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KENYA

CASE STUDY

Women Become the Arbiters of Peace

The Women's Peace Crusade helps reconcile communities in conflict



Photo: Richard Grahn, AU/IBAR

A Turkana warrior and Pokot warrior pledge reconciliation to the Women's Peace Crusade.

The Women's Peace Crusade has been a successful tool for opening dialogue between communities in conflict, due in no small part to the great influence women have over warriors.

Challenge

Trapped in a cycle of growing poverty, pastoral communities on a cross-border region of Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda known as the Karamojong Cluster have become increasingly desperate in recent years. Inadequate representation in government, understaffed security and poor civil administration result in lost livestock and livelihoods for residents. Tribal and ethnic conflicts bring violence, the proliferation of small arms and cattle raids, and this cycle continues when men of one community conduct a raid to acquire more livestock after being raided themselves.

Initiative

USAID funded a program to bring together community elders from conflicting tribes to discuss the benefits of peace and how to stop escalating violence. The program's groundbreaking initiatives, like the Women's Peace Crusade, have established and maintained peace among several ethnic groups. Karamojong women can speak out about their grievances under exceptional circumstances, and they must bless the warriors before they go off on a cattle raid. Under the Women's Peace Crusade, 100 women spend two weeks at a time traveling from one community to another, telling elders, officials, warriors and other groups about peace in speech, dance and song. Their meetings are held in contested grazing areas, reaching the youths involved in raids and ensuring that peace messages reach those on the frontlines.

Results

The Women's Peace Crusade has been a successful tool for opening dialogue between communities in conflict, due in no small part to the great influence women have over warriors. It has raised community awareness of the problems caused by cattle raiding and the need to find ways to share scarce resources. As a result, large-scale community-sanctioned raids have decreased, and some communities now allow their former foes' cattle to graze their land. Groups are also working together to develop inter-ethnic agreements that set out universal punishments for crimes.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
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