

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY CENTERS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION
A CASE STUDY OF ASUKASTALO CENTRE IN EAST PASILA

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Abstract

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The study sort to shade light on the impact of the community centre (Asukastalo) in Pasila east, on its neighbourhood in solving conflicts. Community centres act as a pool for laying out grievances, ironing out community differences in a diplomatic, less punitive and agreeable manner. Asukastalo employed various facets of conflict resolution to enhance community livelihood through mediation, reconciliation, arbitration, negotiation, dialogue just to mention but a few, methods, tools and processes that were used in attaining peace. The efficiency of the methods used was also examined.

The study utilized empirical methodology and analysis in alliance with the respondents to derive a clear picture of the role of the said community centre. The Pasila neighbourhood project was launched by the Kalliola settlement Helsinki city (2008-2010), with the ultimate aim of bridging the gap between different cultures. It reports in depth developments to the community as a result, including and not limited to networking and various problem solving dimensions. It also derived expansive recommendations that will be essential to other community centre policy development.

Key words: Mediation, Rehabilitation, Arbitration, Reconciliation, and Pasila.

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INTRODUCTION

Community centres whether in developed or developing world, have one thing in common; they act as that binding force in the society bringing people of different walks of life together to develop themselves, solve conflicts and reduce differences which would otherwise blow out of proportion leading to a crisis.

The number of immigrants in Finland has increased drastically during the last decade. The growth has been 168%, comparing the years 2007 and 2008. In 2007 Finland received 1505 asylum seekers, in 2008 it received 4035. Between January and June 2009, a total of 4035 applications for asylum were received. Of all these the biggest number came from Somalia. (Finnish immigration service 2009.)

Asukastalo located in the Eastern Pasila is one of those centres that have seen constant increase in number of the service users. The above mentioned factor has largely contributed to this. In our daily lives we encounter conflicts be it in private or public, the centre is therefore no exception. The question is how does the centre deal with those conflicts?

The aim of the research is to shed more light on the role played by the community centre in conflict resolution, the methods they used in resolution and activities they used if any. The settlement movement is a good example of how the gap between the rich and the poor would be bridged. Asukastalo is a product of Kallio settlement which is more like the settlement movement that originated in the United States of America.

This study will endeavour to find out from the inhabitants of Eastern Pasila how the community centre has made an impact in their lives by solving problems encountered during their stay in Pasila. In the developed world, most conflicts are settled in court or in a formal way. It is therefore important to note that this study will focus on those methods that do not involve courts.

1.1 East Pasila

Pasila as we know it today was shaped in 1918 by Eliel Saarinen. East Pasila was built such that pedestrian zones are separated from motor vehicle zones. The area has a mixture of residential and office buildings. East Pasila has a population of 3,863 inhabitants and an area of 0.92 square kilometres. It has 8918 work places, and the age structure is such that 40-60years bracket have the highest number of inhabitants (tietokeskus Helsinki.)

Commercially speaking East Pasila is active with many facilities like Messukeskus and Hartwall arena. It has its own railway station, a number of educational facilities like the main library, schools like Helsinki Business College, Helsinki business polytechnic Haaga Helia are located there (tietokeskus Helsinki).

1.2 Research Questions

Community centres have a potential of bringing people together and bridging that gap that exist between cultures. These centres act as a meeting point of people who would otherwise never have crossed paths in their lives.

1. Which methods do community centres use in solving conflicts in the community? And what is their role in conflict resolution?
2. How has Asukastalo helped in bringing the community together by solving their differences?
3. How do community centres exercise their role as that integral part of the society that helps the community fastened together?
4. How can community centres help in bulding a socially cohesive society in their endeavours to deal with conflicts?

1.2 Background of the Problem

Conflicts can be defined as differences with a person or between two or more people that touches them in a significant way. We all constantly encounter differences with and between ourselves and others. Only those differences that we perceive as challenges to something we believe in or need, or to some aspect of our individual or shared identities become conflicts (Lebarone 2006, 12).

My international placement enabled me to mingle and interact with the residents of East Pasila and the service users in the community centre. I was surprised to discover that though at the surface things seemed to be smooth running, deep down some people begrudged others. I came to know this because I would see some ladies discussing in low tones and when some people passed by, they pretended as though nothing was going on. Though I did not understand their language, it was clear that all was not well. My decision to research on this topic was largely because of the power struggle seen within the Somali community and the other residents.

This research will seek to find out what the community centre has done to solve conflicts within its members and how it has endeavoured to do so. Another question that will have to be answered is the methods used by the centre in settling conflicts.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1 History of conflict resolution

Umbreit in his book *Mediating Interpersonal Conflicts* asserts that in America, community based mediation programmes dates back to the late 1960s. This was during the war on poverty and many communities wanted to be in control and free from oppression. It was recognized that during that time courts in America were overcrowded and a way had to be invented to ease the congestion in the courts. He further alleges that in the 1970s, community based organizations played an important role in that, they came up with mediation programmes. Some of the community programmes included the centre for Dispute settlement in Rochester New York and Night prosecutors program in Columbus, Ohio (Umbreit 1995, 44).

Umbreit further claims that a program like the Night prosecutors in Columbus Ohio had an enormous impact in the neighbourhood because it diverted a lot of cases from the court system. It is essential to note that these centres were developed to cater for the marginalized communities.

A lot of studies have been done on conflict resolution, but there are few studies focusing on the role played by community centres in conflict resolution. A lot of studies have also been done on Somali immigrants in Finland but not on how they solve conflicts within themselves and outside the courts.

2.1.2 Theoretical framework: Community Development and its models

Human beings share an inherent sociability and a willingness to connect and cooperate. A community can be defined in different ways. When you call a set of people a community, it usually implies that these people have certain characteristics in common.

Over a period of time, the way people perceived community has changed a lot. Geographical location of certain neighbourhood, small town or some people was the main focus then. According to Webber, (1963) communities go beyond just geographical boundaries. Communities are based upon people's faith, beliefs and hobbies. It is the people who decide which communities they want to build.

Certain symbols and features like hairstyles, dressing codes and language help identify who belongs to which community. “Civilization is the celebration of differences” (Gandhi). There is a saying in my culture that goes like; it takes a whole village to raise a child. The point is that, a community is an integral part of the society and no man is an island.

When dealing with a diverse community like the one in Pasila a lot of care should be taken because communities with incompatibilities are prone to generate a lot of debate and heat which often lead to conflicts. Community development may not be an old profession but it has had a great impact in the society. It has become a tool used to address vices such as social exclusion, poverty, discrimination and crime (Henderson, 2000.)

2.1.3 Consensus Model

The first model in community development is the one on consensus. This model dwells on the fact that there is a general consensus on how the community should be organized (Alison Gillchrist 2004). Numerous projects have come up from this kind of model. A good example is Asukastlo, the model encourages local responsibility for organizing projects and activities to benefit the society. They may be self help activities for especially a minority or a marginalised section of the people.

This model has the sole-purpose of bringing the community together through activities such as cultural events which have been quite noticeable in Asukastalo. Volunteering in that, retired professionals have given back to society through their professional service during events. For instance retired teachers help in teaching Finnish, retired nurses give consultative services like blood pressure derivation and computer experts help in teaching adults on computer literacy issues. Willingness to be an active member of the community and taking responsibility are both very important rather the corner stone of this model (Etzioni, 1993, Blunkett 2001).

2.1.4 Pluralist (liberal) model

Compared to the first model where we found a bottom-up approach, such that members were involved in the activities of the community, this takes a totally different dimension. It is generally agreed that society has different interest groups which strive to out-do each other by influencing the decision making process. This model therefore sees community development as that integral part of the society that enables the disadvantaged to be heard.

The community worker in this model is an advocate, organiser and facilitator. His main task is to bring the people together so that they can speak in one voice collectively; as the adage goes unity is strength division is weakness. This way, they can exert pressure on the policy makers to attain desired results. This kind of model is usually common with local authorities like municipalities (Gillchrist, 2004.)

2.1.5 Conflict of interest model

This is a more radical approach kind of model. It would not be wrong to liken it to “Robinhood” the backbone of this model is the fact that it identifies the conflict in the community and tends to align itself with the poor, oppressed, or marginalised (Mayo, 1979, Cooke and show 1996).

The argument in this model is that the causes of poverty are connected to the economic system. It tries to bring out the fact that political and social institutions have a significant connection with the exploitation of the poor. This model strives to minimize imbalances by exposing discrimination and prejudice. It seeks to develop forum for addressing social change through redistribution of power and other resources.

All in all, it can be concluded that Asukastalo fits in the consensus model. This is because community members are involved in day to day activities. Their participation is very important, interaction with each other, and the willingness to take responsibility seriously assigned to them, gives them a sense of belonging. In the other models, the social workers are the major agents of change. This is clear in the Asukastalo events such as trips to Estonia, participating in the Pasila week and community clean-up exercises.

2.1.6 Mediation

Mediation can be defined as the process of settling disputes or misunderstanding using a third party member who plays the key role. This process entails a common understanding of the dispute at hand, a clear picture of the disagreement from both-sides-of-the-coin perspective such that the mediator is aware of each party's grievances separately

In principle, the success of mediation is nestled in the stronghold of a variety of virtues. The mediator in this case is expected to be of calm, reasonable, respectable, non-partisan and patient amongst much needed traits. To be able to be accorded the honour and audience to come in between and facilitate the reconciliation process one is regarded as esteemed and of reasonable mature ground in resolution. Fuller (1970) emphasizes further the need for perfect knowledge of the circumstances leading to the dispute, the parties involved and the ethical mode of performance by the mediator. In this case the mediator professionally handles both information kinds with discretion and confidence so as not to jeopardize any positive sign whatsoever of reconciliation.

Communities are there with the major intent of living at peace and in harmony with each other. However, as the adage goes we are all wired differently, it follows that our ways of conduct, belief, interests and judgements vary from one person to another. Furthermore, our tolerance levels for these variations define the intensity of the dispute.

According to The Nationwide Academy for Dispute Resolution in the UK, (NADR) Mediation is regarded as a deliberate, non-tying, impartial course of action. Professional third party mediators endeavour through dialogue procedures to bring the parties in dispute together in a binding or non-binding resolution. Where the mediation process ends with a binding agreement amongst the conflicting parties, then it follows that the agreement can be enforced, simply and quickly, by the courts should the need arise (Academy for dispute resolution 2000).

This study focuses on Asukastalo and its employment of mediation amongst other methods to resolve various differences amongst the community members and at large. Bowling & Hoffman, (2003) expound on key issues regarding mediators' emotions in the process. In summary, the author accrues success to the mediation process to self awareness, self management, self control and most of all appropriate tonal variation

during communication. Upon evaluation, the appropriate use of the above concepts by the mediator definitely yield the much needed result since the conversations become less emotional, the professional is impartial and the tendency for emotions to flare is limited.

2.1.7 Reconciliation

Often the end achieved after the mediation process comes reconciliation. At this point the parties are in tandem. As argued earlier in the chapter, in the consensus model of conflicts, the sole-purpose is to bring the community together and if some people are not in good terms then it will be impossible to work as united community. There comes a point when the disputed parties come together during or after mediation, to forge a common understanding and forge a common way forward. In this case these parties do not think independently but reason with the other (ex-disputed) to yield a solution on the way forward. In most cases this part of resolution is sweet and filled with emotion, empathy, sympathy and mixed feelings of distrust and confidence. Parties want to try and make their relationship better.

According to Ron, (1995), reconciliation is not a one-touch procedure but a lengthy sequence of events in repetitive motion to finally eradicate ill feelings between the conflicting parties. In his theory "The Cycle of Reconciliation", Ron assert that the process should start with an initial relationship. There should be a pre-existing link between the parties involved. In this relationship the risk factor is that, risk-taking creates trust, and therefore it is this trust that is in return betrayed and causes conflicts.

In most cases the aftermath of conflict is fear, distance, physical, psychological and even emotional distancing by the hurt party. The distancing enables the victim to self examine the event, circumstances that led to it, the behaviour of the other party during the squabble. To avoid distrust or hard feelings harboured, one would resort to talk it over, otherwise then; feelings of pride and who owns up to fault begin to recur. If little time is dedicated to this self evaluation then room for acceptance and forgiveness is created hence apology and reconciliation (Yevsyukova, 1997).

Finally, for the guilt and hard feelings to be erased away from the relationship, negotiations through the mediator take place at the consent and knowledge of both parties. In this case every table is turned, to touch on every aspect of the conflict and air out the parties grievances.

As Ron, (1995), put it, strong relationships grow in a cyclical manner whereby heart aches and strife are an everyday occurrence and more or less a natural path. It follows therefore that reconciliation takes a while and is enhanced more when repeated, and re-interaction of the parties regularly not only for dispute resolution but for familiarisation purposes.

2.1.8 Arbitration

The world Intellectual property right association defines arbitration as a course of action in which a dispute is yielded, in accordance with the involved parties, to one or more arbitrators who formulate a binding resolution on the dispute. Upon the choice of arbitration, the disputed parties involved opt for a non-judicial, discrete form of resolution proceedings instead of court systems. In this case arbitration differs from mediation since the latter is formal. Arbitrators are indeed professional individuals who run through the proceeding more like the court schedule although in this case there is no jury neither is it the-winner-takes-it-all situation.

The Nationwide Academy For Dispute Resolution in the UK appraises the arbitration method for resolving disputes, doping it the best especially in commercial disputes although it is expected that the parties involved rarely redeem the initial business relationship they enjoyed prior to the conflict. The academy asserts that Arbitration is fundamentally adverse and legal in context consequentially ending in a-winner-takes-it-all situation (Academy for Dispute Resolution, 2000.)

According to the mediation and arbitration department of the world intellectual property right association, arbitration is characteristic of consent amongst the 2 parties, it is a neutral procedure such that the arbiters aren't expected to take sides with any disputed party, the proceeding is carried out in a confidential manner and finally, the decision of the arbitration tribunal is final. It is important to note also that unlike mediation, which

is a procedure that ends with both parties in consensus mode, most arbitration proceedings jeopardise the pre-existing relationships be it individual or commercial. This method therefore draws the line in this study's precept in that, as we shall see later in the study, arbitration holds no water in the Asukastalo centre since the centre's core values revolve around consent, understanding, warm resolution, rehabilitation and most of all bridging hard feelings amongst the disputed parties. The centre therefore does not indulge in formal resolution proceedings.

2.1.9 Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation: The process of making a new, of a person's way of living, perceptions for life changing purposes, it is the activities that necessitate the turning point of an individual in need of intervention.

It is a process of social, political and economic adjustment to, and underpinning of, conditions of relative peace in which the participants, especially those who have been disempowered and immiserated by violence can begin to prioritise future goals beyond immediate survival. Survivors not only need a stake in achieving these adjustment goals but need ultimate direction over the means to achieve them (Pugh, 1998).

This study will be limited to the transformational aspect of rehabilitation employed by the Asukastalo community centre in resolving conflict. The procedure of aiding disputed and reconciled individuals to the last stage of resolution, 'moving on'. At this point the individuals have gone through the previous tools of resolution, mediation, and reconciliation although in this study, we did not find it applicable when dealing with arbitration and finally rehabilitation.

2.2 Conflicts

As long as human beings dwell on this earth, there will be conflicts of different magnitude. It would be naive to imagine living in a utopia kind of world. The question is how we respond to these conflicts. Conflicts can be very destructive depending on the mode of solution. Tempers can flare and violence can easily result in some situations if conflicts are not handled properly.

According to Umbreit, (1995), conflicts can take up two forms; assertiveness and cooperativeness. In the latter, our interests come first, while cooperativeness takes into consideration of other people's needs along with ours. The way a conflict is addressed can make a huge difference in the society. It gives one an encouragement to know that however difficult a conflict is, if handled properly a constructive solution can take place.

Umbreit further asserts that separating the problem from the person is an important step in conflict resolution. We should all bear in mind that we are all hum beings and humans make mistakes. Respecting the other party means considering the criticism they give rationally and not attacking the critic.

2.3 Types of conflicts

I chose to write on the following example of conflicts because they were relevant to Asukastalo. There are many types of conflicts which were left out because they have no similarity at all to Asukastalo for example political and international conflicts.

2.3.1 Relationship conflict

In life conflicts will always exist, they range from trivial differences to significant fights. The fact that conflicts exist, does not necessarily make them bad. Relationship conflicts come in different forms, they range from friends having differences to marriages and even family members disagreeing on certain issues. Conflicts can act as a test for any meaningful relationship in such a way that they can weaken or strengthen it. Relationship conflict can be fruitful in such a way that they bring about appreciative admiration of the other party or they can be disparaging, resulting in hatred and aggression to the other party with undesired results.

The determinant in any conflict is the way it is resolved. Fences can be mended or shattered, relationships damaged or repaired depending on how the conflict was handled (Nadig, 2010).

2.3.2 Interest Conflicts

When two groups of people have a struggle over some resources or any rare commodity it will be almost certain that a conflict will arise from that. Interest conflict comes as a

result of this struggle and the result is such that the opponent's interests are sacrificed at the expense of the other group. To some degree Asukastalo can be said to have noticeable characteristics that can be compared to this type of conflict. Generally speaking this kind of conflict is frequent in position, physical resources and money.

In my case study, we saw one group having a feeling of being looked down upon just because they were not given a key to the centre and so the power struggle and position in the society came into the picture. This seems to be a perfect example to equate to interest conflicts (Nadig, 2010).

2.3.3 Structural Conflicts

These conflicts are unique in a way because the people involved in the actual conflict have no control over the causes. Land in Kenya for example is a very sensitive issue and this has been a major bone of contention in most parts of Africa. As the population keeps increasing, the land will be a scarce commodity hence people will compete for it. This model however does not fit Asukastalo because there are no forces external to the people in dispute. It is however worth mentioning that this kind of conflict requires structural kind of solutions. It is through concurrence of the concerned parties that an external force is in existence in the conflict that a solution may be found. Even then mediation has to come into existence to help the parties understand that it is beyond their control that they are in the conflict (Nadig, 2010.)

2.3.4 Value conflicts

According to MacIntyre and Plummer, (2007), the definition of values can be summarised as the measures that one holds in discerning good or bad that varies across cultures. Of all the conflicts, one can argue that value conflicts are widespread in the contemporary society. One may define easily value as an attribute held so strongly due to cultural orientation, upbringing or external influence in one's lifetime. In as much as one grows up and exposes oneself to various stimuli and phenomenon it is possible that one adjusts or changes to it. However in situations that compromise the strong structures inherent (values) since development or childhood, it becomes uncommon that one may change to adhere to it (phenomenon). Furthermore, these values form the character and personality

of the person in most cases. In addition, in the event that one is put under pressure or the values held are contrary to the other party's, then there arises conflict in ideology that compels one party to compel or disagree hence disputes. In Asukastalo case for example, this model fits best the description.

The writer goes ahead to denote that value differences are a difference in orientation of various issues like education, culture, frugality, merit, community and ethics, to mention but a few (Macionis & Plumer 2007, 135.)

2.4 Conflict management

Conflicts can be managed in different ways. The type of conflict dictates which of the management styles is suitable for that particular conflict. The commonly used styles include avoidance, competition, compromise, accommodation and last but not least collaboration. The research will seek to dwell three of the management styles because of the multicultural nature of Asukastalo.

Avoidance as a management style can be used in certain instances where some time is needed to cool off the heat and when the right time avails itself, the issues can be discussed over. However with accommodating style, there is a lot of cooperativeness and mostly people want to meet the needs of the other party. This style is not suitable in the study because there is minimization of the conflict and appearance of harmony is displayed. The aim of solving a conflict is to bring about long lasting peace. If people are not honest and tend to please others at their own expense, then it defeats the whole purpose of conflict resolution.

The research will mostly dwell on compromise where both parties with a dispute want to come to the understanding at some point so that their relationship is not damaged. Asukastalo, being a community of people from different cultural backgrounds with a lot of interaction, is not conducive an environment for people to harbour grudges. At some point, the community members rub shoulders hence the need to maintain good relationship. The compromising style therefore is one of the methods that suits Asukastalo because it's a give and take scenario.

Finally, in collaboration, both parties openly present their grievances with a genuine need to hear what the other used to say. They both work with what they have in common rather than their differences. This style is relevant to promoting employer-employee relationships, such that it's a two-way journey that both parties meet halfway, it is therefore not indicative of the Asukastalo scenario.

2.5 Examples of Conflicts

In this section I will discuss various conflicts from various parts of the world. Though some of them are political, the basic idea is that conflicts have some common denominator and that is if they are not solved properly, they may escalate and get out of hand leading to violence and great loss of life. The other important point I want to emphasize is that community centres play a significant role in conflict resolution.

2.5.1 The African Perspective

The African continent has experienced numerous conflicts. Though some have been amicably solved, a great number of others are going on and have caused untold misery and senseless loss of lives.

Multi-level clashes and differences in opinion in Africa can blow out of proportion into aggression and conflict owing to the in-effective arbitration systems that are depended on in providing genuine, just, efficient and timed means of resolving conflicts. In essence, one may argue that alternative dispute resolution can bridge the gap between the formal punitive modes of correction and dispute solving, and the traditional forms of African justice. Despite globalization and the westernization effect that has accrued more attention and powers to the latter, community gatherings, consultations, seminars and fairs are tested-and-tried means through which differences are ironed out effortlessly, thus achieving stability and neutralizing social tension and misfit.

2.5.1.1 Case of Burundi

Ancient disputes amongst the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa communities could possibly have aggravated immense psychological enmity. Tutsis as herders, fought the reserved Hutu

and Twa over foodstuff and arid land for grazing their cattle. The process of group formation and differentiation most especially the roles that illustrations, perceptions, stereotyping, and deindividualization were critical for the key players in the decision-making in communities (Ndayizigiye 2002.)

In its long, blood-spattered record of hostility since its independence in 1962, Burundi attests to countless defining moments. It is likely deemed to be facing its toughest, The Gatumba massacre. The fateful 18th of September 2011 demonstrated the unsettled disputes boiling underneath the surface that threatened to entirely drawback endeavours to spearhead harmony and ultimately restore transitional order. As a matter of interest to this study therefore, the way in which Burundi counters this recent simmer of violence and conflict, brewing from the conflicting communities is the background of the study. According to a recent Conflict Alert & Prevention Centre (CENAP) report on the Burundi violence and disputes, CENAP team started a second phase based on a participatory approach to find consensual solutions adapted to Burundian context on the identified challenges (illegal circulation of weapons; poverty and unemployment; attitudes during elections; and justice and reconciliation). Dialogue groups were created in communes and provinces to link the four forces and grassroots community. (Cenap, Insight on Conflict 2004.)

In remedy however, the Amahoro ('Peace') Youth Club (AYC) was formed. A centre targeting the active patriotic youths aimed at being the major tool for reconciliation, and restoration of peace. Comprising university students, initiated towards non-profit motivated activities involving society, income generating ventures at small scale and peer to peer consultation forums that united all communities regardless of roots. According to Ndayizigiye, (2002), it was a national movement which had a democratic, networking structure, in contrast to what they perceive as the more hierarchical NGOs of their country.

Dedicated to creating dialogue and educational activities to support the peace process in Burundi, the AYC intended to establish a new type of working culture in the civil society, with a high level of individual commitment, transparency and a long-term mission which guides the organisation's everyday activities (Insight on conflict, 2004.)

The grizzly civil strife in Burundi has had a devastating effect on children, evidenced by large street urchin numbers, teenage pregnancies and needless to say stray women. The picture therefore draws us to conclude the most affected cadre to be women and children. According to Insight on Conflict, (2004), many young people have suffered psychological stress through the violence, humiliation, rape, and economic hardship which have become a part of daily life, whilst others have been recruited by rebel or government forces, and involved in the fighting.

The objectives and core values of AYC narrowed down to a more transformational scope, more democratic and harmonic society. This centre therefore is deemed remedial in cash and kind through counselling services, excursions, community clean-ups and activities that are pro-peace oriented. Although one may argue that Burundi still has got a long way, evidenced by immense poverty and economic strife, the quality of life in terms of security cannot be overlooked. Therefore community centres have played a major intermediary role in creating peace and order restoration to a greater extent, informally.

2.5.1.2 Case of Sudan

One may argue that majority of conflicts in Africa are attributed to power struggle. In the recent past, power changes, ascensions and stand-outs have left societies torn and helpless in devastating shape. According to sungho kang, chinsoo bae et al (conflict resolution and peace building 2009), the burning question is whose responsibility is it? Moreover, in as much as the victims would want to resolve, often the culprits are adamant to the peace process. The conflict in Sudan has many faces, the best known are a 'North-South' conflict, 'that problem in Darfur' or an 'Arab-African' conflict. The reality is that Sudan is deeply complex with many isolated but often overlapping conflicts that blur common perceptions (Insight on conflict 2009).

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) reached in 2005, clearly affects virtually all communities from both North and southern parts of Sudan. Underneath these diverse ethnic clashes that persist, and unspoken oil-related disputes, tend to act as catalysts that aggravate the crisis further.

The bone of contention being southern Sudan's independence, the report from the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), that decided on southern Sudan's autonomy. Darfur has come out as a dispute ground, with high level violence reports. New splinter rebel groups have taken shape and are contesting fresh demands in the South and East, the fate of the oil rich Border States are still undecided, with the possibility of renewed violence. Thousands of refugees have fled conflict areas and logistics over citizenship and the splitting of the national debt have yet to be worked out. These problems threaten to derail the entire process (Insight on conflict 2009.)

SONAD is one of the oldest non-profit organisations in Sudan, promoting active non-violence and with experience of non-violent action. It is founded on the grounds that just, peaceful democratic societies are best built by people with political and civil consciousness, using non-violent methods, and are a combined responsibility of civil society and government.

SONAD began in 1994 with a group of friends from the south at the University of Juba, and was based on their experience of good relationships between Muslims and Christians in the south. They were determined to resist the labelling of the conflict between the north and the south as a religious conflict, and felt that young people were marginalised in decision-making processes. In less than a year, the organisation was so successful that it quickly took on responsibility for raising awareness amongst IDPs and advocating non-violent resistance to government demolition of IDP homes. (Lord Jack McConnell, listen to locals 2011).

SONAD constitutes various denominations majority being from the south, most of its directors from high level institutions, of government and education. Its main objectives align towards strengthening ethnic ties, in non-violent means and inculcate order, peace, justice in the community.

This centre has been a home to the homeless Sudanese through their rehabilitative home schemes for the refugees and internally displaced civilians. (Similar to this study site Eastern Pasila), The SONAD centre runs seminars, and workshops mainly to sensitize

on leadership and capacity development by providing livelihoods in the form of unified sustainable growth.

According to the insight on conflict report (2009), The School of Democracy training cycles covers: the art of good governance, management, ethnicity, dispute transformation, theology of liberation, human rights, gender and development, and social change. Since 2004, ten training cycles have been organised through the School of Democracy, with several accompanying workshops and meetings.

Basically, the Non-violence courses introduced the theory, practice, history, current uses and religious dimensions of non-violence, and gave participants a chance to practise their new skills. Training of Trainers provided more in-depth conceptual understanding of non-violence and its application, and taught participants to lead their own workshops. 'Do No Harm' taught the principles of the 'Do No Harm' theory, and discussed how it can be applied to the work of development organisations and to the situation in Sudan as a whole.

Moreover, still on the remedial centres in Sudan is a major organisation that has played intermediary roles in peace building. Community Animation Friend Association (CAFA) works in development and peace building in Sudan. It focuses on peace building and human rights, youth capacity building and training and education. At present a lot of the work CAFA handles is on sensitization on Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) for civil awareness. CAFA also provided more peace seminars, training courses in different languages when need arises

However, how can one grade community centre interventions effective? Is the forum remedial, are people's perception on violence streamlined, are the women empowered? One attribute remarkable about the CAFA is the bending to suit occasions. Unique to other centres in this study, this centre runs open market interventions at a language most understood to the locals, information regarding non-violence activities, economic development, capacity building activities, to mention but a few.

CAFA operates peace committees in the markets of Omdurman, a city home to people from all over Sudan, these informal meetings provided a place to discuss Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the upcoming elections, by operating in markets, CAFA aims to reach local people who may not be reached in other ways and

talks to them in the relevant language of the market, vernacular, rather than the sometimes impenetrable jargon associated with peace agreements. Using the local tradition of “Guor shakheet” – drawing a line in the middle of the street to signal to people you want to say something. CAFA volunteers give talks on CPA initiatives and invite forums and debates from shoppers and shopkeepers.. Among many active programmes and centres for post conflict development are, ALAM(teachers first training and research) is a teachers’ association committed to educating the next generation about the importance of unity, democracy and freedom of expression. Consultancy relevant to providing social research solutions both to businesses and nonprofits were offered, to all ages and education levels also in the CAFA forums. Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA), a regional peace organisation (Insight on conflict report, 2011).

2.5.1.3 Case of Uganda

The degree and definition of conflict are as complex as its definition. Nevertheless, one may argue out conflict by associating its causes with extreme hatred, fear, power, misunderstanding, vengeance, suspicion and ignorance to mention but a few. In retrospect when it comes to defining conflict, it’s an interplay of words such as rape, strife, power struggle, poverty, unemployment, shattered families, reconciliation, refugees, settlement, strategy, massacres, amputation, child labour to mention but a few.

A report by the UN secretary General Kofi Anan, (progress in tackling Africa’s conflicts) indicates that conflict can be attributed to poverty, weak government, income disparities. This is the picture painted in both Rwanda and Uganda.

The Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) is a non-profit motivated NGO(non-governmental organisation) founded in 1995 by a few Ugandans aspiring to promote alternative and creative means of preventing, managing, and resolving conflict. Above all, CECORE seeks to empower individual women and men, communities, and organizations to transform conflict and to establish a culture of active tolerance and peace. CECORE’s area of focus is Uganda, the Great Lakes Region, and the Greater Horn of Africa, though its services and involvement have been requested and provided beyond these areas.

CECORE is guided by a vision of a society where peace, tolerance, and human dignity prevail. Many conditions must be fulfilled if the dignity of each and every human being is to be established and maintained. A host of economic, social, cultural, and political factors are significant. But peace in real sense should be the driving force, and tolerance, based upon mutual understanding, respect, and forbearance, creates the foundations upon which peace may be built. Thus, the Centre's core values revolve around traditions of peace. CECORE ventures in communities notwithstanding levels of conflict but all communities regardless, implying that it works in both threatened and peaceful backgrounds, to awaken and develop their awareness that peace is within their grasp; to empower them with the knowledge and skills relevant to their situation; and to facilitate conflict resolution, transformation and prevention. This involves training, sensitization, advocacy, mediation and research. It requires a profound understanding of the causes of conflict, a readiness to listen, learn, and mould approaches that respond to specific circumstances, and the capacity to deliver services that are relevant, timely, and effective.

CECORE through its 6 courses Training in conflict prevention, transformation and resolution (CPTR) and peace-building; 'Building Bridges': creating links between parties in conflict for dialogue and reconciliation; Research, documentation and information dissemination; Networking and advocacy; in corporation with media in forums, seminars and conferences is also a point to note in CECORE's modes of intervention in conflict resolution. (Insight on conflict report, 2011).

Important to this study is the forms of intervention CECORE employs. Women, children and the elderly are distressed differently by war, strife and conflict regardless of where they are taking place. (Sungho, John, Chinsoo Bae 2009). Studies conducted on this issue reveal that women and girls are usually the victims. It is therefore necessary to comprehend the various tools centres employ to combat over-the-edge-strife and distress.

Capacity building: CECORE employs a participatory, interactive workshop-based methodology that helps groups understand and analyze conflict. Early Warning and Early Response, Facilitation of CPTR, Media and Peace-building are among resolution the resolution

ventures. In the mid-1990s, the Oxfam Special Program on the Great Lakes Region contracted CECORE to work with women in Rwanda, one of the first initiatives in conflict transformation and healing in post-genocide Rwanda. The women's national collective Pro Femme was subsequently given the UNESCO non-violence peace award in 1996. In 1997 CECORE carried out a needs assessment for UNHCR of Southern Sudanese women living as refugees in camps in North Western Uganda. This led to the development and implementation of CPTR training not just for the women but for all the refugees, government, military, and relief agency personnel working in the camps, and the local Ugandan population. (Lord Jack McConnell, listen to locals 2011.)

In CECORE's mission, building bridges between differing parties are efforts in mobilization of the vulnerable Burundian women and children. To establish and implement the contract work in educating and empowering pastoral communities in the karamoja region of Uganda. In the records, the centre has also facilitated a wide-faceted forum for negotiation in the conflict prone areas as a result of differences within the bujagali falls, river Nile hydro-electric project in Uganda.

Transverse boundary action is also an important element worth noting. In its efforts to neutralise tensions amongst cross border communities, CECORE channelled its efforts in the Teso-Karamoja community disputes as a result of cattle rustling. Informal, under-the-tree activities, meetings with political leaders, government officials and men of the cloth (priests). The centre implored the key figures in community and used them as a means to reach out to their individual community by sensitization and knowledge sharing. This aspect of conflict resolution is also unique to the case study site pasila with the exclusion of political icons in question. These attributes can be deemed as far reaching considering the wide coverage and fan-base these icons command, hence making successful CECORE'S other tool of networking and advocacy.

One final project necessary in conflict resolution by negotiation and anti-arbitration programmes is the Small-Arms-and-Light-Weapons project. In conjunction with CECORE, this project sensitizes the hostile community against the illegal possession of arms of any kind. It focused mainly on the need for peace amongst communities and also families, more importantly it breaks down the complexity of legislative elements to

layman's language for better understanding, fines and penalties are also pondered upon in this forum for a better carrot-stick effect.

2.5.2 Asian perspective

The main purpose of including examples from other parts of the world is to show that though conflicts can be of different magnitude and nature, the process of solving them is quite similar. They both have offenders and victims, and in most cases betrayal of trust may have occurred and once the resolution process starts, there is the need for a peaceful ending to the conflict.

2.5.2.1 Case of Pakistan

Common to all worldwide is the tension and conflict in the Middle East and Arabic countries of which Pakistan is not an exception. In the recent past, Pakistan has faced immense terror owing to its renowned mix of culture variances, poverty, illiteracy, religious extremism and the mother-of-all insecurities, terrorism. Moreover, ranking high in drug smuggling according to the gazette reports, violent ethnicity issues are worth mentioning. From the sociological point of view especially the Marxist view of oppression and subordination, one may fail to draw a line between genuine religion and sectism. It is amidst these tensions that women and children bear the scars that some times last a life time.

The Pakistan government has channelled resources in cash and kind to eradicate the ethnic and religious pull amidst the communities but has not yielded much. Therefore community centres in collaboration with NGO's have come together to establish strategy to counter these strife and promote peace in Pakistan. I believe that there are lessons from civil society organisations in Pakistan for peace builders around the world. The country is often known for terrorism, extremism, violence and conflict, but there is the other side to the country, with passionate peace builders actively working for the cause of peace and non-violence (insight on conflict, 2010.)

ALAAP (Ambassadors of Love, Arts and Peace) is a research-based cultural organisation with a vision of pursuing peace through art in Pakistan. According to the

insight in conflict (2010), established as a result of inspired artists, researchers, musicians, and writer, the organisation is affiliated with Jeunesse's Musical International, which is the world's largest network of organisations promoting peace through music and therefore promotes non-violence through events such as cultural festivals, art exhibitions, musical evenings, seminars and writings. Potential projects that involve people from all corners of the Pakistan community through art and talent regardless of ethnic ties and backgrounds included the peace calendar, poetic events such as Peace Mushaera, Kalam Night and peace festivities to bring together jovially members of the Pakistan community. These strategies of mediation become natural in connecting conflicted parties together and also employ a silent way of resolution, away from the round-table norm of resolving disputes.

Taangh Wasaib Organization (TWO) is a rights-based initiative of university and college teachers, students, social workers and citizens aiming to promote communal harmony, gender equality and respect for human rights, according to the insight on conflict, Pakistan, (2010), it was founded in 1988 and employs local Sufism as a strategy for peace development in Pakistan. Sufists are Islamic 'saints' born in the region, they have their roots in Islamic teachings but they gave a very progressive interpretation of Islam. They have boldly addressed sectarianism, hatred, intolerance and gender issues, preaching a message of love, harmony, and peace. These is more of mediation and arbitration such that the sufists could stand in as judges and use the religious notes to guide in settling parties at dispute. This organisation, similar to Pasila deals with the same religious inclination as the members in pasila and therefore is of relevance especially in comparison of the efficacy of different modes of conflict resolution.

2.5.3 Community centres in conflict resolution; European perspective

Europe too has experienced a number of conflicts some of which are political and ethnic in nature like the one in Bosnia and Kosovo. If underlying differences are not addressed conflicts can linger on and later escalate to violence and even genocide. I would also like to point out some of these cases show that if conflicts are well handled, peace can be achieved.

2.5.3.1 Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland was the location for an extended armed conflict, known locally as ‘the Troubles’, which lasted from 1969 until 1998 and led to the deaths of 3,600 people. The conflict in Northern Ireland has been driven by conflict over the political status of the region and the competing claims and aspirations of the two main communities. The Protestant community generally favours the political union with Great Britain. They regard themselves as British citizens and define themselves politically as Unionists. Hardline unionists are known as Loyalists since they proclaim loyalty to the British monarchy. The Catholic community generally favours the creation of a single united Irish state. They regard themselves as Irish people and define themselves politically as Nationalists. Hardline Nationalists are known as Republicans since they strive for a United Irish Republic. (CAIN Web Service - Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland)

A protracted multi-party ‘peace process’ resulted in a peace agreement, signed on Good Friday 1998, leading to the creation of a range of new political and human rights institutions and eventually in 2007 the formation of a devolved government that included the four main political parties (Cain web service 2011). The transition from a society enmeshed in a long-running violent conflict to a largely peaceful society has ensured that the Northern Ireland peace process is widely regarded as one of the major successes of recent peacebuilding activity and a model for other conflict transformation work (Good Friday Agreement of 1998).

Northern Ireland was for a long period seen as one of the world’s ‘intractable conflicts’, with little hope of a political solution to the violence between Catholic and Protestant communities (Borooah, 2000). These clashes have left a dent in people’s lives and perception of peace from the military. They felt their trust was betrayed and around this time the Good Friday Agreement came about, with its amendments to the then policies, it acted as a unifying agent and brought about resolution between disputing parties. Despite much effort however to restore order, most NGOs were called upon to support the government in conflict resolution.

Irish Network for Nonviolent Action, Training and Education (INNATE) offered relevant material and extensional services to train on anti-violent and anti-violence action. It worked alongside community in relation and development through public

conferences and parades, advocating (non-partisan) mediation and workshops (Insight in conflict, Northern Ireland 2009.)

The Koram Centre, commonly known for its providence of counselling services to the post `troubles` victims acted as a disaster management centre in northern Ireland, it offered forums for people to freely express themselves. It also made use of local volunteers who were aggressive tools for change in community then. One important aspect of the resolution process by Koram is the confidentiality during its sessions, whereby parties listen a lot to the grievances of the disputed members and try to offer personal and discrete solutions to their problems and ill-feelings.

Assured of confidentiality, victims and survivors of the conflict were able to receive one to one support from trained and supervised volunteer 'Listening Ears' (Insight in conflict, northern Ireland 2009).

Through training volunteers in a Community Counselling Course, individuals received closure in expression and offering suggestions on non-violent actions. The teaching undertook a solution-focused perspective, and it was therapeutic to the affected physically, emotionally and mentally. Hence transforming individuals into doing pro-cohesion activities that would bring them together into the community with no hard feelings.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Significance of the study

This study sort to explain the contribution of Asukastalo community centre in resolving disputes within Pasila East community and its contribution towards building a cohesive society.

Purpose-driven by the guidelines of the various modes of conflict resolution in community, I ventured into expounding how community centres employ these various tools to resolve conflict. Issues pertaining to mediation, arbitration, reconciliation and dialogue to say the least have been utilised as ponder points for these study. A Salient question to this study could be, in as much as governments have structured modes of resolving conflicts, systems have been structured to mediate for non violence and pro-peace actions, they have fallen short in achieving total peace. Community forms societies that form nations that constitute the world, if therefore a string in this channel is faulty, tension threatens the whole system. Conflicts are still being reported in Korea, East African regional conflict, Arab countries for example Lebanon and Israel conflict to mention but a few. This shows that there is a loophole in this structured system hence the driving force behind this study. I therefore intend to contribute in filling the gap of knowledge on the role of community centres in dispute resolution.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives

1. To develop a clear cut framework for non-punitive modes of conflict resolution at community level.
2. To establish a harmonious and convenient way of settling disputes of different capacities.
3. To investigate the resolution modes used by the community centre and their effectiveness in settling resolution loopholes.

3.3 Methodology and Data Collection

The research report mainly focuses on analysing the process and methods used by Asukastalo community centre in resolving conflicts. The qualitative methodology was employed in this research, the main reason being that it has a variety of ways of data collection that range from narration to observation. Furthermore according to Denzin and Lincoln, (1994, 2) qualitative research involves interpretive, naturalistic approach to a subject matter.

The expediency of the methodology cannot be over emphasised because if you compare it to quantitative analysis, the feelings of the interviewees can be obtained in qualitative research and this method therefore fits perfectly in conflict resolution as it acts as a platform for the people with differences to air their views and feelings towards the conflict.

Data collection was linked to the research questions on how community centres can help in building a socially cohesive society and the methods Asukastalo used in solving conflicts. I decided to use the interview method in my data collection. The interviews were divided into two groups namely:

- a) Asukastalo staff
- b) Community leaders and the Somali residents from Pasila East Community

The Asukastalo officials run the centre's day to day activities and help in planning for the activities of the year and the administration of the centre. On the other hand the leaders from the community for example the Imam offered valuable information regarding conflict resolution. The language used in conducting and analysing the interviews was English. I interviewed two adults from the Somali community with the age range of forties to Mid-forties. I also interviewed two staff members from the centre and two community leaders from Pasila East.

I conducted individual open interviews directed by semi-structured interview questions. Open interviews were preferred because they gave the respondents the chance to be flexible and hence express fully their feelings. The down side of this kind of questions is that the respondents tend to stray away from the main focus point. I therefore decided to employ semi structured interview questions to keep or steer the conversations in the right direction of the research. Semi structured interview questions have an advantage

because they play a big role in giving the interviewer means to build on a topic and get detailed information. Personal interviews were favoured due to their diverse advantages as opposed to long distance or other interview methods like by telephone and internet. The major advantage is that there is a one to one interaction and one can even be able to see the expression on the respondents' faces and therefore weigh on the seriousness of the conflict. This can also give the interviewer an advantage because he or she can be able to encourage the respondent to open up to answering questions that would be regarded as sensitive (Connaway & Powell 2010, 170.)

For the sake of precision I decided to use audio tapes in the interviews. It can be impossible to get all information from the respondents without recording. A part from the audibility and sound dependability almost all the sounds are a hundred percent preserved. If one were to compare between recorded and written interview, you would find out that a lot of information is lost in the written interview (Connaway & Powell 2010, 171.)

3.4 Observation

Observing is an act of being in a particular research area taking part in whatever is happening, watching, listening, speaking, drawing and even noting down what is going on (Dunne, Pryor & Yates 2005, 55).

Observation is a method used to collect data to be used in qualitative studies. The starting point of data collection was when I was doing my roles relationship and power placement practice at Asukastalo Community centre. I started writing in my diary what was happening starting in early October. I noticed that some Somali ladies were whispering and pointing at other ladies and laughing sarcastically. I also used participatory observation because I was given the responsibility of organizing a cultural evening. This gave me a chance to get closer to the group and know more about them. The Asukastalo staff acted as the bridge to reach the community members and since I had participated in most activities, it was easy for me to mingle and interact with them fully. The down side of the observation method is that the people tend to behave normally when they realize that a new person is around. The advantage I had was that I had to stay there for a long period of time so the people found it "normal" that I was

always around and so they tended to behave normally (Halarambos & Holborn 2004, 909).

Throughout the whole observation process I used to make drawings while mingling with the members. The advantage with using drawings was that we would laugh with them at the drawings but behind the drawing was an important message. This method proved to be not only beneficial but secure. For example I drew a sitting arrangement and later I found out that some people were always sitting closer to each other just because they did not want to mingle with others.

3.5 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conversations initiated by the interviewer for the purpose of obtaining information (Cohen & Manin, 1994, 271.) Furthermore according to Warren (2001, 83), interviews are essential because they enable the researcher to understand the interviewee's viewpoint on certain issues and most importantly his emotions on the topic. I conducted six interviews two from the Asukastalo staff, two from the community members and two from the Pasila community representatives.

The use of a tape recorder was of paramount importance because it enabled me to do the interview relaxed and maximize the time given to me by the respondent. I had to transcribe the data myself afterwards and deleted all the information as I would not wish the information to be leaked out to someone. I was at times disappointed because some respondents did not keep time and others did not come at all. One particular respondent was so busy that getting him took so much time that gave up on him. I however understood his position because some things were beyond his control.

One of the most strenuous activities of the whole process is transcription. I spent close to five hours to transcribe one interview of one hour, this was largely because of the accent of the respondents and at times the sound was interfered with by the centre's busy activities.

3.6 Data Analysis

Only the interviewees know of what they are saying in other words they are the experts of their own information. This therefore explains my decision to use interpretive

phenomenological analysis. It gives consideration to the meaning of the respondents as the main source of data (Howitt & Cramer 2008, 381.) In this research, no specific permission was required to conduct it. It is nonetheless significant to note that in all social sciences, certain ethical standards have to be upheld and those I did.

I approached the collected data from the research questions perspective. This was important because it enabled me to focus only on the relevant information and therefore not waste too much time on unrelated information. My next step was to reduce the transcribed texts by forming clusters. I formed clusters using three categories; the first one was on what the community centre does to the individual, the second one was on what it does to the society and finally how it addresses conflicts between the individual and the society. In the first category the recurrent information I discovered was that the community offers courses, relaxing atmosphere, meeting point and listening ear. When it came to the role of the community centre and its usefulness to the society I found out that most people talked about organizing community events like Pasila week, trips and clean up exercises and Friday dinner which is open for all community members. Finally the centre played a big role between the individual and society. Most people talked about problem solving, providing ample environment for individuals to settle down conflicts and basically one individual said it is like “fire fighters” it cools down the tempers.

According to Gregory (2003, 49), discretion is a central part of professional and ethical value in social work that has to be observed at all times. To be specific no information of the respondent should ever be divulged under any circumstances. The research took into consideration the fact that all findings did not mention any respondent by name, in fact letters like X or Y were used to indicate a respondent this is so because I did not want to jeopardize their identity.

Community work has always been a topic that is close to my heart and since in a community all sorts of conflicts arise, I therefore got the inspiration from the course we did on community work which is part of social work to strive to work towards cohesive community.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Validity and reliability of research instruments ensure scientific usefulness of the findings arising thereof (UNESCO, 2004). This study applied purposive sampling procedures to obtain a sample of community centre service users and providers. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique that allows a research to use cases that have the required information with respect to the objectives of the study. Such cases are often handpicked because they are informative on the required characteristics (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999.) It is with this regard that this study draws the justification of the purposive sampling process which identified key players in the conflict resolution process as handled by the community centres.

Validity is the extent to which the instruments will capture what they purport to measure (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). Validity of the instruments is critical in all forms of researches and the acceptable level is largely dependent on logical reasoning, experience and professionalism of the researcher (UNESCO, 2004.) To uphold content validity, the researcher discussed the contents of the qualitative data with the supervisor before generalizations and conclusions were drawn. Further, the researcher noted down and interpreted the circumstances upon which relevant arguments and disputes were arrived at. This ensured that all sentiments were scrutinized before being accepted as valid findings of the study.

The idea of my topic developed during my placement on roles relationship and power, and one of our tasks was to find out what kind of power struggle existed in the placement environment. Since I knew that I would write on conflicts, I then started collecting data by observing and writing down notes and discussing with the staff on some noticeable behaviour of some service users. I was involved in the daily running of the centre and I mingled with the people freely. Being an immigrant, it was easy for them to accept me and open up to me for those three months. This way, I got to know underlying issues which I would not have known had not done my practice in the centre.

In this study, a high level of reliability was upheld. To achieve this, I ensured that questions were designed and put across in the simplest way possible. This were

accompanied by side notes to enable respondents understand the requirements, thereby providing reliable responses. Further, the qualitative approach of structured and semi-structured questionnaires allowed me to elaborate questions in cases where they were not well understood; these also enabled respondents to provide reliable answers.

However, given the fact that most questions were open-ended and that most variables are in non-quantifiable scales of measurement, the application of quantitative techniques for determining reliability such as test-retest, split-half or even parallel forms were constrained. The situation was further complicated by the nature of target respondents- people who in most cases are busy and may only spare a little time for interviews. In view of this, it would be difficult and monotonous to have a second time to interview the same people, if quantitative techniques for determining reliability were to be applied. Accordingly however, the responses were matched with the study objectives to identify information gaps. In the event of such gaps, the researcher reviewed the instruments further as well as data collection approaches to yield efficiently as expected.

3.8 Professional development during the research process

The experience gained from the research is immeasurable. I got a firsthand experience in research work and the challenges that come with it. I however got to understand better the advantages of a qualitative research and how observation can be a very useful tool in doing a research.

The most important aspect was the fact that when I spent time in the community my perception of certain things changed drastically and I was really challenged because I reflected and realized that I too had some degree of intolerance. My communication skills were developed significantly and so were my interpersonal skills. These act as a prerequisite for a good research as they help in building trust. Once trust has been build one can be able to access vital information on the research.

I was able to read non-verbal communication by the respondents' because that enabled me to know when to stop if the questions were too personal or the respondent was not comfortable in answering them. I however need to develop more professional skills as this will be advantageous in my future research work.

3.9 Research ethics and the role of the researcher

I took into consideration the fact that the respondents have a different culture than mine and so respect was given to them and I asked for their permission before doing the interview and I had to fully explain to them what the interview was all about.

The protection of their identity was a priority and after the recorded tapes were transcribed, I made sure that I erased all the recordings. My role as a researcher was to create a favourable environment for the respondents and to use a simple language that would enable me get the most out of the respondents.

4 CASE STUDY

Pasila community centre was launched by Kalliola settlement Helsinki city in 2008. This centre is a co-operation project with different actors namely the inhabitants, the Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY), Helsinki social department and the resident association.

Just like other community centres, Pasila centre acts as a place where neighbours can meet, receive special help, organize trips, offer their services to other people voluntarily and exchange ideas. It is an open place where people of different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds can come together and enjoy the diversity of humanity.

The idea of community based organization has been around for quite some time. It is therefore not a new idea and that is why the research will dwell on the impact it has on the community when it comes to solving conflicts.

Conflicts happen when two parties disagree on a particular topic, situation or values. Human beings will always disagree but the question is how they solve their disagreement. Having done my placement at Pasila community centre I realized that pushing conflicts aside or postponing them will not help, rather getting to the bottom of the problem is the best way to go.

During my placement period which was from October to December 2011, I got an opportunity to work with the people of East Pasila community, and I was mostly in the community centre. Asukastalo is a meeting point for people with diverse cultural background, the largest of which is the Somali community. It is with this regard that the study concentrated on the Somali community.

It should be noted that even within the Somalis they have divisions according to clans and region of origin from Somali. In autumn 2009, Asukastalo saw an increase in the number of service users from the Somali community. The participation of the youths increased and some of the activities that attracted them were English lessons offered, mathematics and cooking lessons.

The older people too attended in great numbers especially the ladies. They too had interesting activities which kept them busy. They would cook, attend sewing classes and those who had interest in learning the Finnish language would do so. The men also had a chance to meet and talk about current affairs and they too had a possibility of doing computer lessons. Trips were organised to Estonia in autumn and summer of 2009 and everything seemed to be running smoothly.

A significant point to note is that, when the centre was opened the Somalis were close together and they were a close community. They treated each other warmly and according to the officials the Xhosa principle of “Ubuntu” which means “I am because you are was seen at its best”

In the beginning of the year 2010, there started to appear some divisions in the Somali community residing in East Pasila. The divisions were so unique because the ladies were the ones who had started the divisions. An important point to note is that the single ladies had issues with the married ladies. The husbands of married ladies did not have any problem with the single ladies. As the year progressed the conflicts seemed to escalate and now it was apparent that something had to be done. The officials in Asukastalo sort for the help of the imam to try to find out what was causing the big division.

It was discovered that some single parent ladies were spreading rumours about some members of the community and some of those rumours were not true. The other reason was that the single parents were looked down upon by the married ladies who saw themselves as having a higher status in the community due to the fact that they were married. The single parents found it harder to deal with the life generally and the fact that being a single parent in that community has some negative connotations as “seen as promiscuous”.

The other notable difference was the fact that one group of Somalis liked listening to music and dancing while the other did not even like the sound of a mobile phone ringing using musical tones. In autumn 2010 when I joined the community centre the situation had subsided and things seemed to be normal. There were incidents where conflicts would arise though trivial matters, but the fact is they had the capacity to escalate to full conflicts.

To give an example, in November 2010, one group had been assigned a key to the community centre, and so they had access to it fully. This infuriated the group without the key since they saw themselves as inferior. They even did not want to hold meetings together or even attending functions at the same time. Just before December the Somali men came together and said they did not want to be left out in this conflict. They talked to the officials in the community centre and wanted to give their contribution to the community.

On 17th of December 2010, the men organized dinner for the community and prepared delicious food which was shared by both single parents and married ladies. The men did not also find it appropriate to be calling the imam every time a dispute arises. They therefore decided to pay the single ladies visits individually and talk to them as friends.

5 ASUKASTALO IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In this chapter, I will dwell on various methods asukastalo used to resolve conflicts and how they were applied on the case study. I will also endeavour to show how asukastalo combined various methods to arrive at a delightful solution.

5.1 Mediation

As mentioned in chapter 2, mediation is the process of settling disputes or misunderstandings using a third party member who plays the key role in the quest for peace. This process entails a common understanding of the dispute at hand, a clear picture of the disagreement from both-sides-of-the-coin perspective such that the mediator is aware of each party's grievances separately (Fuller, 1970).

Asukastalo's role as a community centre is to bring change by solving problems in a peaceful and non-punitive way. It was however evident that change happened in both ways, by this I mean that Asukastalo was also changed by the service users. Their approach to conflicts changed and they ended up using multiple ways to solve conflicts.

It is important to mention at this point that I did not attend any of the mediation sessions, the reason being that these sessions were so sensitive and the parties did not wish to have any other person in their meetings a part from the mediator and the Asukastalo staff. I was however updated by the staff on the progress of the meetings so I was able to write down the challenges and progress of the mediation meetings.

Mediation was one of the tools used in Asukastalo's endeavour to settle conflicts. In the case that is mentioned in chapter 4 where two groups of Somali ladies had a conflict, the staff had to intervene. They acted as facilitators; therefore utilizing the liberal model which states that a community worker is an advocate, organiser and facilitator. His main task is to bring the people together so that they can speak in one voice. Mediation is a process that must be followed meticulously for any meaningful results to be achieved.

According to Fuller (1970), the success of mediation is nestled in the stronghold of a variety of virtues. The mediator in this case is expected to be of calm, reasonable, respectable, non-partisan and patient amongst much needed traits. To be able to be

accorded the honour and audience to come in between and facilitate the reconciliation process one is regarded as esteemed and of reasonable mature ground in resolution.

The choice of respectable Muslim leader from the Pasila community was therefore no accident. The Pasila staff played an important role in facilitating the mediation, providing a comfortable location therefore reducing the tension. In line with the study's objectives and question I can say that through mediation the conflicting parties were brought closer to each other and they were able to speak out openly and frankly their minds. Mediation cannot exist without dialogue. Dialogue is the process of communicating and sharing necessary information with each other with an aim of bettering oneself or each other (Noor,Osman personal communication 15.12.2010).

I found out that however much Asukastalo staff worked towards peace achievement, the conflicting parties share a bigger role in the game. Unless the conflicting parties are of the realisation that they need to be in tandem, the dispute can be regarded as hardly over. Considering the case of Asukastalo, relationship conflicts and interest conflicts were better intervened through uniform forums and events that were meant to reduce tension.

An important point to note is that all disputes are a result of long-gone unsettled aggravations. Some conflicts left unsettled or dispute parties left dissatisfied. This study found that reinforcement was remedial to both parties and society in the long run. The case of Sudan that is mentioned in chapter 2, presents a conflict with many faces, the best known are a 'North-South' conflict, 'that problem in Darfur' or an 'Arab-African' conflict. The reality is that Sudan is deeply complex with many isolated but often overlapping conflicts that blur common perceptions (Insight on conflict 2009).

This case presents a perfect example of harboured unresolved disputes on land, income disparities and leadership that for a long time were unsettled, which later blew up to tension, rebels and revolts in the society. SONAD, through the school of democracy training, addressed conflict transformation, liberation and social change in its courses, hence creating a new way of thinking and dealing with disputes individually and as a group, thus providing a lasting non-violent resolution.

In its attempt to bring the community together, Asukastalo employed dialogue as a tool in achieving peaceful ends to conflicts. Alongside its popularity and the round table

environment that were conducive for negotiations, conflicting parties were drawn in by consent. In relation to the dominant form of conflict played in the whole study, value conflict, the vast values in conflict within the Somali community were harnessed unknowingly whilst at these social activities. Especially the group that felt under-utilized and was assigned less responsibilities, clashed in most cases with the leaders and my experience was that these differences naturally resolved themselves through interaction in get-together forums, cookery sessions, finish courses and cultural event nights.

As previously illustrated in the theoretical framework, of all the conflicts, one can argue that value conflicts are widespread in the contemporary society. One may define easily value as an attribute held so strongly due to cultural orientation, upbringing or external influence in one's lifetime. In as much as one grows up and exposes oneself to various stimuli and phenomenon it is possible that one adjusts or changes to it. However in situations that compromise the strong structures inherent (values) since development or childhood, it becomes uncommon that one may change to adhere to it (Macionis & Plumer, 2007.)

Value conflicts came across as the dominant source of conflict in this case study. In Asukastalo this was clearly the case because the conflicting parties had some things they held dear to their hearts and therefore did not want them compromised. The consensus model relates to the case study due to its unanimity trait. According to Gillchrist (2004), this model determined how the centre and larger community is organised. From these interventions, I can attest that transparency and order was achieved. Conflicting parties had a common understanding for each other and usually after reconciliation vow to move on in one piece.

Asukastalo has through consensus agreed on activities that are aimed at binding the community together such as trips to Estonia and Sweden, participation in Pasila week and clean-up activities which have shown that when differences are put aside much can be achieved. Furthermore, looking at the pluralist model, which puts emphasis on the community worker as an advocate, organiser, facilitator, I find it manifesting itself in Asukastalo because the staff were the organisers in the mediation process. They arranged for the appropriate venue and acted as facilitators by giving suggestions as to

who should be a mediator. The main aim of the facilitator was to oversee the smooth running of the resolution process.

Just like in the case of Burundi whereby the Amahoro youth club (AYC) targeted willing youths, women and children through reconciliation as a method for peace, I can therefore equate it to Asukastalo, considering the use of dialogue and educational trainings that encouraged member participation. Through these, differences were easily ironed out and disputed parties reconciled.

5.2 Reconciliation

As mentioned in chapter 2, after the mediation process, comes reconciliation. At this point the parties are in tandem. As argued earlier in the chapter, in the consensus model of conflicts, the sole-purpose is to bring the community together and if some people are not in good terms then it will be impossible to work as a united community. There comes a point when the disputed parties come together during or after mediation, to forge a common understanding and forge a common way forward. In this case these parties do not think independently but reason with the other (ex-disputed) to yield a solution on the way forward. In most cases this part of resolution is sweet and filled with emotion, empathy, sympathy and mixed feelings of distrust and confidence. Parties want to try and make their relationship better.

In Asukastalo this part of the conflict resolution was clearly seen when men from the Somali community expressed their wish to be included in the process. The men offered to cook for the ladies as a sign of encouragement and showing solidarity. They went a step further and organized home visits for the disputing parties. This answers research question four on how the community centre has helped in building a socially cohesive society.

Though political in nature, Northern Ireland conflict has some similarities that can be compared to Asukastalo when it comes to reconciliation. When disputing parties met at this stage a lot of emotions were expressed. This shows us that any conflict be it ethnic, political or social the process of resolution is the same.

5.3 Arbitration

As mentioned in the previous chapter, arbitration is a course of action in which a dispute is yielded, in accordance with the involved parties, to one or more arbitrators who formulate a binding resolution on the dispute. Upon the choice of arbitration, the disputed parties involved opt for a non-judicial, discrete form of resolution proceedings instead of court systems. In this case arbitration differs from mediation since the latter is formal. Arbitrators are indeed professional individuals who run through the proceeding more like the court schedule although in this case there is no jury neither is it the winner-takes-it-all situation.

Arbitration was found inapplicable in the Asukastalo case simply because the parties did not want a formal way of settling their differences. It was however an option for the centre because from the interview two interviewees said at times people may negate the promises made hence leading to the use of arbitration which has some sort of formality.

5.4 Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is the process of changing the way of a person's living, perceptions for life changing purposes, it is the activities that necessitate the turning point of an individual in need of intervention (Pugh, 1998).

In the process of resolving conflicts, this can be said to be the last stage. It is meant to bring the culprit back to the society. In Asukastlo the process is still going on, it has not yet reached this last stage. However an important point to note is that in normal life small misunderstandings do happen but the staff and the community through the resolution process and representatives from the community can be able to handle them before they get out of hand. This is the essence of conflict resolution, nipping the problem before it grows.

6 ASUKASTALO IN PASILA COMMUNITY

In this chapter I will discuss the role Asukastalo has played in bringing the conflicting parties and the Pasila community together. The tools used in the process will be closely discussed and analyzed because they are the important segments that help in building a cohesive society.

However much effort in the resolution process and restoring peace and order amongst disputing parties, there is still a lot to be desired, Asukastalo is one of the many community centres striving to mediate, reconcile and rehabilitate society. I found that conflicting parties, who would otherwise not have met, got a chance to associate. It also made clients feel a sense of belonging especially through the language activities that played a role of orienting its service users in the society. Integration to vast cultures through community centre activities gave clients exposure and a sense of understanding amidst their `conflicts of interest`. Through cultural nights the service users started to know why some cultures hold certain values dearly.

In the social cohesion perspective, the fact that there are a lot of professional volunteers such as doctors, teachers, nurses and administrators who are willing to offer their services and there are people from the community who are willing to receive these services, then the community centre is the missing link that completes the chain. I found a connection between Asukastalo and the Northern Ireland Koram Centre case. It was known for its providence in counselling services to the victims. It offered forums for people to freely express themselves and made use of local volunteers to ease the tensions just like Asukastalo.

Finally, what made Asukastalo a unique case is that its centre portrayed a picture of empowerment. This is a key trait in building a society's cohesion. The encouragement through both physical and mental activities made it an outstanding centre in conflict resolution.

6.1 Other Findings

Another important finding was that however much they tried to mediate and solve some problems, they kept on lingering on. It was almost impossible to solve some conflicts. They therefore kept them at a tolerable level where everybody was comfortable. An example was noted when a trivial matter like “one group was given the community centre key to use and the other got to know about it.” The ones who were not given were furious. It just shows how delicate the process can be and something small can bring back or escalate a conflict.

A very important observation was that a lot of professionals interacted with Asukastalo members. It was evident that their interaction had a great impact on them. A good example was when ladies met for the language classes, having attended the classes myself. I noticed that the teachers kept them active and encourage participation in the class. They grouped them together and so they had no choice but to participate in that particular group. They made the lessons enjoyable and gave them motivation and so most of them looked forward to the next lesson.

Another interesting finding was that in the Somali community, we have a number of single parents. For me this was really interesting because my assumption was that in the Muslim community, having a single parent is almost taboo. This therefore led the married ladies to look down upon the single parent ladies. A lot of friction was generated from this fact and this is probably the cause of the conflict. The men did not have any problem at all with the single ladies.

Common gatherings like Friday dinner, clubs and trips acted as the “glue” of the community. Through these activities, the community gets to learn the values and culture of the other people and that way there is tolerance in the community. When people do not know anything about some people, fear develops and some cases, arises a stereotype kind of thinking, but once one learns the other person’s way of life, there is acceptance and accommodation.

6.2 Networking

Networking has a great impact on any conflict. Asukastalo had a great network that involves a lot of experienced people who offer advice to them and to the community members. For example the police are part of the network and their services were needed at one point when a boy X was in love with a girl in the community centre, he tried to use force to show his love for the girl as his culture allows that. The girl was enraged and reported him to the staff of the centre. The community centre staff explained to the boy the consequences of assaulting someone and after he understood, they opted to call the police not to arrest him but to inform him that what he was attempting to do is a criminal offence and therefore he should never try it again.

The diagram below is an illustration on how networking can be a great tool in conflict resolution. Just to give an illustration, the housing companies which are part of the network can play an important role in conflict resolution. They can solve a dispute in the neighbourhood before it gets to the authorities by rectification some simple constructions. The community centre has “parliament” with representatives who discuss the grievances of the members. They have a forum whereby they write down what they feel is not pleasing to them and after one year they meet and review any improvements. The community worker can be said to be the connection that Asukastalo uses to link itself to the other parts of the network in the diagram.

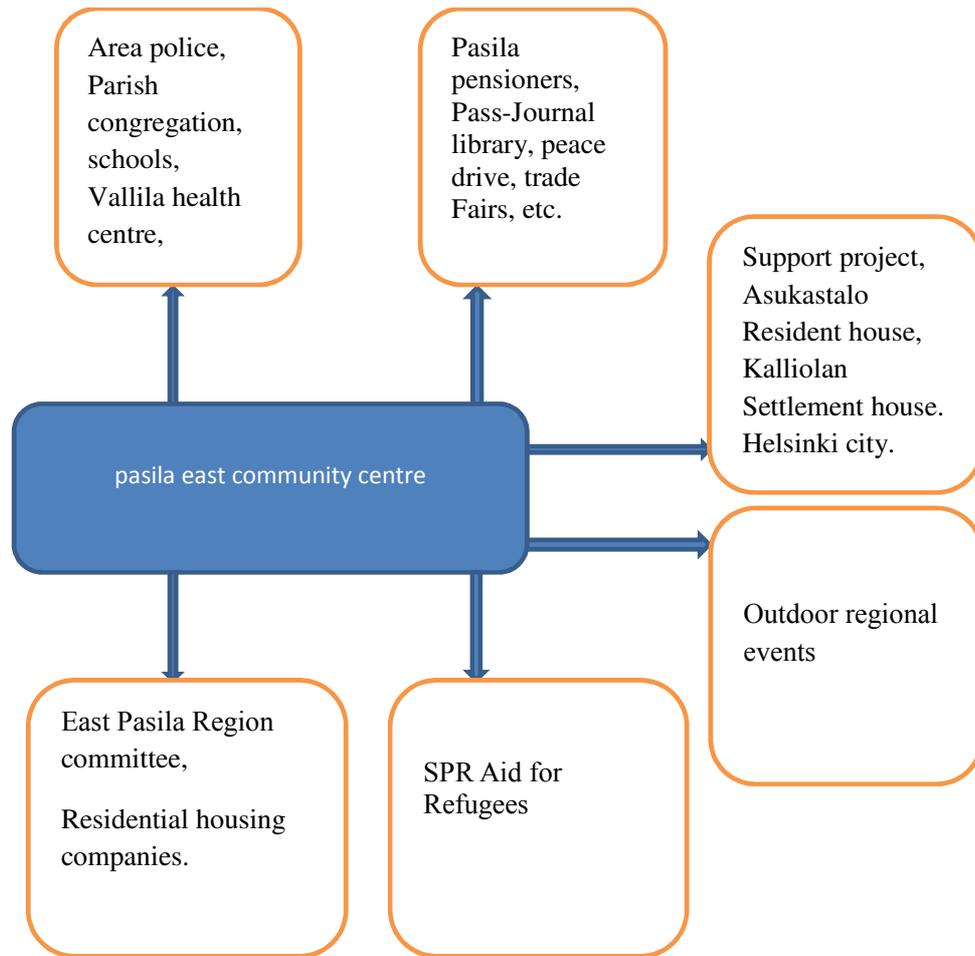


FIGURE 1 Kalliolan settlement activities.

Source: kaliollan centre

The centre does not just use one method in solving conflicts. One can say that the way the clients behave dictates which method is suitable for that particular conflict. They combine more than one method for example mediation, reconciliation and dialogue.

When more than one method is used, the results tend to be more effective as compared to using only one method. A good example is where mediation and dialogue were used to settle the dispute but at the same time men were brought on board to help in showing their support for the whole process. The liberal model sees community development as that integral part of the society that enables the disadvantaged to be heard.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Every research ends with a much needed feedback. During my experience at Asukastalo I noted down a few points that would be of help to the centre in the conflict resolution process. Having done the interviews and observing the community members closely I came up with some recommendations that maybe helpful to the centre. It is my recommendation that community centre works closely with other similar centres in Finland so they can be able to establish other links and channels for its clients to network, easily socialize and learn how others deal with conflicts, let alone discover differing levels of conflict.

I would recommend a range of activities for the community centre`s clients. As discovered, men are lowly represented and activities that are pro-masculine would be more encouraging and better channels for the men also to vent their grievances. Centre follow ups with ex-conflict clientele can be of paramount importance to the centre. The centre gets to gather necessary information and self-evaluate itself on performance measures. Follow up on these cases not only shows the centres concern but also it acts as a measure to ensure cohesion in society.

Testimonials could also multi-yeild in the conflict resolution process. The centre uses stories and even personal narrations from the ex-conflict clientele themselves are far reaching. The disputed parties learn that they are not alone, it`s normal to be in disagreements, it is the way you deal with it that matters. Students from various universities come to do placement practice in the community centre, if utilized properly they can be a great source of information and can help the centre advance in community development.

Finally, intensive advertisement of the centre and its mission, core values and statement should be made public, so the community and society as a whole understand its roles and capabilities. Also to create confidence in those who would want to join the centre to get help. It will also widen its outreach base and give the centre variety of complexities in conflicts that it will have to deal with.

8 CONCLUSION

Resolving conflicts is very much like a journey, it is a process that needs to be followed if peace is the desired outcome. When this research is finished I hope it will provide some answers to some questions in conflict resolution. Conflicts have always been there and will always be there. Whichever method or system that tries to reduce conflicts will have helped in the communities' cohesion in one way or another. Conflicts make people to drift apart and if not attended to at an early stage, can blow out of proportion and take a violent turn.

Asukastalo has acted as that integral part in conflict resolution in the society. The community centre through its activities has endeavoured to bring its community closer hence reducing pre-held prejudices and stereotype kind of thinking. Cultural nights will serve as an example where different communities come together and show their culture, trying to explain to other members in the community why some things happen the way they do.

Events like trips to Estonia and Sweden and Pasila week make the people of east pasila feel that they have something in common. In essence, the major strategy Asukastalo has employed that's worth noticing is the involvement of all calibre regardless of age. Different groups engage in different activities such as memory games, dancing courses and musical chairs, karaoke events, Finnish language classes across all ages regardless of race and sex, also women clubs are deemed active in this case. With all these activities in place, it has been rather difficult to live hidden stones (conflicts) and any other hard feelings unturned the easy way (dialogue & fellowship).

It will be unrealistic to say that all the conflicts can be fully solved. It is almost impossible to eliminate conflicts totally just like in Asukastalo, the conflict was not totally eliminated but reduced to a manageable level. I came to realise that as long as the conflict was kept at a manageable level, the community can begin to build itself from there to a fully cohesive society as this acts as a starting point to positive change. It was quite impressive to know that the Asukastalo staff did not stop engaging with the parties in question when the problem subsided. They kept following up the progress and encouraged the two parties to continue with dialogue and communication.

An interesting concept noted was that at times if the tensions rose, to higher levels, the two parties were not allowed to be in contact or share an event at the same time. It is realistic to argue therefore that at that moment it is more likely for violence and any form of aggression to erupt.

Courts can solve cases but cannot resolve hard feelings people harbour when in conflict. These bad feelings are in most cases kept at heart and in most cases accumulate to dangerous levels. It is at this point that the only solution is when people come together through mediation, reconciliation and dialogue to dilute the tension, which courts do not offer.

The cost of solving conflicts through non-punitive ways is a far less expensive channel compared to the courts. The parties in dispute harbour great animosity towards each other given that in most cases courts verdicts end up with the winner-takes-it-all situations. When people don't know or understand much about people's culture and way of life, they develop distrust and fear and therefore whatever the other person does will be seen as wrong or uncivilised.

My feeling is that conflicts are not bad at all; in fact they are healthy because they make us learn and it is through the learning that we make better choices and decisions. Conflicts should be taken as part of life which will exist as long as human beings continue living together.

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