

A Demographic Survey of the Reception of Damietta Peace Initiative as a method to resolve Interreligious Conflicts in Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: *The Damietta Peace Initiative, DPI is a communal platform geared towards non-violence, right relationships, harmony, reconciliation and care for creation. This platform has successfully been able to resolve conflicts and bring peace to different parts of the continent. In Kenya, there are many religious groups with Christianity and Islam being the two major ones. These religions have had good and bad days since time immemorial. There has been a growing trend of terrorism globally which has worsened the relationship of these two religions. In Kenya, terrorism militia groups have been attacking Kenyans with more bias towards non-Muslims. There have also been complaints by some Muslims living in a Christian-neighborhood of being discriminated and sidelined from essential services. This study aimed at evaluating the reception of DPI as a method to resolve interreligious conflicts amongst several residents of Nairobi, Kenya. A mixed method research approach was used integrating cross-sectional survey and phenomenological research designs. Questionnaires and in-depth interview guide were used as research instruments. The findings indicated that more male (64%) were involved in the process compared to females. Most of DPI recipients were also quite youthful. The study also found out that there was more preference of DPI by Christians (70%) compared to Muslims. The profession of the respondent was not found to significantly affect their perception of DPI ($P < 0.05$). However, most of the recipients of DPI were business persons. In conclusion, DPI had not been fully acknowledged by the residents of Nairobi as an interreligious dialogue platform. Its popularity was still low. The research recommends more public awareness and facilitation of DPI in Kenya by the national government, Ministry of Internal Security and Co-ordination and Religious leaders. This will fasten the healing process of interreligious conflicts as well as enhancing more peace in the country.*

Keywords -Damietta Peace Initiative, Demographic survey, Interreligious conflicts, Religion

I. INTRODUCTION

The most viable time in which to build attitudes of fellowship and harmony in society is in periods of peace. In peaceful periods, dialogue is an activity carried out in hope, whose purpose is to build enduring bonds of friendship and mutual appreciation between individuals, that will be strong enough to overcome pressures and communal tensions that could arise in otherwise circumstances. When hostility and crises develop, it is often too late to ward off polarization and violence.

This study explored the Damietta Peace Initiative's interreligious dialogue approach for peacebuilding at the grassroots in Nairobi-Region, Kenya. This peacebuilding initiative is founded on the spirituality of non-violence and care for creation of Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), an Italian friar who served as an early pioneer to explore the path of interreligious dialogue [1]. Saint Francis of Assisi is one of the most venerated religious figures in history. His encounter with a Muslim Sultan al Malik al-Kamil in 1219, as Warren [13] observes was an unprecedented venture that continues to offer the world and this study a bold paradigm for interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding.

The focus of the study is on the two forms of dialogue; dialogue of action where Christians and Muslims collaborate for purposes of promoting a culture of peace in society and dialogue of life. Though theological reasons for Interreligious dialogue are closely related to pragmatic reasons, the latter is the key

features for engaging in Interreligious dialogue in the study. Peace and understanding; the basis for this dialogue, is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths as indicated in their sacred texts.

The Damietta Peace Initiative takes its name and its great spiritual inspiration from the visit of St. Francis to Sultan Malik al-Kamal at Damietta in Egypt in 1219 during the Fifth Crusade, which called on all of the Christendom to be involved. This Fifth Crusade (1213–1221) was an attempt by Catholic Europeans to reacquire Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land by first conquering the powerful Ayyubid state in Egypt [2].

In a time when relations between Muslims and Christians were even worse than they are today, these two men found a way to speak peacefully, respect one another, and depart as equals. They were opposed to warlike remedies; they proposed the absolute value of brotherhood instead. Francis specifically included all nations in this brotherhood as is apparent from the fact that during this crusade he presented himself to the Saracen Sultan unarmed to announce the peace of Christ. Saint Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamal showed a new way of dialogue, a new way of dealing with conflict and an approach of non-violence [3].

The Damietta Peace Initiative (DPI) came into existence as both Christians and Muslims reflected upon this unlikely meeting of St Francis and Sultan al Malik. This historical event became an inspiration to the Franciscan family to re-establish positive relations with the Muslim communities and together address emerging challenges to peace.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This research employed an embedded mixed methods research approach where qualitative data was collected and analyzed within a quantitative research. The information obtained from the county, program coordinators and the fieldworker were analyzed and discussed within those gathered from the PACT enablers and members. Cross sectional survey research design was used in this study to obtain data from the DPI's PACT enablers and sampled PACT members.

2.2 Target Population

Since the study was evaluating the DPI's approach for peacebuilding at grassroots, the data for the study was therefore drawn from: The Country Coordinator, Program Coordinator, Fieldworker, PACT Enablers and PACT Members. In Nairobi region where study was carried out there were about 18 PACT Enablers and approximately 160 PACT members in the region according to the information obtained from the DPI office. The researcher selected 9 Enablers and 90 PACT members to represent the entire population. The Country Coordinator is in charge of all the DPI regions in Kenya. Members in various regions within the country are harmonized by the Program Coordinator. Fieldworkers are the link between the regional office and the PACT members, they organize and supervise all the activities of the DPI at the grassroots. They work very closely with the PACT Enablers and PACT members to fulfill the peacebuilding mission of the Damietta Peace Initiative.

2.3 Description of Sample and Sampling Procedures

The sample for this study were 102 DPI members distributed as follows; the country coordinator, program coordinator, fieldworker, 9 enablers and 90 PACT members. Probability and non-probability sampling procedures were used in this research to obtain a sample. Probability sampling was chosen because the researcher sought to make generalizations of this study. The study also employed purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used in Nairobi-Region to sample two areas from within Nairobi County (Kibera and Mathare) and two from outside Nairobi County; Mwanganthia ward in Meru and Namanga location in Kajiado County. The main reason for this selection is that Kibera and Mathare slums form an urban locale with cosmopolitan populace locale have experienced diverse conflicts and violence, while Mwanganthia ward in Meru and Namanga location in Kajiado county from rural settings have had no much violent conflicts. Purposive sampling was used in this research to select respondents with special responsibility; The DPI's country coordinator, program coordinator, fieldworker and PACT enablers were automatically sampled because the researcher presumes that they have adequate knowledge and factual information required for this study. Simple Random Sampling was used in this study to select members of the PACTs to answer the questionnaires since it provided equal chance to every member in the PACT to be included. The sample distribution frame of the study is illustrated in **table 1**.

Table 1: DPI Sample Distribution Frame

Respondents Categories	Number	Sampling Technique	Sample Size	Research Instrument
Country Coordinator	1	Purposive	1	In-depth interview guide
Programme Coordinator	1	Purposive	1	In-depth interview guide
Fieldworker	1	Purposive	1	In-depth interview guide
PACT Enablers	9	Purposive	9	Questionnaires
PACT Members	90	Simple random/purposive sampling	90	Questionnaires
Total	102		102	

Table 1 indicates that the study's participants were made up of Country and Programme Coordinators, a Fieldworker, PACT Enablers and PACT Members.

2.4 Description of Data Collection Instruments

In this research, data was collected using two sources; the secondary sources and the primary sources. Secondary data was gathered from published books, journals, magazines, internet sources and encyclicals/church documents. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interview guide and administering of questionnaires (closed and open-ended questions) to respondents. The questionnaires were administered to the PACT enablers and PACT members while in-depth interviews were administered to the country coordinator, program coordinator and a fieldworker. The questionnaire enabled the researcher to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data while the in-depth interview guide enabled the researcher to obtain qualitative data from the respondents.

2.5 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

2.5.1 Validity of Research Instruments

A panel of specialists in the Catholic University of Eastern Africa checked on the content coverage by assessing what concept the instrument tried to measure. The experts also determined whether the set items accurately represented the concept of this study. Data collection validity was enhanced by instrument triangulation whereby different sets of instruments were used. Source triangulation was used to validate the instruments by making PACT enablers and members to respond to some similar questions. Triangulation method was also employed using questionnaires, interview guides to collect similar information.

2.5.2. Pilot Testing

A pilot study was undertaken to determine the validity and reliability of the instruments prior to going to the field with the instruments. Research instruments in this study therefore had to be subjected to a pre-test so as to find and amend any ambiguities, inconceivable statements and errors. In this research, validity of the research instruments employed in the pilot phase were established through the pilot administration of questionnaires to two PACT groups, a fieldworker, two PACT enablers and ten PACT members. The respondents in the pilot study were taken from one of the PACT within the area of study (PACT Rongai) which did not form part of the main study. Information obtained during the pre-testing was highly encouraging for the study to proceed.

2.5.3 Reliability of Research Instruments

To ascertain the reliability of these instruments, the researchers compared data from one instrument with that from another from the same category to ensure that they are consistent, accurate and efficient. It was then subjected to scrutiny by 4 experts. Source triangulation was used to validate the instruments by making PACT enablers and PACT members to respond to similar questions. Triangulation method was also employed using questionnaires, in-depth interview guides to collect similar information. The researcher ensured employment of triangulation of data collection methods.

2.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistic Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. For qualitative data, the researchers categorized data into themes according to the research questions. Thematic analysis was then used to discuss the findings and presented them in form of narratives and direct quotes. Qualitative data was then analyzed and interpreted within quantitative data.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Gender of the Respondents

The study sought to find out the gender of the respondents. Simple Random Sampling was used to pick the respondents in each PACT. It established that majority of the respondents who participated in the study were male at 64%, while female respondents constituted 36% as shown in **figure 1**. One person did not answer to the question.

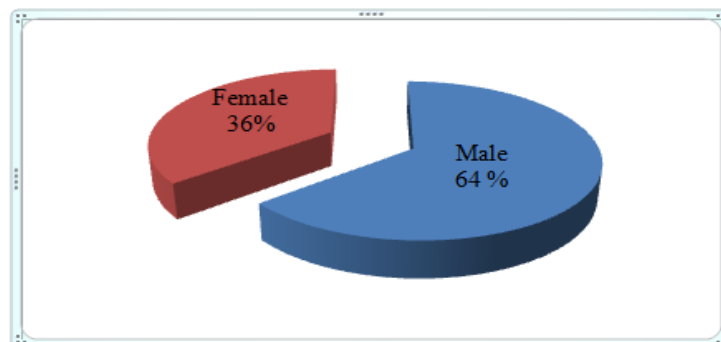


Figure 1: Gender of the Respondents

The researcher noted that there were more male (64%) respondents in Kibera slums during the time of research than female (36%). This finding contradicts the information given by the Programme Coordinator in an interview on 08th July 2014 “the number of women in the PACTs is slightly higher than those of men”. In her observation women prefer working for peace since it they and their children suffer more in cases of violent conflicts.

Critically looking at the findings of the study on this gender disparity with more male respondents than female, there is a tendency for one to deduce that men are more interested in peacebuilding and in DPI activities than women. However, such an interpretation was not the case in this research since the low turnout of women respondents during the time of research was justified by the DPI Fieldworker in an interview **held on mid-June 2014 at Kibera slums where the low turnout of women was experienced**. She had this to say:

There are more female than men in the PACTs within the region, however, since this is the month of Ramadan for the Muslims, most of the PACT Muslim members especially women are busy in various activities in the mosques or outside in their homes preparing for Iftar (evening meal during Ramadan; one of the religious observances of Ramadan which is often done as a community, with people gathering to break their fast together). The ones who have been requested will represent the others and I am confident that they have relevant information, since they are well conversant with all the activities carried out in their PACTs. They have also been in the PACTs since its inception in 2006.

Comparing the information from both the fieldworker and the programme coordinator, it is evident that there are more men than women who participate in the DPI activities. Thonissen [2] ascertained that the vision of The Damietta Peace Initiative is a universal brotherhood and sisterhood on a cosmic scale that includes all people and all creation. “St Francis breathed the fragrance of healing peace on all whom he met and whose lives he touched” (p. ii). The DPI calls on and encourages all people to be committed to peacebuilding. Similarly, Dandala [4] in his address during sub-regional interfaith peace summit in Nairobi, Kenya, emphasized that peace concerns everyone and therefore its search involves all. There is need therefore, for the DPI to keep encouraging people of both genders to join the PACTs.

Peace and peaceful coexistence is a value for majority of the people in society [5]. Specifically, peace is a popular theme within Christian and Muslim circles as well as in cultural spheres. It is one of the fundamental virtues as taught in both the Bible and the Quran. Noko [6] in his opening address confirms this when he said that “our faiths are centered on a God of peace, harmony, of love and of compassion.” (p. 27). This means peace and peacebuilding is truly a concern for all members (both gender) of the Christian and Muslim community. The Human Need Theory also calls for inclusivity for all in its wide applicability. This could mean the need to build a culture of peace for a good stable society is an invitation for all members regardless of the gender. Peace and peacebuilding generally, is one of the human basic needs and is a concern for all for peaceful and harmonious coexistence in society.

3.2 Age of the Respondents

The age brackets of all the respondents as sought by the study were as indicated in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Age of the Respondents

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percent
20-29 years	32	36%
30-39 years	23	26%
40-49 years	15	17%
50-59 years	14	16%
60 years and above	4	5%
Total	88	100%

From the study’s findings 36% of the total number of respondents were aged between 20-29 years, 26%, between 30-39 years, 17%, had between 40-49 years, 16%, were aged between 50-59 years, and 5% were above 60 years of age. The study revealed that majority, 79% of all the respondents were aged between 20-49 years.

Looking at the distribution of age as indicated above, one can deduce the overwhelming response from youthful people who range between 20 to 39 years of age; they represent 62% of the respondents. This impressive response is justified by the fact that The Damietta Peace Initiative approach largely targets the youths for the life long process of peacebuilding. Doing so is strategic because most often, the youth are to blame for activities of execution of violent conflicts. In addition, the involving activities of peacebuilding can easily be taken up by the youthful generation because they are the most active and energetic; what they acquire can be perpetuated for a longer period of time. The theoretical framework on peacebuilding and the literature reviewed confirm that peacebuilding is a life-long process, it can take many different forms and it involves many different roles.

The youth therefore, as opposed to the older generation, are the most appropriate age group to invest in as carriers of this lifelong process. Their inclusion is presumed to bring vibrancy and creativity to DPI's peacebuilding efforts, supposing that they offer creative energy and active potential for the transformation of violent conflict in the world. From the larger number of youthful respondents, it can also be deduced that the DPI has a greater responsibility to dialogue with youth on knowledge, values, skills, and behaviors conducive to fostering peaceful coexistence in the society.

The youths by virtue of their age would also be able to engage their fellow age mates in the society easily in becoming early promoters of the DPI' interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding at the grassroots. However, the involvement of the older adults of 40 and above years, who constitute 48% of the respondents, cannot be overlooked. They offer longer lived varied experiences needed to promote peaceful coexistence and in care for the environment as advocated by The Damietta Peace Initiative.

The age of the respondents guides the nature of the DPI activities which the youths and adults can easily be involved in for successful peacebuilding, for example, the Pan African Conciliation Team of youths are more likely to reach out to their fellow age mates through, sporting activities, forming peace clubs and tree planting in the environment according to the guidelines of the Damietta Peace Initiative.

The adults on the other hand are involved in alternative activities that differ from those carried out by the youths. The Fieldworker in an interview reveals the following:

The elder people prefer organizing Barazas (meetings) with the help of the government officials like the chiefs in order to educate people on the need for peaceful coexistence in the society. They are of great assistance in monitoring any kind of tension that may arise within their areas and assist before it erupts into violent conflict; this is done in the spirit of dialogue, togetherness and non-violence. Coincidentally these are some of the key values that we have learned from the DPI trainings.

The DPI' interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding at grassroots in Nairobi-Region, Kenya, generally relies on PACT members within all these age brackets since each plays an important role in the growth and development of the DPI. The old and the younger complement one another both in thought and action.

3.3 Religious Affiliation of the Respondents

The study sought to ascertain the religious affiliation of the respondents. **Table 3** reveals that Christians and Muslims constituted 70% and 30% of the respondents respectively.

Table 3: Religious Affiliation of the Respondents

Religious Affiliation	Frequency	Percentage
Christians	62	70%
Muslims	26	30%
Total	88	100

Kenya's International Religious Report [7], revealed that majority of Kenyans; approximately 78% are Christians. This is due to the impact of Christian missionaries during the British colonial period. Islam, making up about 11% has the second largest number of followers in the country, with both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim groups. The percentage of the respondents in this study showing a higher percentage of Christians, 70% than Muslims, 30% concur with the statistics of the two religions in Kenya.

The unique character of interreligious dialogue approach is drawn from its deep sense of motivation that originates from religious identity. This distinguishes it from secular or interethnic encounter. From the reviewed literature, it has been established that religious identity is one of the most powerful sources in shaping attitudes and actions in the society. The spiritual, moral and ethical components of any religious identity are powerful sources of generating change. The DPI affirms that a sustainable peacebuilding must be founded on a spirituality that integrates the physical and spiritual dimensions of the human experience. From its inception, the DPI has perceived the physical world, including human beings as a web of relationships rather than as isolated objects [8,9]. Therefore, Christians and Muslims being the majority in Kenya, and having peace as one of the key values in their teachings as earlier discussed in the literature reviewed, have a great influence on peacebuilding.

Lederach's theory guiding this study indicates that poor relationships between groups are all too often a trigger for conflict, and remain a critical hindrance to peacebuilding efforts. The study is in agreement with Lederach's view on the issue of establishing right relationships. With both Christians and Muslims forming Pan African Conciliation Teams at the grassroots aids in the establishment of right relationships, a whole fabric of interaction in the society [10].

The DPI' Interreligious dialogue therefore promotes cordial relationships between Christian and Muslim members within the PACTs and by extension to the wider society; this aids in building a culture of peace in the society. Christians and Muslims constituting a higher percentage of the population as earlier mentioned can be perceived as well placed in terms of mobilizing their members and others to build sustainable

peace in the society. This, therefore, can be taken to mean that the DPI' interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding at grassroots can be considered as the best approach to peacebuilding in Nairobi Region, Kenya in considering this larger population of Christian and Muslims in the area.

Generally, one can conclude that this religious orientation of the DPI shape the peacebuilding they undertake. For instance, the approach makes use of sacred texts (Quran and the Bible). The spiritual aspect of the Christians and Muslims encourages looking beyond one's personal interests toward a greater good, which in this case is seeking for peace for all [11]. A value cherished and advocated in their sacred scriptures.

3.4 Profession of the Respondents

The profession of the respondents was sought and the study revealed as indicated in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Profession of the Respondents

Profession	Frequency	Percent
Permanent employment	15	17%
Temporary/ Casual employment	18	20%
Farmers	10	12%
Business Persons	35	39%
Students	10	12%
Total	88	100%

Table 5 shows that 39%, which was the majority of the respondents were business persons, while 20% had temporary or casual employment. Other occupations included permanent employment 17%, farming 12% and 12% were students.

The demographic information of the respondents indicates that Country Coordinator, Program Coordinator, Fieldworker, PACT Enablers and PACT members of The DPI's interreligious dialogue approach for peacebuilding at the grassroots in Nairobi-Region, Kenya comprises persons with varied occupations. Based on the interview with the Programme Coordinator, the study established that being in varied occupations, the Damietta Peace Initiative PACT members can easily interact with people of all walks of life and this assists in wider spread of the key values of DPI, for example, "The PACT members who are students assist the DPI in creative peace talks and sporting activities among the youths".

The majority 39% who are business persons pose a challenge sometimes to planned PACT meetings and activities as reported by the Fieldworker in an interview:

When we call for meetings to plan for PACT activities, some members are busy in their workplaces, others in business and their daily life struggles to meet their needs, this forces us sometimes to postponed or reschedule the activities, which often delays the implementation of these activities.

The challenges caused by poor attendance to PACT meetings by some of the members will be dealt with in detail later. However, it is important to note that these varied occupations assist a lot in reaching out to different people as noted by the Programme Coordinator;

Having variety of occupations is of great significance to us in DPI especially when it comes to planning, development and organization of PACTs' trainings and workshops, the PACT members easily reach out to their colleagues at place of work and invite them to attend peacebuilding workshops...People of varied occupations help in spreading the skills and values of the DPI to as many people as possible.

This fact therefore, can be taken to mean that the DPI' interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding is indeed carried out at the grassroots where one finds people of different occupations. The DPI is also seen as inclusive.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrated that there was a different perception and by extension reception of DPI amongst different people. Most recipients were of male gender (64%). Majority of them were quite youthful with about 62% of them being below 39 years of age. The study found out that there were more Christians willing to indulge in DPI compared to Muslims. Most of the attendees participated in businesses. In view of the findings, the DPI as a tool for Interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding at the grassroots can be seen as a forward looking and comprehensive approach to establishing sustainable peace. In its application in Nairobi-Region, Kenya has played an important role in peacebuilding at the grassroots since its inception. Its focus and emphasis is the fact that it is better to prevent conflicts from erupting than dealing with its violent destructive consequences.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

More sensitization campaigns on the importance of participating in DPI should be made throughout the country. Majority of the people in the study region were unaware of DPI making its penetration in grassroots quite difficult. The national government and various religious groups in the country should join hands to educate

its members of the significances of participating in DPI.

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