

# Strategic Humanitarian Interventions during the Ethnic Conflict Period in Sigowet and Nyakach Sub Counties of Kenya: Pupils' Perspective

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**Abstract:** The main objective of the study was to examine the strategic humanitarian interventions by state and non-state actors during the ethnic conflict period in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya from the perspective of primary school pupils. The descriptive research design was adopted. The target group was primary school pupils in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya, parents of sampled pupils, Education Quality Assurance Officers, NGO and Community leaders. The researcher used questionnaires, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and observation checklists in collection of primary data. The completed questionnaires were coded and entries converted into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21 version). Secondary data was obtained from the university library, public offices, offices of non-governmental organizations and faith based organizations. The research used both descriptive and inferential statistics in data analysis and interpretation. The conclusion is that humanitarian interventions during the period of ethnic conflict had significant gaps in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya. The study recommends that there is need to have a more coordinated approach in offering humanitarian response to victims of ethnic conflict; that involves both state and non-state actors. The study further recommends that humanitarian interventions should put in consideration the needs of school going children who form the bulk of the population affected by armed ethnic conflict. This study is expected to benefit the government and humanitarian organizations in formulation of policies regarding children in emergencies.

**Keywords:** Strategic, humanitarian interventions, ethnic conflict, Sigowet and Nyakach, pupils' perspective.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study:

Children represent one of the most vulnerable segments of the civilian population in situations of armed conflicts. During armed ethnic conflict, children, not only suffer from the direct consequences such as recruitment in the armed groups, physical injury or death but are also indirectly affected by displacement, loss of relatives, and the trauma associated with witnessing acts of atrocities. (UNESCO, 2010; Justino, 2014; Dryden Peterson, 2011). In Kenya, between 1992-1993, inter-ethnic conflicts led to the deaths of over 1,500 people and displacement of about 300,000 (Nyukuri, 1997; Nyawala, 2011). Following the 2008 Post-Election Violence in Kenya, over 1,550 people were killed and 11,146 people suffered injuries and 117,216 private property destroyed. The resultant humanitarian catastrophe required huge efforts and resources from the government and humanitarian organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to victims of the atrocities who included mainly women and children. (KNCHR, 2012; Achoka *et al*, 2008; Waki Commission, 2008). The inter-ethnic conflict in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya has followed the pattern of other conflicts in Kenya. The conflict involved two neighboring ethnic groups; the Kalenjin of Sigowet sub county and the Luo of Nyakach sub

county. (Majanga, 2014; Ngundo, 2014). Despite efforts by both the government and NGOs to effect humanitarian operations whenever there is armed conflict, little research has been documented on the nature of humanitarian interventions offered from the pupils' perspective. The available research gives a general overview of humanitarian interventions without focusing on pupils; an important segment of society that bears the brunt of ethnic conflict. The purpose of this research is to examine the strategic humanitarian interventions during the conflict period in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya from the pupils' perspective.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem:

Kenya has experienced devastating ethnic conflicts in the past three decades. In the year 2014, some of the sub counties hard hit by inter- ethnic clashes were Sigowet and Nyakach which are occupied by the Kalenjin and Luo communities respectively. As a result of this conflict, dozens of people were killed, hundreds injured and over 2,816 displaced from their homes. (Red Cross, 2014; Saferworld briefing, 2014). Whenever there are ethnic conflicts, victims suffer unimaginable atrocities. Women and children are the most affected segments of the society. (Dryden Peterson, 2014; Justino, 2014; Tino *et al*, 2015).

Thus, the nature of humanitarian assistance given to victims during such period need to be examined from the perspective of the children, who are normally school going pupils. Although Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties have experienced devastating ethnic clashes in the past three decades, little has been documented on the nature of humanitarian assistance given to victims in these sub counties. The period of emergence is particularly critical because it can help save lives or exacerbate the suffering. The present research examined the nature of humanitarian interventions during and after the conflict period in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya from the perspective of primary school pupils.

### 1.3. Research Objective:

The overall objective of this research was to examine the nature of humanitarian interventions during and after the period of ethnic conflict in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya.

### 1.4. Research question:

In this study, the main research question seeking to be answered was: What was the nature of humanitarian interventions during and after the ethnic conflict period in Sigowet and Nyakach Sub counties of Kenya?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the UNO set out to achieve Millennium development Goals(MDGs) goals by the year 2015 it may take a little longer to achieve these goals if concrete strategies are not employed to mitigate the effects of armed ethnic conflict on communities. The eight MDGs were to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat human epidemics and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development. (UNICEF, 2009; UNESCO, 2012). Armed ethnic conflict has capacity to undermine fundamental human rights and violate the international protocols set out to protect them. Women and children represent one big segment that is often severely affected by this catastrophe. The wounds inflicted by armed conflict on children –physical injury, gender based violence, psychosocial distress, are affronts to every impulse that inspired the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Machel, 2001; UNHCR, 2010)

The disruption of food supplies, the destruction of crops and agricultural infrastructure, the disintegration of families and communities, the displacement of populations and the destruction of educational and health services all take a heavy toll on children and pose grave challenges to parenting. (Justino, 2009; Ndamwe, 2013; Ogada, 2015). Article 39 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that state parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social re-integration of a child victim of; any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; or armed conflict. Such recovery shall take place in an environment which fosters health, self-respect and dignity of the child. (UNHCR, 2010). Thus, ensuring that health, nutrition, clothing, shelter psychosocial wellbeing and education are priority components of humanitarian assistance is the best way to ensure both parents' and children's physical and psychological recovery. This study examined the nature of humanitarian assistance given to victims of conflict during emergencies in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya from the perspective of primary school pupils.

### 2.1. Theoretical framework:

This research was guided by Burton's (1990) human needs theory which explored the link between inter-group conflict and the realm of basic human needs, identity, recognition and survival. Burton (1990) argued that armed conflict has repercussions among the people witnessing or experiencing them. For children witnessing conflict has severe consequences on their psychological wellbeing and their education hence the need for a well-coordinated humanitarian approach to mitigate the impact of conflict on the children.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design:

The purpose of the study was to examine the strategic humanitarian interventions during the ethnic conflict period in Sigowet and Nyakach Sub Counties of Kenya from the pupils' perspective. The study used the descriptive research design. This research utilized a number of sampling methods to get the sample. The first was multistage random sampling and the second was purposive sampling. The choice of schools to do research in was arrived at after stratifying the schools based on rural or urban, boarding or day and private or public.

### 3.2 Research instruments:

Two questionnaires were developed by the researcher and used to collect data. The first questionnaire was filled by 200 pupils sampled from grade four, seven and eight. The second questionnaire was filled by 200 parents of sampled pupils from the two sub counties. Key informant interviews were conducted between the researcher and community leaders, and leaders of NGOs and faith based organizations. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and observation checklists were also utilized in data collection. Secondary data was obtained from the university library, public offices, offices of nongovernmental organizations and faith based organizations.

### 3.3 Data Analysis and Presentation:

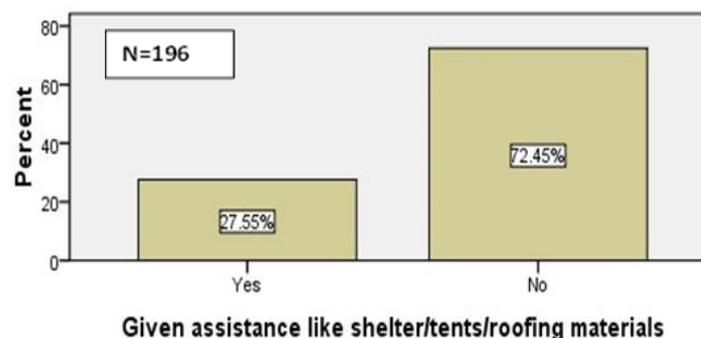
The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer package was used in data processing, analysis and interpretation. Data from key informants was analyzed by both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data was presented in graphs, tables, and discussions. Inferences were done from results presented.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to establish the proportion of pupils whose families were given humanitarian assistance in form of shelter, medical assistance, food aid, provision of clothes, guidance/counseling programs and provision of peace programs.

### 4.1 Provision of Shelter:

Pupils were asked to state whether they were given assistance like tents or roofing materials during or after the conflict. The responses are revealed in Figure 4.1.



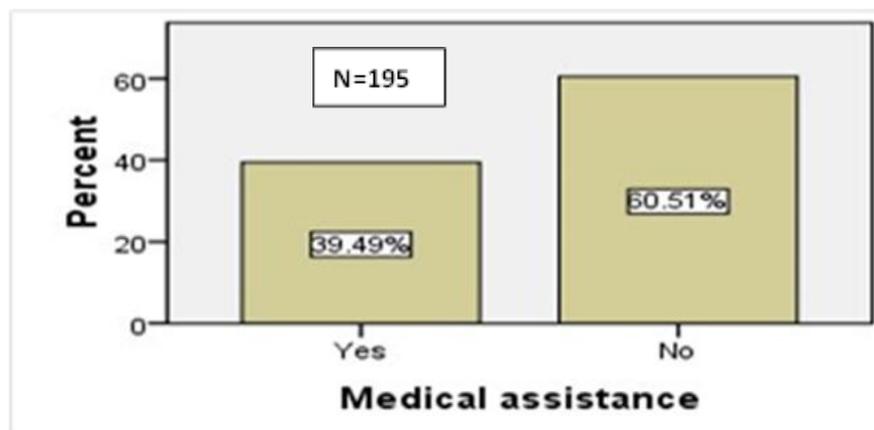
Source: Field Data (2015)

Figure 4.1: Proportion of Respondents Given Tents/Roofing Materials during Conflict in Sigowet and Nyakach Sub Counties of Kenya.

A Pearson Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2_{1,0.01} = 33.510$ ) showed that there was highly significant ( $P < 0.05$ ) variation on the issue of whether they respondents were given shelter, tents or roofing materials. Data in Figure 4.1 shows that 54(27.55%) of the respondents received the assistance while 142 (72.45%) did not. The Red Cross (2014) reported that provision of nonfood items like shelter and medical assistance was a big challenge that needed concerted efforts from both state and non-state actors. FGDs confirmed that some of the IDPs in Sigowet went to stay with their relatives as they found no other form of shelter. Others received assistance from Red Cross and World Vision organizations. UNHCR (2010) agrees with these findings by pointing out that provision of shelter is one of the biggest challenges during emergencies and sometimes the victims may be forced to spend in the cold unless there is a quick and well-coordinated response both from the government and humanitarian organizations.

#### 4.2 Provision of Medical Assistance:

Pupils were asked whether they received any medical assistance from the government or humanitarian agencies during the ethnic conflict period. The results are summarized in Figure 4.2.



Source: Field Data (2015)

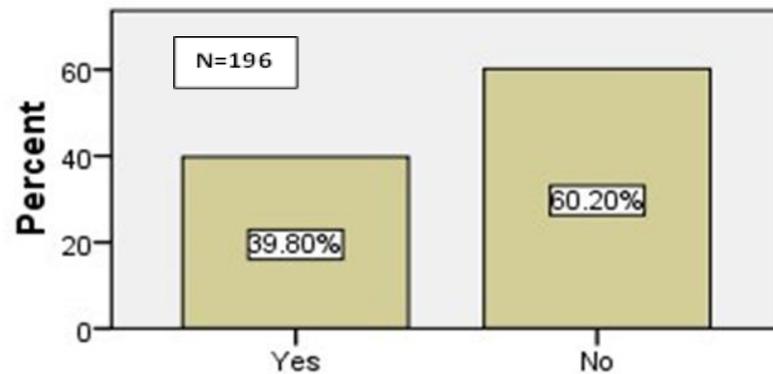
**Figure 4.2: Proportion of Pupils who got Medical Assistance during Conflict in Sigowet and Nyakach Sub Counties of Kenya.**

A Pearson Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2_{1,0.01} = 28.621$ ) showed that there was highly significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) variation on the issue of whether the respondents received medical assistance. Data in Figure 4.2 indicates that 118(60.51%) of the pupils' families received medical assistance while 77(39.49%) did not. This was confirmed through FGDs that some Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) didn't get medical assistance because either the humanitarian staff was overstretched or was not present at all. Many ailments such as malaria and cholera affected the conflict victims due to exposure to the cold and lack of clean water for use. These findings agree with Ndamwe (2013) who pointed out that during the Mt Elgon conflict in Western Kenya (2006-2007) hospitals were rendered useless as medical staff fled conflict and left the patients unattended to.

These findings further confirm the UNESCO (2010) report that armed conflict increases child and maternal mortality due to increased exposure to predisposing factors such as cold and lack of access to proper medical care. As confirmed by the KNBS (2014) the under-five mortality rate in Sigowet was at 100/1000 children while that of Nyakach was at 149/1000 children. Reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health and combating epidemics such as malaria were the fourth, fifth and sixth MDG goals respectively. Without proper health care for conflict victims in areas such as the Sigowet and Nyakach border, attainment of such goals will remain unachievable.

#### 4.3 Provision of Food Aid:

Pupils were asked whether their families received food aid or whether their schools were given food donations from the government or any humanitarian agencies during the conflict period. The results are summarized in Figure 4.3.



**Provision of food aid/school feeding programs**

Source: Field Data (2015)

**Figure 4.3: Distribution of Pupils who Received Food Aid Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya.**

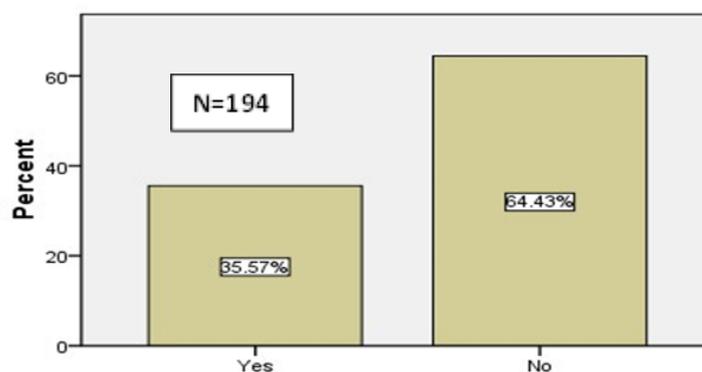
A Pearson Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2_{1,0.01} = 8.163$ ) showed that there was highly significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) variation on the issue of provision of food aid to families or support to school feeding programs. Data from Figure 4.3 indicates that 118 (60.20%) of the respondents were given food assistance while 78 (39.80%) reported having received no assistance. During FGDs some residents said that some community members escaped conflict and went to stay with relatives, thus getting no assistance at all. The Red Cross Report (2014) initially responded by providing food and water, including water treatment kits. This assistance was however not adequate. FGD meetings confirmed that after the conflict period there was no food assistance and the resultant food situation was difficult for them. One pupil respondent remarked:

“The rate of starvation here is high. Sometimes we eat one meal per day. Some young children suffer from severe malnutrition while some of my classmates have dropped out of school due to hunger.”

These findings agree with Ogada (2015) who pointed out that during the period of ethnic conflict in Mt Elgon sub county of Kenya (2006-2008) there were severe food shortages due to displacement and destruction of food stocks. As a result, households were forced to consume one meal per day or none at all. Furthermore, Amir and Naylor (2014) agree with these findings by stating that the quality of education suffers during and after the conflict period due to shortage of basic necessities such as food. Eradication of extreme hunger was the first goal of the UNO Millennium Development Goals 2015. For the achievement of this goal, effort must be made to assist IDP returnees and their children to resettle and establish their farming activities to boost food production.

#### 4.4 Provision of Clothes/School uniforms:

Pupils were asked whether they were given clothes or school uniforms during the ethnic conflict period. The results are given in Figure 4.4.



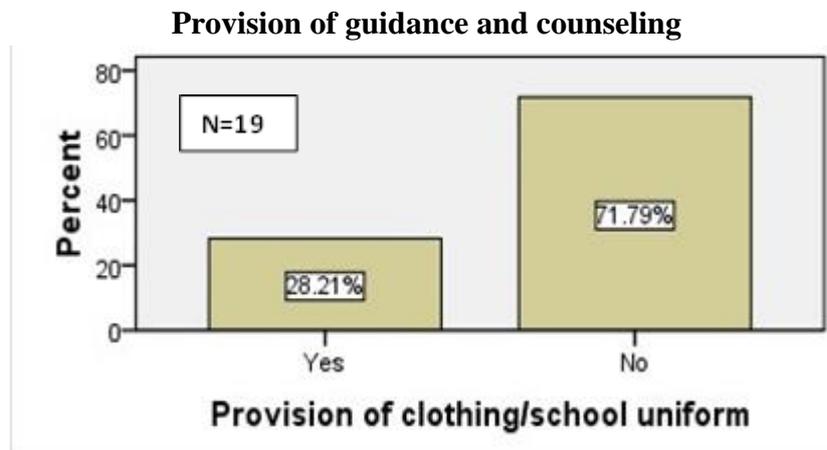
Source: Field Data (2015)

**Figure 4.4: Distribution of Pupils who Received Clothing/school uniforms in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya.**

A Pearson Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2_{1,0.01} = 37.051$ ) showed that there was highly significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) variation on the issue of provision of clothing or school uniforms by the government or relief agencies. Data from Figure 4.4 shows that 140 (71.79%) of the respondents were given assistance such as clothing or school uniforms while 55 (28.21%) did not receive such assistance. The Kenya Red Cross (2014) confirmed having distributed blankets, water treatment kits, mosquito nets and soap and not school uniform or clothing to the victims. This was confirmed during FGD meetings where some parents revealed that majority of them did not get clothes except from well-wishers. Pupils lacked school uniforms as they had been destroyed or lost during the conflict period. Thus, the quality of learning was affected as some pupils could not attend school without proper dressing. Punamaki (1996) agrees with these findings by affirming that many children affected by conflict lack fees, uniforms and learning materials as majority of parents may not be able to provide such requirements. Thus, such children lack behind academically compared to children not affected by such atrocities. Such children need assistance from both state and non-state actors to do well academically. This emphasizes the need to do proper needs assessment in order to fully address the needs of victims during emergencies.

#### 4.5 Provision of Guidance and Counseling Programs:

Pupils were asked whether they received any guidance and counseling programs, initiated by the government or any humanitarian organizations during the ethnic conflict period. The results are given in Figure 4.5.



Source: Field Data (2015)

**Figure 4.5: Distribution of Pupils who Received Guidance/Counseling in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya.**

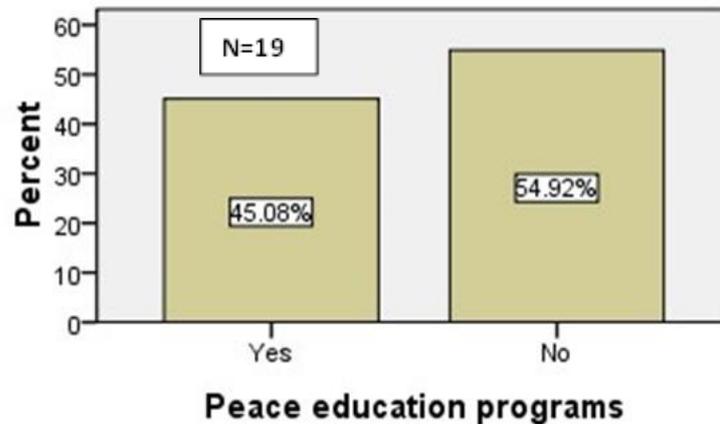
A Pearson Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2_{1,0.01} = 16.165$ ) showed that there was highly significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) on the variation on the issue of provision of guidance and counseling. From the study conducted in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties, Figure 4.5 reveals that majority of the pupils 125 (64.43%) did not receive guidance and counseling while a minority 69 (35.57%) received guidance and counseling during the conflict period. During interviews some children confirmed that they experienced nightmares and were not able to study at night when they recall the atrocities witnessed during conflict. One pupil remarked:

“When the armed gangs attack, I hear the wailing all night. My parents tell me to put off the light and go to sleep. The next day I am too afraid to go to school for fear of being attacked. I am afraid of everybody including teachers and my parents. I don’t concentrate in class.”

This highlights the need for guidance counseling programs in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties. Sichari (2014) pointed out that children born of traumatized parents require guidance and counseling because the mothers were likely to pass over the behavioral and emotional disorders to the children. This may lead to difficulties in learning and mastering of concepts at school. Justino (2014) agrees with these findings by noting that children who had witnessed massacres of their relatives or rape of their parents were constantly traumatized. Such children are emotionally demanding and need guidance and counseling to help them overcome the trauma.

#### 4.6 Provision of Peace Programs:

Pupils were asked whether they had received peace education programs. The results are given in Figure 4.6.



Source: Field Data (2015)

**Figure 4.6: Distribution of Pupils who had Received Peace Programs in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya.**

A Pearson Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2_{1,0.05} = 1.870$ ) showed that there was no significant ( $P > 0.05$ ) variation on the issue of peace education programs. Data from Figure 4.6 reveals that 106 (54.92%) of respondents received peace education programs while 87 (45.08%) did not. During the FGD discussions it emerged that more needs to be done to sustain peace and cohesion in the two sub counties of Nyakach and Sigowet in Kenya. Teachers observed that the pupils harbored vengeful tendencies in school. This was confirmed by one pupil interviewed who remarked:

“When I grow up I would like to acquire a gun and shoot those people who killed my parents. I will never forgive them. They made me an orphan and now there is nobody to support my education.”

This vengeful attitude of young pupils in schools highlights the need for peace education and guidance and counseling. Key informants interviews revealed that there was inadequate peace education both in schools and in the community. This had been made worse by lack of proper guidance and counseling programs for the victims of ethnic clashes. During FGD meetings, residents of the two sub counties admitted that there was constant fear and suspicion between members of the two communities; the Luo of Nyakach and the Kalenjin of Sigowet sub counties respectively. Burton (1990) pointed out that conflict is deeply rooted in unfulfilled basic human needs of the parties. Unless effort is made to fulfill the needs of the parties during and after the conflict period, sustainable peace and security cannot be achieved. UNICEF (2006) reports a number of countries that have already undertaken peace education programs after conflict. For instance, in Lebanon, the Education for Peace Program, jointly undertaken by the Lebanese Government, NGOs, youth volunteers and UNICEF now benefits thousands of children. Similarly, the student Palaver Conflict Management Program in Liberia employs adolescents as resources in peer conflict resolution and mediation activities in schools.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The general objective of the study was to evaluate the nature of humanitarian interventions during and after the period of ethnic conflict in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya. Analysis of the nature of humanitarian interventions revealed that although the government and humanitarian organizations assisted the conflict victims with food aid, clothes, medical care, shelter, guidance and counseling programs, more needs to be done to alleviate the suffering of the conflict victims. The study recommends that intervention programs by both government and humanitarian organizations should engage more closely with the households affected by conflict to alleviate their suffering and facilitate the process of conflict recovery. Both the national and county governments should come up with proactive policies on how to support the education of children in emergencies. There is need for the state to enforce the rule of law and address impunity with reference to violence against children in armed ethnic conflict.

### 5.1. Suggestions for Further Research:

Based on the findings of the study in Sigowet and Nyakach sub counties of Kenya, the researcher recommends that a similar study be done in another region facing ethnic conflict to determine the nature of humanitarian interventions during and after the conflict period in comparison to these study findings. Further research is needed to evaluate strategies of mitigating the impact of ethnic conflict on communities engaged in armed conflict. Supportive research should determine the early warning systems and risk reduction measures that can be used by the government and Non-governmental Organizations to mitigate the effects of ethnic conflicts on affected communities.

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