the chosen solution, its implementation, and the outcomes. Given the nature of the study and the intricacies of the study variables, the study adopted a mixed method approach in data collection.

A sample size of 384 respondents were drawn from the study population, based on

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size computation table. Accordingly, 384 respondents were administered survey questionnaires, while another 15 key informants purposively sampled by the researchers were interviewed. Survey questionnaire were used to collect quantitative data, while key informant interviews were used to elicit qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected through randomly selected respondents, while qualitative data were collected from purposively selected actors and stakeholders (key informants). Furthermore, quantitative data were analysed using regression analysis, while the response rate per district were presented using graphs. Similarly, qualitative data were analysed using the content analysis method.

### **1.6 Findings**

The study aimed to analyze the role and participation of organizational actors in the management of the conflict in the Rwenzori sub-region of Uganda. The findings are presented below:

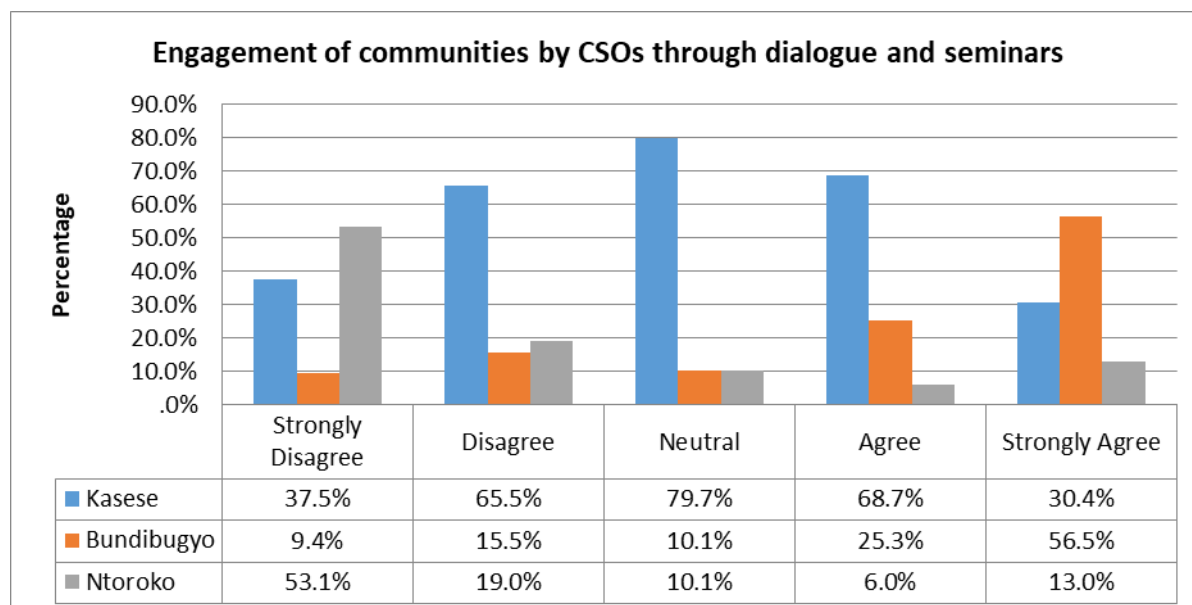
**Table 1: Participation of organizational actors**

Role of organizational actors	Level of Agreement/Disagreement					Mean $\mu$	SD
	SD Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	N Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	SA Freq (%)		
Civil society organizations (CSOs) have reasonably engaged communities through dialogue and seminars on the peace process	32(9.0%)	150(42.3%)	69(19.4%)	58(16.3%)	46(13.0%)	2.82	1.198
CSOs have visibly engaged in peace campaigns to end the conflict	26(7.3%)	148(41.7%)	81(22.8%)	54(15.2%)	46(13%)	2.85	1.167
Universities and other research professionals were significantly engaged in the peace process.	99(27.9%)	82(23.1%)	106(29.9%)	54(15.2%)	14(3.9%)	2.44	1.161
The media houses were objective in their reportage of the conflict	25(7.0%)	50(14.1%)	54(15.2%)	100(28.2%)	126(35.5%)	3.71	1.275
Media reportage of the conflict contributed to the de-escalation of the conflict.	27(7.6%)	39(11.0%)	70(19.7%)	127(35.8%)	92(25.9%)	3.61	1.198
<b>Grand mean</b>						<b>3.086</b>	<b>1.1998</b>

From the Table 1 above, 29.3% of the respondents agree that the civil society organizations (CSOs) reasonably engaged communities through dialogue and seminars on peace process, 51.3% disagree with this view. On whether the academia played a role in managing the conflict and the peace process, the finding revealed that 57.8% of the respondents held the view that the academia was not engaged in managing the conflict. Also, 63.7% of the respondents agree that the media played a

positive role in managing the conflict. It was found that the media were objective in their reportage of the conflict in the Rwenzori sub region. 61.7% of the respondents were also in agreement that the media played a significant role in de-escalating the conflict. To provide a clearer picture of the answers received per district covered, a graphical representation of the answers elicited from the respondents are presented and discussed below.

**Figure 2: Showing the level of agreement on whether Civil society organizations (CSOs) reasonably engaged communities through dialogue and seminars on the peace process**



The figure above shows how respondents from the different districts that were covered in the study responded to the question of whether Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) reasonably engaged communities through dialogue and seminars on the peace process. In Kasese, most of the respondents 79.9% were neutral, which means that they are not sure whether CSO did enough or not, while 68.7% agree that CSO's significantly engaged communities in dialogue, 30.4% strongly agree that CSOs engaged communities, 37.5% strongly disagree, while 65.5% agree. In Bundibugyo, 56.5% strongly agree that CSO's actively engaged communities in dialogue, 25.3% agree, while 9.4% and 15.5% strongly disagree and disagree respectively. In Ntoroko,

53.1% of the respondents strongly disagree, 19.0% agree, while 13.0% strongly agree, 6.0% agree. Overall, majority of the respondents did not support the view that CSO's significantly engaged communities in dialogue and seminars on the peace process.

When a similar question was posed to the key informants, many of them shared similar opinion with the quantitative data, but were able to provided further information as to why CSO's may have not engaged much of the communities in the presenting situation. Below are some of the excerpts from the interviews.

*Item 1: Do you think that CSO's reasonably engaged communities in dialogue and seminars on the peace process in Rwenzori sub-region?*

One of the respondents who is a community leader had this to say *“Civil society organizations that came here had a different approach to the conflict. The CSO's focused on providing relief services. Organizations like the Red Cross helped victims a lot with beddings, food, water and temporal shelters. That's all they could do”* (KI2, Bundibugyo April 2023).

Another respondent noted that *“the government is highly suspicious of the CSOs and as a result their involvement in the peace process was limited as there operations were highly monitored. CSO's initiatives were hampered because the government became a party to the conflict, thus CSO's afraid of taking the bull by the horn, for fear of what anyone can guess. Government deployed internal and external intelligence personnel in large number to monitor the activities of any entity or persons operating in the sub-region, this could not permit the CSOs to operate freely”* (KI6, Kampala May 2023).

Another key informant said that *“CSOs mainly domestic NGOs came in to the Rwenzori sub-region during the peak of the conflict. Organizations such as the Rwenzori forum for peace and justice, Kabarole Research Center, Red Cross, among others were present, but they focused on providing basic needs, particularly food”* (KI9, Ntoroko April 2023).

One of the key informant who is an academic scholar noted that, *“in the normal circumstance, CSO's are supposed to be here monitoring what is going on and provide support to victims. But the way and manner in which the government responded to the conflict with violent and*

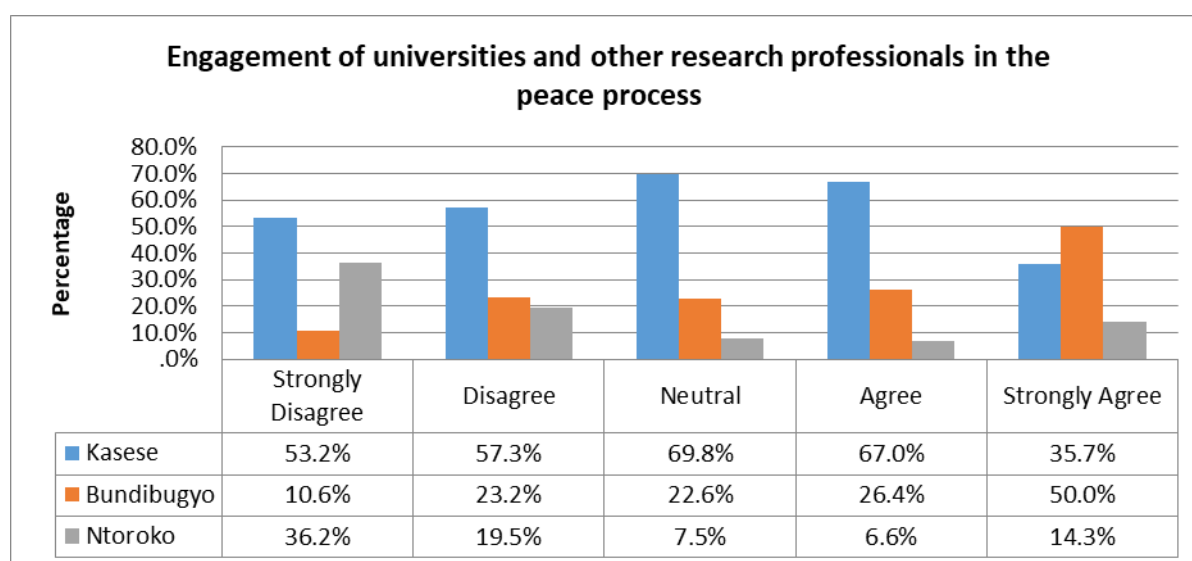
*ruthlessness, CSO's were weary of getting involved. Their feelings I guess was that, if a government can descend on his citizens in this manner then what of them, so they were scared and prefer to stay away from the conflict. Somewhere actually talking from Kampala, while the violence was going on in Rwenzori. I would say that the fear of the government was the beginning of CSO's withdrawal from the Rwenzori conflict. In a nutshell, CSOs did not really engage communities in dialogue and seminars in the peace process”* (KI4, Kampala May 2023).

In summary, the data presented above suggests that CSO's did not do enough in engaging communities in dialogue and seminars in the peace process. It was revealed that most CSOs were afraid of being labeled government supporter or anti-government depending on their position and or perspective of the conflict. Therefore, to avoid this risk, CSO's channeled their interventions toward provision of basic needs to the victims. From both formal and informal interaction with people in Rwenzori sub-region during the data collection process, it was established that at the time when the conflict was purely ethnic (between the Bakonzo and the Bamba), CSOs played a critical role in advocating for peace and building among the communities. However, the CSOs pulled out of active peace process when the government intervened in defense of the minority

Bamba in 2015. From this point, the government became a direct party to the conflict and this marked the turning point at which the conflict mutated to a government - Bakonzo conflict. The

consequences of the government being a direct party to the conflict seem to have influenced the withdrawal of CSO's from active participation in the peace process.

**Figure 3: Showing level of agreement on whether universities and other research professionals were significantly engaged in the peace process.**



The figure above shows how different districts responded to engagement of universities and other research professionals (academia) in the peace process of Rwenzori sub-region. The above graph presents information gathered on whether universities and other research professionals were significantly engaged in the peace process. From the graph, majority of the respondents from Kasese 69.8% were neutral on whether universities and research personals were significantly engaged in the peace process, 53.2% strongly disagree, 57.3% disagree,

while 67.0% and 35.7% agree and strongly agree respectively. In Bundibugyo, 10.6% of the respondents strongly disagree, 23.2% agree, 22.6% were neutral, while 26.6% and 50.0% agree and strongly agree respectively. In Ntoroko, 32.2% of the respondents strongly disagree, 19.5% disagree, 7.5% were neutral, while 6.6% and 14.3% respectively agree and strongly agree. Overall, 57.8% of the respondents were of the opinion that universities and research professionals (academia) were not significantly engaged in the peace process. To complement the quantitative data, the

key informants were asked of their view on the participation of universities and research professionals in managing the conflict in Rwenzori sub-region and they had the following to say.

***Item 2: In your opinion, were the universities and other research professionals significantly engaged in the peace process?***

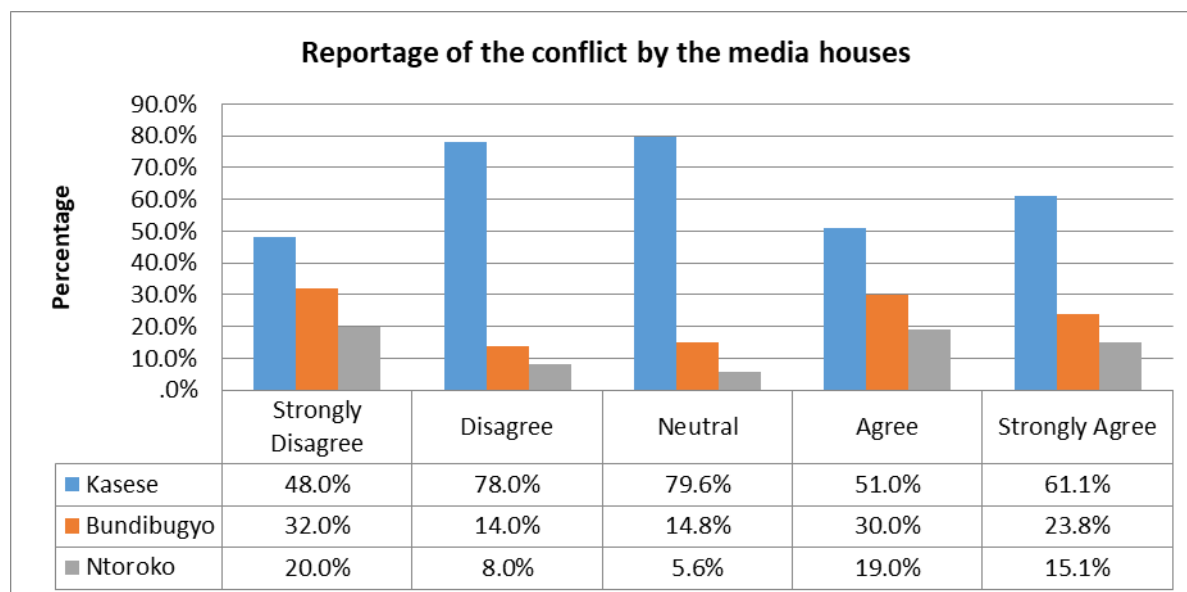
According to one of the key informants, who is state security agency personnel, *“the government decided to deal with the conflict in the manner that it deemed to be the best way possible, in line with its intelligence sources. Government had all the intelligence information it needed to address the Rwenzori conflicts. The cause of the conflict was well known to the government. The main issue of the conflict is that the Rwenzururu kingdom wanted to establish breakaway state called the Yiira Republic. No government in the world will tolerate such within its territory, therefore, the government was not interested in engaging universities or research professional because they will not offer any solution- the situation was beyond books and survey. The solution can only come from the military and other security agencies and the government made a*

*decision to use those who can offer solution”* (KI10, Bundibugyo April 2022).

According to a university scholar, *“I can assure you that the government is not interested in engaging researchers in the Rwenzori conflict or any other conflict in this country. In cases where research is carried out, it is always manipulated by the government to put them in a good image. If you may know, researchers are required to register with the scientific researcher institution under the president’s office. This gives the government an upper hand in suppressing any research findings which it feels will put in on the spotlight. Research is highly monitored, findings disputed and researchers intimidated and were possible researcher’s materials confiscated. There is therefore no way government would engage researchers in this process and yet the findings from these studies would help inform course of action in addressing and preventing conflict relapse in the Rwenzori sub-region”* (KI3, Kampala May 2022).

Qualitative data shows that the academia was not engaged in the peace process in Rwenzori sub-region. Findings revealed that the government decided to use force to handle the situation rather than to engage academics.

**Figure 4: Showing level of agreement on whether the media houses were objective in their reportage of the conflict**



The figure above shows how the respondents from the different districts responded to whether the media houses were objective in their reportage of the conflict. From the graph, majority of the respondents from Kasese 79.6% were neutral on whether the media houses were objective in their reportage of the conflict, 78.0% disagree, 48.0% strongly disagree, while 61.1% and 51.0% strongly agree and agree respectively. In Bundibugyo, 32.0% of the respondents strongly disagree, 14.0% disagree, 14.8% were neutral, while 30.0% and 23.8% agree and strongly agree respectively. In Ntoroko, 20.0% of the respondents strongly disagree, 8.0% disagree, 5.6% were neutral, while 19.0% and 15.1% respectively agree and strongly agree. Overall, 63.7% of the respondents

were of the opinion that the media were objective in their reportage of the conflict in the Rwenzori sub region. This implies that the media were fair and objective in their reportage of the conflict situation in Rwenzori-sub region of Uganda. On the qualitative data, the respondents had this to say when they were asked of their opinion on media reportage of the peace process.

**Item 3: In your opinion, do you think that the media was fair in their reportage of the Rwenzori conflict and do you think that their reportage contributed to de-escalation of the conflict?**

One of the respondents said that, “*the role of the media is to report events as they happen. In my opinion, the media was neutral and tried as much as possible to share positive information which may have helped to dissuade people from violence*” (KI1, Ntoroko April 2023).



Another respondent noted that, *“the media is highly regulated by the government through the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC). The media houses are closely monitored and therefore, they aired only permitted content, which was free of hate speech - a catalyst to conflict escalation”* (KI9, Bundibugyo, April 2023).

An opinion leader in his comment noted that *“The media did very well in their reportage of the conflict, at least there was a regular reportage of the matter on air and sometimes government officials and opinion leaders were called to air their views. This created an opportunity for them to discuss possible ways to handle the conflict and restore back peace”* (KI10, Kasese April 2022).

According to one of the key informants, *“the media houses were the only available tool we had to reach out to our people, we used the media to appeal to our people to end the violence. The media was reasonably proactive in their reportage of the conflict in Rwenzori sub-region”* (KI12, Kampala May 2023).

Summarily, the above data shows that the media were fair and responsible in their reportage of the conflict in Rwenzori sub-region. Also, their reportage contributed to de-escalation of the conflict. By de-escalation it implies methods and mechanisms used to prevent potential violence or prevent further deterioration of a violent situation. These mechanisms include positive communications, dialogue

and mediation, expert opinion aimed to calm a violent or potentially dangerous situation. In essence, the study suggests that the media played a positive role in de-escalating the conflict in Rwenzori sub-region.

### 1.7 Conclusions

The study concluded that organizational actors played crucial role in the managing the conflict in Rwenzori sub-region. Specifically, it was observed that the media played a proactive role in managing the conflict by providing evidence based reporting of the conflict situation. Also, they regularly hosted opinion leaders and sort their views on how best to resolve the conflict. The media provided the public with information, highlighted evidences, details and incidences, and thus shaped receivers' opinion about the conflict. The media provided a balanced reportage, which helped to deescalate the conflict.

The study further established that the CSOs role in supplying food, clothing, beddings, water and medical services, contributed significantly to the preservation of life especially in critical moments where the government and its agents were perceived as an enemy by the contending party. CSOs focused on providing victims with humanitarian

needs, which helped many communities to cope with the situation. On the issue of their participation in peace process through community engagements such as organizing dialogue meeting or training communities in conflict management, it was concluded that CSOs did not do much in engaging communities in peace process.

On the other hand, the academia was not engaged in managing the conflict despite the important role that they are known to play in conflict management. Researchers are needed to explore the root causes of the conflict, provide empirical evidence on the dynamics of the conflict and proffer possible solutions to avert a relapse of the conflict. Unfortunately, the academia was not engaged in the managements of the conflict in Rwenzori sub-region, thus an opportunity to provide an empirical perspective of the conflict may have been lost.

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