



## Conflict Mediation Committees Spurring Development of Communities in Rwanda

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**Abstract:** Conflict Mediation Committees (Abunzi) commonly viewed as agencies for peace and reconciliation in Rwanda. Besides, they have been observed to be contributing a great deal towards all-round developmental activities and programmes being executed among various communities in the country. However, despite the development initiatives they have facilitated, there information about them is scant for local, national and even international consumption, understanding and recognition. It is now a fact that sustainable solutions to the community conflicts can only be mainly achieved through holistic and comprehensive approach as have been employed by Abunzi in terms of harnessing home-grown solutions for local problems bearing in mind the geographical, psychological and ideological dimensions of the local communities. Hence, as consequence, the aforesaid would not only help expand the committees' capacities, capabilities and abilities but also help to provide more integrated and sustainable conflict resolutions and peace for the sake of development of communities living in Kanombe Sector. Hence, it is against this backdrop the researcher chose to conduct the present study entitled: "Conflict Mediation Committees Spurring Development of Communities Development in Rwanda", taking Kanombe Sector of Kicukiro District as case study. Its main objective was to understand the contributions the committees have directly or indirectly made towards the general development of communities in the sector through the identification of the causes of conflicts in the communities; assessment of role played by the mediation committees in the sector and to seek and to seek communities' perception on role of the mediators in development agenda of Kanombe Sector. The researcher adopted case research study design cum descriptive research design. The target population was 352 that included conflict mediated households, mediation committee leaders and local authorities in charge of the mediation programme with a representative sample size of 92 respondents (76 conflict mediated parties and 16 mediators) was chosen through the use of simple random sampling technique to get the right information on mediated cases. Data collections were collected through interview method and questionnaire method as well. Both quantitative data and qualitative were generated and entered into SPSS 22 for analysis. Data was then presented in the form of tables, percentages, graphs, figures, pie charts and it was analysed by using SPSS 22 as a statistical package. To ensure validity and reliability the pre-testing of the tools used for data collection was done accordingly. The study revealed that the majority (78.95%) of the respondents identified property inheritance and related issues as one of the main cause of conflicts in Kanombe Sector. Violation of agreed terms and conditions of contracts between two or more entities were found to be a contributor towards the rise conflicts amongst members of the communities in the sector as reflected by claims on the same by the majority (68.44%) of the respondents. Indebtness among members in the sector was another main cause of conflicts experienced as demonstrated by the majority (64.47%) of the respondents. The majority (73.69%) of the respondents claimed that the conflict mediation committee in the area has helped decrease the number of corruption incidents among members of communities in the area. As regards to respondents' own perception on working of conflict mediation committee in the area, it was noted that sixty seven per cent (67%) of the respondents claimed that mediation committee conducted its mediation activities in a fair and unbiased manner. Local Government and National Government should double their efforts towards raising awareness among populations on the existence of mediation committees and on their role as well as the requirements for the population to get services from the Abunzi. Hence, it can conclusively be stated that conflict mediation committees have been in existence in Rwanda for long a period of time and have played essential role towards the psycho-socio and economic development of communities in the country.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Mediation, Spurring, Community Development.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Research have shown that in 1975 the conflict between Israel and Egypt was settled through mediation (Rabin: 1996). The aforementioned states chose to seek peace through cooperation by abandoning the use of force. The mediation was orchestrated by the former American Secretary of States, Henry Kissinger. Mediation process encourages other processes directed towards conflict resolution. It is observed that, world all over, mediation approaches many a time have been employed in seeking adequate solutions to identified problems affecting any given country. It is noteworthy that various mediation approaches have been used in the United Kingdom as well as the USA in settling not only commercial disputes but also in finding amicable solutions to disagreements amongst family members as Deborah, noted (1985).

Nelson Mandela, the late President of the Republic of South Africa helped resolve the political conflict experienced in Burundi in 1993, as consequence of the assassination of the first democratic elected president of the Republic of Burundi, through mediation means as Abdullah (2000), pointed out. In Kenya, the 2007 electoral crisis and its consequences were put to rest through appropriate mediation approaches used led by Koffi Annan, the former UN General Secretary, who, advocated for the formation of Government of National Unity.

Rwanda in order to restore her glory and pride lost to the 1994 political mayhem, she needed peace with a view to initiating new development agenda the Government of the day and its leadership thought it wise to establish platforms through which the needed mediation could be chanelled in the name of Mediation Committees, commonly as community Mediation Committees (Abunzi). The aforesaid committees were established not only to resolve conflicts but also serve as mediation mechanism for resolving conflicts at family level as well as village level. The available literature in Rwanda has indicated that mediation committees are the only legalised entities set up with a view to settling conflicts, as specified in the Law No 31/2006 and further by Organic Law 02/2010/OL on the jurisdiction, functioning and competence of mediation committees. The committees are viewed as organisations designated to mediate between people before submitting their respective cases to the courts of law (RCN Justice and Democratic, 2015). The mediation activities are carried out at the cell administrative level with the appealing organs set up at the sector level (Ibid). In Rwanda, today, it is estimated that there are over 38,000 mediation committees which have managed to resolve over 90,000 disputes amongst different groups of individuals, hence, leading to the decrease of the number of cases presented before the courts of law in the country.

It is worth mentioning that despite the amount of contributions that such peace-building teams are making towards development of various communities in, there scant published documents on the clear connection between mediation committees and development of communities especially communities living in urban Rwanda. Hence, the present study.

#### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

In Rwanda, after the genocide of 1994 committed against the members of the Tutsi tribe, it was felt that there was need for the establishment of traditional structures to handle and decide punitive measures to be against those found to have participated in the aforesaid heinous act of planning and killing other human beings in the country for they it was realised that the use of conventional structures in prosecuting all the genocide suspects would have taken long time to conclude the identified and numerated cases. Despite the fact that international support was offered to the country, the Government of the day insisted on maintaining strict domestic control over justice. Rwandan legislature passed a law (Organic Law No 31/2006 of 14/08/2006) that ensure the creation and implementation Abunzi Mediation Committees in 2006, that directed towards to serving as on-going fora for public participating to ensure grass root justice. The aforementioned committees had the jurisdiction over civil and criminal cases whose value did not exceed three million Rwandan Francs. The mediation could help resolve low-level disputes, primarily within families and among neighbours, with a view to making justice more affordable and accessible, hence, relieving the burden of small cases clogged the sector level sector courts. Besides, it would empower Rwandans in decision making by having them actively participating in resolving their own disputes as observed by Montanez (2004). It is noted that at present there is limited literature on Abunzi Committees and their place in the general development of communities around the country. Hence, the role played by the committees in development of communities still remains unclear and seen to be underestimated as

pinpoint out by Ruyange (2003). It is against the aforesaid and revelations depicted therein that present researcher decided to conduct the present study with a view to establishing the contribution the conflict mediation committee have made towards the development of communities in the country, taking **Abunzi Committees, Kanombe Sector of Kicukiro District in Kigali City as Case Study**. The researcher believes that the outcome of study may not only in a significant way add value to the existing body of knowledge but also enhance literature in the area of home-grown solutions through the identification and adoption of local legal mechanisms designed mechanisms to meet the needs of developing countries of the world, Rwanda inclusive.

### 1.2. Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with a view to assessing the contributions the conflict mediation committees are making towards the development of communities in Rwanda, taking the mediation committee operating in Kanombe Sector of Kicukiro District, as case study. Too, it was done so as to identify the main causes of conflicts experienced in the sector and the part the Kanombe Conflict Mediation committees have towards finding possible, appropriate and applicable resolutions to the conflicts. Besides, aimed at seeking views from the respondents selected for study on their perception of the committee's contribution on the development of the sector in general.

### 1.3. Significance of the Study

A number of individuals/groups may directly and indirectly benefit in one significant way or the other from the findings of the present study. It may facilitate the Local Government in particular and the National Government in general to adopt appropriate and applicable strategies that the study would have discovered for enhancing abilities of the conflict mediation committees in resolving existing and emerging conflicts in communities. Besides, the findings may serve guide towards the initiation, formulation and implementation of policies. Additionally, may help the authorities concerned in taking informed decisions regarding the committees place in society and their specific contributions directed toward the development of communities in the country. Too, the outcome of the study will add significant value to the existing body of knowledge that future researchers can refer to in their understanding of place of conflict mediation committees in Rwanda and beyond as alternative legal approaches, home-grown approaches adopted towards finding resolutions from within the communities themselves for conflicts they are experiencing any given time and moment.

### 1.4. Scope, Limits and Limitation of the Study

The present study focused on the understanding of the role played by Conflict Mediation Committee towards the development of communities living and around Kanombe Sector of Kicukiro District of Kigali City. Data covered the period between 2013 and 2019, determined purposely with a view to obtaining the most recent data on the occurrence of civil and criminal incidence emanating from them and primary that drawn from the respondents chosen from the area. It is claimed that Kanombe Sector must have been one of the sectors that might have suffered most of the land conflicts as well as family conflicts in the recent past. It is worth noting that since the study was conducted in Kanombe Sector of Kigali City, the findings will directly be applicable to the communities in the Sector. However, the effect of spillovers cannot be ruled out. Hence, the results may be useful to the sector and its surrounding environs in particular and the country in general.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Theoretical Literature

Karl Max (1818-1883), noted that people are often found struggling to content with a view to satisfy themselves with the allocation of resources in terms of food and housing, job opportunities and education services in maintaining equal structure. Gumplovicz (1838-1909) opined that conflict and war are the paramount objective of civilization (Irving, 2007). Coser (1980) asserted that conflict more often than not can be found in all areas of society and the entire community. Further, he observed that the only way to resolve conflicts is through mediation approach.

#### 2.1.1. Community Development

The term 'community development' is defined as a process whereby all citizens are involved in the process of community change and improvement. It is people-centered process. Development is viewed as a procedure of outcome, growth towards self-reliance and contentment. As an outcome,

development is meant to alleviate problems and empower community members as Taylor (1984), pointed out. Additionally, the concept of community development can be defined as involvement of local people on making decisions related to common problems and needs. Available literature has shown that Africa has been characterised by many conflicts where communal committees have been established and used resolving various types of conflicts. As a result, conflict mediating committees have been viewed as essential structures for resolution of conflicts and peace building. The said committees are found to be using mediation, negotiation, agreement and community empowerment in achieving the aforementioned. For Tongeren (2013b), mediation committees played an important role in breaking down and empowering local people in becoming peace builders. Odendaal (2010) has observed that in most of the African countries the contribution of mediation committees in resolving conflict was prominent in rural areas. Laverack et al (2001) have emphasised that community mediation committees are necessary for achievement of community development based on the cooperation between local organisation and people. Some scholars have referred these committees as remarkable local habitant initiatives directed towards resolving conflicts.

### *2.1.2. Mediation and Community Conflict Mediation Committees*

Mediation is a process whereby two or more people involved in a conflict voluntarily sit down together with a mediator who will assist them in working out a solution to their dispute as noted by Howard (2007). Besides, it denotes the participation of others in resolving conflict in mutual ways at different levels: family, community, and workplace, national and international levels.

Sander (1976), viewed mediation as one of the approaches that can be used in resolving conflicts and for dispute settlement within communities. Though, alternative dispute resolution approach was advanced when the scholar challenged judicial dispute settlements mechanisms, he argued that judicial approach is impotent as regards the provision for adequate solutions to meet the needs and to help solve problems faced in the community. Further, he proposed that in order to preserve identical and not conflictual view, it will be essential to adopt alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that could include mediation committees which are set up for the purpose of adjusting challenges and obstacles of procedures. Alberstein (2007) affirmed that mediation is considered as altering conflict in conviviality and reconciliation, however, not in authoritative ways. Hence, the said approach necessitates the involvement of another individual or groups of individuals referred as mediator/mediators with a view to providing good working environment between parties in disagreement. Mediation process comprises five essential components: the problem, conflicting parties, a pathway to agreement and the mediator. It has been observed that conflict resolution committees are more often than not have been helping in resolving conflicts between neighbours through the form of volunteer committees. A study conducted in Scotland by Wright (1991) has brought to light the existence and development of mediation committees in the country. Merry (1988), has stressed on how community mediation committees have not only helped reduce cases brought before courts of law but also facilitated judicial effectiveness. Hence, it can be stated that conflict mediation committees are instrumental in reducing conflicts emerging and experienced within communities in any given country. Moody et al (1995), noted that conflict transformation was achieved through people's involvement in mediation, clear indication of the importance of these community-based initiatives in resolving conflicts in society in general. Hence, proponents of conflict mediation committees contend that there are a number of benefits gained through resolving conflicts without concurring legal and regulatory framework. Moore (1986) has viewed conflict mediation as a win-win solution, confidential and consented through the improvement of communication and information sharing with populations. He has further stated that mediation is voluntary in nature. Goudy (1990) has observed that conflicts range from socio-economic to cultural disorder. Economic conflict comes as a result of economic inactivity leading to migration of some people to other areas and activities as Vardy (1983) noted. Hence, appropriate strategies are the need of the hour for resolving conflicts amounting from communities.

### *2.1.3. Models of Conflict Mediation*

Alberstein (2007) highlighted different models of mediation as discussed below.

**Pragmatic Model:** Formulated by Fisher and Ury (1981) in changing the traditional approaches to mediation of the 1980s. Dixit et al (1993) believed that for successful collaborative negotiations the negotiator should focus on problems and profits. The model was used by ADR with special reference

to Israel. **Transformative Model:** The model shows that conflict mediations have been able to control conflict and ensured justice. The role of mediators, therefore, is to stimulate communication and understanding between conflicting parties. **Narrative Model:** The model was developed by Winslade and Monk (2000), who argued that the cause of conflicts is poor communication in the perception of personal reality. The incidence of Conflict takes place amongst conflicting parties. Members and the ordinary people aim at establishing effective tools for conflict resolution. The model is used in interlinking conflicts and facilitating the intervention of mediation committees in managing conflicts within a society.

### *2.1.4. Mediation as Mechanism for Community Conflict Transformation*

Mediation committee is an organ meant for providing a framework of obligatory mediation prior to submission of a case before the first degree court.

For Roberts (2005), mediation is an approach or strategy used to overcome misunderstanding among people. Besides, it is seen as strategies to overcome conflicts are important in restoring harmony between people and communities. In order to handle problems experienced in communities called for the use of different mediation approaches that necessarily may include traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The aforementioned paralegal mechanisms existed during the pre-modern societies were used in conflict resolution and management as Alberstein (2007), noted.

### *2.1.5. Factors Influencing Conflict Transformation in Communities*

Bercovitch and Houston (1996) argued that mediation is influenced by distinctive features related to its result. However arguing that impact of its mediation step must be taken into consideration. Writing of Burton (1972) and Fisher (1983) provided strategies to effectively settle conflict, including negotiation, questionnaire assumption, another approach is comparative one related to disagreement and mediation. The comparative model necessitates the historical background of the conflict, situation during negotiation, the nature of parties, mediators, in addition to mediation meetings and policies.

### *2.1.6. Principles and Strategies for Community Conflict Mediation*

Research has shown that one of the most important approaches to be adopted for conflict resolution is the directive mediation strategy for it encourages extraordinary successful proportions. The approach is more likely to influence imposing in mediating process and lead to more positive successful results (Ibid). Besides, there are other strategies such as communication-facilitator strategies, formulation-procedural strategies and manipulation-directive strategies. The approaches ensure communication between parties for mediation session and the initiation of peace session. The manipulation phase include concession, adjusting and making parties understand agreement and negative effect of lacking concession as Bercovitch and Well (1993), pointed out.

### *2.1.7. Principles of Community Development*

**Community Development:** It is a process through which community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Community wellbeing (economic, social environmental and cultural) often emanates from collective action being taken at grassroots level as Hockachka, (2005), noted

James *et al* (2012) have described the principles of community development as follows:

**Community Participation:** A process that ensures that ordinary citizens are prominently involved in activities and programmes directed towards all-round development of their respective local community. Members of any given community play an important role in making decision, planning, follow ups, monitoring and evaluation of the planned and executed activities and programmes.

**Community Ownership:** In this context community ownership is regarded as effective involvement of people identifying development needs, problems and suggesting adequate solutions to achieve identified target. This requires sufficient cooperation between stakeholders and beneficiaries.

**Community Empowerment:** Enhancement community members 'ability to accomplish their expectations in a positive way in terms of adjustment and advancement in knowledge, income growth and accessibility to financial services. Besides, the process calls the notions of inclusiveness and awareness towards collective action that can better people's living conditions and wellbeing within the community.

## 2.2. Empirical Literature

Researches already done on mediation and conflict resolutions have brought to light the fact that conflicts occur under different environments such as families, school, work place, consumers and producers. Hence, in order to resolve the conflicts visible in the aforementioned areas, mediation is need with a view to finding appropriate resolutions for the identified conflicts, ensuring conflict transformation and conflict management. It is towards that direction, mediation has been observed to have helped decrease overcrowding in courts of law besides enhancing effective implementation of judicial procedures. Mediation has the potential to encourage people to resolve conflict by themselves within their respective communities.

Too, it has been noted that compared to ordinary courts, the Abunzi-mediation committee system has a number of advantages: It is affordable, accessible, time management, participatory, restorative and has significantly contributed towards ensuring justice to all citizens of Rwanda in more effective ways(RCN Justice and Democratic, 2009).

Deprivation of privileges and unequal distribution and allocation of resources have been view as key preconditions conflicts in society, consequently leading to vigorous strikes and hence, clear conditions favouring the invitation of mediation among communities. Child dependency mediation has been adopted in California since 1985. In this regard, 78% of cases acquiesced were resolved successfully and mediation agreement led to the amenability as noted by Thoennes (1998). Advocates of mediation have pointed out that there are more benefits for the disputants when using the system when compared to the use of the legal system for it offers a win-win solution, is non-adversarial system, confidential, cheap and quick in providing the required solutions. Besides, it enables individuals to pursue legal remedies in case they choose to do so. Mediation as model for conflict resolution remain to be model of the future for the process is voluntary, responsible for providing solution ,remains with the parties concerned and is never imposed on community. Bercovitch (2000) examined the position of researchers on the theory and nature of conflict, contrasting a narrow approach with a wide approach and subjective approach with an objective approach. The narrow approach to the study of conflict viewed conflict as opposition to cooperation and focused on the destructive behavior located in conflicts. Further, defined conflict as conscious struggle for status. A wide approach to the study of conflicts required researchers to examine the conditions that contribute to incompatible community interests or values. The approach was used for understanding resource distribution and viewed conflict as the result of problems emerging within the system. The subjective approach believed that conflict was the result of the perception of the parties.

The objective approach demonstrated that conflict existed whenever there is incompatible interests or goals regardless of whether or not the parties are aware of these differences. Too, the approach attributed conflicts to structure of the situation not to the individual parties involved.

## 2.3. Conceptual Framework

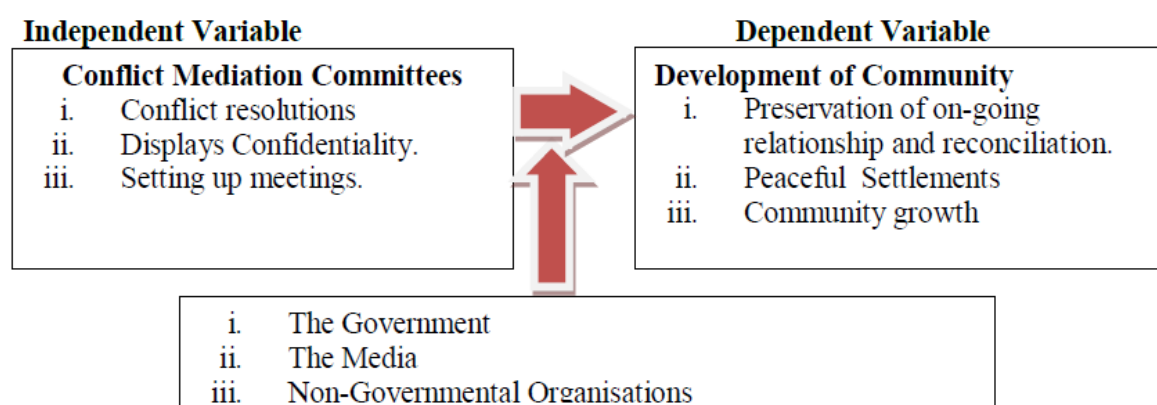


Figure1.1. Conceptual Framework

Source: (Researcher)

### 2.3.1. Conceptual Framework

The principal role of mediators is to facilitate communication between the parties in conflict with a view to helping them reach voluntary resolution to their dispute that is timely, fair and cost-effective,

hence, development of community. It is observed that a good number of disputes occur in the context of relationships that will continue over the years. Confidentiality is the cornerstone of the mediation process. All communications between the parties and mediators are confidential and no evidence of anything said or documents produced during the mediation process are admissible in any litigation proceedings. Parties are generally more satisfied with solutions that have been mutually agreed upon. As opposed to solutions that are imposed by a third party, decision-maker. Through the maximisation of confidentiality disputants remain confident in a mediator throughout the process and among themselves, hence, leading to development of community and peaceful settlements.

Soon after appointment, the mediator contacts the parties or their counsels with a view to fixing date for holding the first meeting. Mediation as alternative often provides a more timely way of solving disputes. When parties want to get on with business or their lives, mediation may be desirable as a means of producing rapid results hence transformation and personal growth.

The Government of Rwanda despite passing laws creating and implementing Abunzi Mediation Committees, provides incentives to support Abunzi, members and their immediate members of their respective families in Mutual Health Insurance Besides,, the Government provide them with mobile telephones and pays airtime charges for them to facilitate their smooth communication. Too, they receive transport facility. The media advocate for respect for human rights in the course of developing communities. Non-Governmental Organisations provide monetary support and at the same time make follow-ups to ensure equal distribution of justice to the conflicting parties.

**3. METROLOGY**

**3.1. Research Design**

Case study research design cum descriptive research design was adopted for the present study.

**3.2. Target Population and Representative Sample Size**

The target population was 317 mediated parties in drawn from Kanombe Sector. Mediation Law No 37/2016 of 08/09/2016, has clearly spelled out what the composition of Conflict Mediation Committees (Abunzi) should be like. Hence, it comprises seven (7) persons of integrity at the cell and seven (7) at the sector level respectively.

Slovin’s Formula was used to calculate the representative sample size of the present study, which in this caseis seventy six (76) respondents as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample Size, N is the Population size and e is the marginal of error (0.1).

Application of the Formula:

$$n = \frac{317}{1 + 317(0.1)^2} = \frac{317}{1 + 317(0.01)} = \frac{317}{1 + 0.3} = \frac{317}{1 + 3.17} = 76.01 \sim 76 \text{ Respondents}$$

Therefore n=76

**Table3.1. Sampling size**

Cells	Mediated parties	Random sample size	Mediation committee	Sample size members
Busanza	72	15	7	3
Kabeza	81	17	7	3
Karama	70	14	7	3
Rubirizi	94	30	7	4
Sector mediation committee members				
<b>Total</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16</b>

Source: Researcher

**3.3. Sampling Technique**

Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed in the selection of respondents of the study.

### **3.4. Instruments of Data Collection, Data Collection Data Analysis**

The study made use of both primary data as secondary data. Primary data were collected by using questionnaire method and interview methods as well.

Questionnaire method was used for collecting the needed data from the respondents selected from the target population, who were conflict parties mediated at the selected Sector for the study. Interview method was used by the researcher in collecting data from the selected conflict mediators drawn from the sector.

The obtained for the study data was then analysed with a view to generating both quantitative data checked and sorted out in order to ensure completeness through the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22)

## **4. FINDINGS**

The study revealed that the majority (78.95%) of the respondents identified property inheritance and related issues as one of the main cause of conflicts in Kanombe Sector. Violation of agreed terms and conditions of contracts between two or more entities were found to be a contributor towards the rise conflicts amongst members of the communities in the sector as reflected by claims on the same by the majority (68.44%) of the respondents. Indebtness among members in the sector was another main cause of conflicts experienced as demonstrated by the majority (64.47%) of the respondents. Another cause of conflict noticed was family disorganization as claimed by the respondents (69.71%). Disorderliness among family members meaning that families are seen functioning without particular order or plan and hence, conditions leading to conflicts among families in the area. Other causes mentioned by the respondents include: difference in understanding existing situations; belief systems and practices; different value systems; members' personal backgrounds; individual and group life accumulated experiences and varied individual and group interests. The said are viewed by as potential situations leading to conflicts in communities and hence, requiring the attention and management of mediators.

The majority (73.69%) of the respondents claimed that the conflict mediation committee in the area has helped decrease the number of corruption incidents among members of communities in the area. The said then implies that the mediation committee has played an important role towards all-round development of communities in the sector. Building of trust, assuring and ensuring fairness as well as efficiency among communities and their respective members were cited as other essential functions undertaken by conflict mediation committee in the area as cited by fifty five per cent (55%) of the respondents.

More often than not the majority (89.47%) claimed that the intervention of conflict mediation in the efforts directed towards preventing and controlling conflicts has raised the level guaranteed justice and assurance of satisfactory resolutions of cases presented before. Hence, the aforementioned is a direct reconfirmation that the mediation committee is central to developmental activities taking place in communities living in the sector covered under the study. Kanombe sector by increasing the level of satisfaction with outcomes of mediated parties. No wonder then, Busingye (2014), the then Minister for Justice of Government of Rwanda, commended the mediators, by emphasising that their role in seeking peaceful solutions to local disputes is vital development of society. Further, added that the mediation committees have their roots in the communities' trust and believe their capacity in seeking peaceful solutions to problems and conflicts experienced. Too, it was revealed that disputes presented before the mediation committee more often than not take less time and costs as compared to those before courts of law in the course of arriving at the appropriate solutions, as demonstrated by sixty one per cent (61%) of the respondents. It is said that, 'peace is an essential element of development'. The majority of the respondents have, hence, confirmed role played by the mediation committee championing development endeavours in the area. It discernible that overwhelming (82.89%) respondents indicated the mediation committee has helped bring about not only social harmony among the communities but also socio-economic transformations in the sector. As observed by Bucyensenge (2014), the officials have commended the role played by community mediators, locally known as Abunzi in solving local disputes and finding common grounds for citizens, which they say have impacted positively the socio-economic lives of the populations in Rwanda.

As regards to respondents' own perception on working of conflict mediation committee in the area, it was noted that sixty seven per cent (67%) of the respondents claimed that mediation committee



conducted its mediation activities in a fair and unbiased manner. In addition, it was revealed that the majority (68.42%) of the respondents stated positively that mediation committee makes reasonable and transparent investigations that in the long run enable it determine precisely any potential conflicts that might require their immediate attention. The respondents (64.47%) confirmed the fact the mediators were always seen directed their efforts towards seeking to ensure that each conflicting party is fully heard during the mediation process. Also revealed is the fact that the majority (63.15%) of respondents were in agreement that mediators make sure that they have proper understanding and analysis of issues of conflict and, ensure that the conflicting parties have similar understanding before final decision is made on the same. It was found that that (78.95%) respondents viewed mediation committee as one of the best and most popular home-grown solutions to burning issues emerging and being experienced in the area in particular in the country as a whole. Noticeable, too, was the fact that the majority (64.47) of the respondents point out that mediators manages and keep track on all the needed information, write up the parties' agreements and facilitate the parties concerned in the implementation of their respective agreement. The Ministry of Justice of Government of Rwanda Report (2012) on the study conducted on Justice Sector User Perception and Victimization indicated that: the overall satisfaction with Abunzi was quite high (73.2%) with no significant difference among the sub-indicators; rate of population's satisfaction with independence of Abunzi at 73.9 % ; rate of population' satisfaction with Abunzi ability to refrain from corruption was at 72.5% and level of population's satisfaction with impartiality of Abunzi stood at 73%. The present study revealed that seventy per cent (70%) of the respondents viewed the mediation committee as an impartial body as regards its obligations and mandate to the communities.

### 5. CONCLUSION

The available information on the existence of conflict mediation committees (Abunzi) and their all-round enormous contributions they have made towards the development of communities in the country so far is scant. knowledge on the committee's ability and capacity to find amicable solutions on social burning issues such as land disputes, family disputes and community disputes a long side with forms of conflicts emerging and present in communities that to a large extent, are seen to obstruct peace, community harmony that in the long run end up demanding for need of reconciliation of the conflicting parties. Hence, place of conflict mediation committees and the role they play in the development of communities in Rwanda cannot be under estimated. It was against the aforementioned backdrop the present researcher decided to undertake the study with a view to establishing the real contributions mediation committee making aimed at development communities in the selected sector, results of which can be replicated elsewhere in the country and beyond. The study intended to depict the role of mediation committees in solving disputes while reducing court congestion with backlog of cases. Besides, targeting the understanding of the work done towards the promotion of development in communities while assessing the contribution of the mediation committees in solving conflicts. Conflict can be defined as any situation where incompatible activities, feelings or intentions that occur together. It is an everyday occurrence at school, at places of work and wherever there are people with differing beliefs, values and experiences. Abunzi is a kind of community justice system where conflicting members of the community, chosen on the basis of being people of integrity, mediate between conflicting parties to find a common ground without necessarily going to courts of law. The study confirmed that mediation is a method of alternative dispute resolution aimed at settling a case before it goes to court. During mediation, the disputing parties come together to attempting to reach a deal. Mediation often uses a collaborative approach and encourages parties to work together during the process. Mediators were of the view that the mediation conflict resolution training they received helped to support the social work approach of freedom, respect and cultural competency by allowing people to feel empowered with ideas on how to plan for bettering their role in society. Besides, will be helpful in enhancing conflict management skills in terms of identifying the causes of conflicts in communities. Conflicts are dominant in practices in communities and in our personal lives, suggesting that there could be benefits associated with learning mediation and conflict resolution skills. Effective mediation helps communities by raising level of members' cohesiveness and hence, strengthening communities. In a way, *Abunzi* can be seen as hybrid between state sponsored justice and traditional methods of conflict resolution, as it helps to address the challenges of an overburdened modern court system. Mediators reduce the levels of irritation and blockage in communities and not only help settle disputes but also to reconcile the conflicting parties and restore harmony within the affected community. Those who referred their cases to Abunzi claimed to feel comfortable while seeking

mediation from within their respective community, which afforded them a better understanding of the issues and process at hand. Local Government and National Government should double their efforts towards raising awareness among populations on the existence of mediation committees and on their role as well as the requirements for the population to get services from the Abunzi. Both the Governments should serve as driving forces to revise laws governing the organisation and functioning of mediation committees with a view to enhancing not only their competences but also strengthening their skills in order to be able to examine well and as expected on civil cases that are presented before the courts of law for the said would not only shorten the time that litigants spend in courts but also court costs incurred by litigants. Mediators should inspire trust. When conflicting parties attend a mediation session, they want to believe that mediators will keep all discussions confidential and use any information they receive to reach mutually acceptable resolutions to the situation by maximising trustworthiness. Local community leaders should be allowed to play a key role in facilitating mediation between conflicted parties. It is necessary for mediators to have special training on leadership and be individuals that both parties can look upon as respected third parties. Leaders drawn from village level should be trained on how to obtain necessary information on all cases to be presented and on how to identify new cases with ease. Development partners such as Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and regional organisations should extend their activities with a view to reaching all in need mediation for their knowledge and expertise in the understanding of the official mediatory networks in sharing relevant information with one another. Hence, the said will lead to better understanding on how conflicts would help the conflicting parties in seeking appropriate solutions to their grievances.

Hence, it can conclusively be stated that conflict mediation committees have been in existence in Rwanda for long a period of time and have played essential role towards the psycho-socio and economic development of communities in the country, though, information on the same is scant in terms of publications for wide readership. The present work was undertaken with a view to making a contribution towards that direction.

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