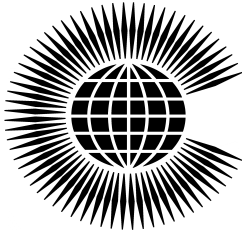


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YOUTH AND PEACE-BUILDING:

A CASE STUDY FROM CYP AFRICA CENTRE

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YOUNG PEOPLE AND PEACE-BUILDING: A CASE STUDY FROM CYP AFRICA CENTRE

Introduction

Although media images of Africa portray it as an irredeemable conflict zone, there are many efforts being made, including by young people, to build peace. In a number of Commonwealth Africa countries these efforts have borne peace dividends with young people taking the lead and creating hope for their communities. This reality must offer a point of reflection and redefinition of the role of young people in and whether this potential resource has been effectively tapped into. In considering the role of young people in , it is necessary to begin by conceptualizing peace. According to Jawaharlal Nehru¹:

Peace is not a relationship of nations. It is a condition of mind brought about by a serenity of soul. Peace is not merely the absence of war. It is also a state of mind. Lasting peace can come only to peaceful people.

Arising from this perspective, the challenge is to ensure that takes into account the different dimensions of peace. In his book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Amartya Sen stresses the crucial point that we all have multiple identities such as our race, our religion, our social class, our work, our country of residence, our education, and so on. Trouble starts, according to Sen, when people are persuaded to focus on just one of their multiple identities as the only route to their destiny.

The description of selected peace initiatives and projects that succeed this section is intended to demonstrate how young people in Commonwealth Africa are encouraging the precepts of learning to know, to be, to do and to live together. The three country case studies of Kenya, Sierra Leone and Uganda show that for peace-building to take root, there is need to foster the crucial sense of multiple identities by expanding the dimensions of an individual's freedom. This is through sustainable livelihood and change of mindset.

Youth participation in peace-building in Africa is imperative as young people are both perpetrators and victims. But clearly they can be great peace builders in their communities as the case studies show. They have played the role of peace animators, peer to peer peace messengers and are versatile in using songs and dances. Furthermore, youth can effectively use radio shows, debates, discussions and sports games to foster peace. They also have the energy to help in creating awareness and in humanitarian efforts after conflict.

However, the challenge still remains to ensure that subsequent experiences continue to foster the value of multiple identities and to promote mutual understanding and respect among all communities in Commonwealth Africa. This paper will examine and illustrate approaches that have worked well particularly those that really manage by young people.

¹ First Prime Minister of India

Kenya

Kenya has been an outwardly peaceful country since its independence but this changed with the recent elections of December 2007, when the country was plunged into electoral related conflict. Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary General headed international mediation efforts to address this conflict. While electoral related conflicts may not be unique to Kenya, the allegations of electoral malpractices on both sides brought to the fore deep hidden issues of livelihoods and lack of human security. The conflict left approximately 1000 people dead and 300,000 families displaced. There were widespread cases of looting, rape and ethnic clashes.

In March 2007, long before the disputed elections, the Ministry of Youth Affairs in conjunction with UNDP embarked on a peace campaign aimed initially at addressing electoral related violence and the use of youth or youth groups to instigate violence. In this regard they solicited the support of youth organizations in Kenya in order to get the youth constituency to take ownership of this campaign. *Zuia Noma* (Avoid Violence Campaign) was to be a countrywide campaign sensitizing young people about the importance of peace and generating discussion on the sources of various conflicts across the country.

However at the time of elections at the end of December 2007 *Zuia Noma* was still in its early stages: artists had been selected for a peace album, newspaper, radio and television adverts had begun to circulate, and in a fundraising drive, the private sector had been roped into a partnership through the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KPSA). (A number of planned activities included a peace video, a national peace anthem, a peace website, a peace charter, country-wide peace concerts, signatures of peace, peace trainings, recruitment of ambassadors of peace nationally, national and regional youth exchanges, inter party youth discussions and peace tree planting.)

In the aftermath of the elections, the *Zuia Noma/Avoid Violence Campaign* was changed to the *Violence Stops at Me* initiative. In the hotspots of Nairobi such as Kibera, Mathare and Dandora, about 1,000 youth leaders were brought together under this initiative to discuss peace. There was a moving story from one young man who rose up after the peace discussions and said that his relatives had been killed. He said that he could spot the person who had killed them and he was seated in the same gathering. The young man said that he could not take revenge. While conflict is fresh in people's minds this mixing of perpetrators and victims in one place clearly carries risks.

Through the initiative, young people provided an enabling environment for the Kofi Annan mediation. During the negotiation process, the young people shunned any provocative activities that could frustrate the peace process. They held peace talks with the primary victims, which helped to release the strong feelings of revenge and hatred. This helped in nurturing the spirit of harmony and reconciliation. Young people have also been actively involved in volunteering at the Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDP Camps). They have helped in supplying food and clothing, and disseminated peace information in the form of T shirts and songs. They have also held peace discussions and debates. Youth exchange visits have contributed to co-existence among different tribes. Visits to the rural areas of each tribe were made.

To ensure the peace efforts were sustainable, the Ministry of Youth "*Violence Stops at Me*" Initiative sent peace teams to some districts such as Kaloleni in the Coastal Province to physically give out cheques to various youth groups from the National Youth Enterprise Development Fund.

What is clear from this experience is that prevention is better than cure. Anybody engaging in peace-building activities must consider investing in building a peace culture particularly among

young people. We must continuously monitor conflict in society as the Kenyan case clearly shows that the eruption of post-election violence was a manifestation of a deeper societal conflict around perceptions of access, control and distribution of resources in terms of ethnicity. It is therefore imperative that young people are socialized to engage in a politics of issues not a politics of identity along ethnic and tribal lines.

Sierra Leone

A combination of factors contributed to prolonged armed conflicts and war in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002. One was the political exploitation of people through military coups, dictatorships, unaccountable government and undemocratic practices. A related factor was the dire socio-economic situation, characterized by the inequitable distribution of resources, the lack of health care and social safety nets, and high levels of illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. The destruction of already inadequate economic resources and infrastructure, including schools and health centres, exacerbated uncertainties and placed youth, who had undergone ten years of instability and violence, in an even more vulnerable position.

The civil war also produced more than 2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees — mainly young women and children — i.e. about 40% of the total population (4.9 million). More than 90 per cent of these victims were civilians. Most are traumatized witnesses or victims or perpetrators — or all three.

Sierra Leone Youth Advocate Programme

The Sierra Leone Youth Advocate Programme (SLYAP) operates according to the principle that empowering young people encourages them to become positive contributors to society and “rulers of their destiny”. Aside from advocacy at various levels, the Programme has undertaken a number of projects. One involves mentoring youth by providing them with care and support including through sports. Other initiatives facilitate the reintegration of former child soldiers.

SLYAP opened two primary schools that accommodate a total of approximately 145 children between the ages of 5 and 14. An economic development cooperative was started to provide women and youth emotionally affected by the war with an opportunity to develop income-generating skills and ensure their families’ livelihoods. In partnership with other NGOs, the Programme provides one-on-one counselling to former child soldiers, and general aid is offered to youth in overcrowded refugee camps. To further the goal of empowering youth to be positive contributors, methods are applied to sensitize them towards civic responsibilities and peace-building.

Most people in Sierra Leone love sports, especially football and athletics. One lesson from the SLYAP project is that through sports, reintegration and harmony can be achieved. This was shown to be true in a series of football matches in which youth from contending parties, including child soldiers and victims, played against each other as well as on the same teams. Although initially tensions were high between the players and within the crowd, by the time the final game arrived the ice had been broken and a friendly environment prevailed. The games forced victims and soldiers to cooperate and trust each other. Coupled with peace-building education, sports promotes the release of war-related tensions. The disarmed soldiers had the opportunity to interact with other community members and break down walls of defensiveness and feelings of marginalisation and separation from those around them.

Youth Alliance for Peace and Development

After the restoration of democracy, The Youth Alliance for Peace and Development (YAPAD) was born. YAPAD established relations with the UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and advocated for the establishment of a radio station which was used to send peace messages to the rebels still in the jungle. In some of the radio programmes surrendered rebels spoke to their colleagues to dispel the myth within rebel territories that any rebel seen in town would be killed. This led to many rebels leaving the bush and coming to town.

YAPAD later expanded its membership to have a national spread and also address the issues of youth marginalization and poverty, which saw women and disabled youth groups joining the YAPAD family. YAPAD was part of a national reconciliation forum that laid the groundwork for the peace as it was at this forum that the rebels agreed to disarm, provided the government forces would agree to disarm simultaneously.

At the final tripartite meeting that marked the end of war in Sierra Leone, a member of YAPAD dedicated Peace Poles to all the parties and addressed them to be committed to the peace process. Eventually YAPAD established a relationship with Village Aid UK which saw YAPAD implementing an 18 months European Commission/Village Aid funded project on “Addressing Youth Poverty in Post War Sierra Leone”. Currently YAPAD is implementing a three year Diana Memorial Fund/Village Aid funded project to empower young people’s organizations to mainstream gender, disability and health issues within decision-making processes in the country.

During the September 2007 elections, YAPAD and its allies, led by the Centre for the Coordination of Youth Activities, held a lot of meetings with the youth wings of the political parties, which culminated in a youth run against violent elections. Some young musicians and drama artists formed a group called Artists for Peace, and went across the country organizing musical concerts for a violence free election.

This experience shows that a holistic approach to peace-building creates stability much more than when one approach is used. Creating alliances re-enforces efforts and strengthens voices. A combination of sustaining livelihood and changing mindsets is necessary to maintain peace efforts. The shortcoming of this project is that like many others, it is too reliant on donor support.

Uganda

Northern Uganda has experienced armed conflict for nearly two decades. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), under the leadership of Joseph Kony had waged a war against the government of Uganda in the hope of gaining political power. The LRA has been targeting civilians, and the conflict has been characterized by great brutality, carried out by the LRA (Tom: 2006). Efforts by the Ugandan government to end the war through military means have proved unsuccessful, since the war continued unabated and the response has led to “massive forced displacement and increased arrests.”

The United Nations estimates that by 2006 over 1.6 million Ugandans had been forced to flee to camps where they lived under squalid and overcrowded conditions. About 30,000 children have been abducted (Ibid). Human Rights Watch points out that, “A Ugandan peace effort, spearheaded by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), has not yet broken through the parties’ desire for a military solution.” (Human rights watch report, 2007)

“*By Youth for Youth*” was launched in December 2006 with the support of Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR), the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade’s (DFAIT) and the Stabilization and Reconstruction Taskforce (START initiative). During the first phase of the project, CPAR identified and recruited 20 youth leaders from communities in Gulu District. A trainer in conflict resolution and an expert in war-related psychological trauma in youth and children trained these youth leaders in peer-to-peer peacebuilding techniques. Over the lifespan of the project, 121 youth from Anaka, Amuru, Paicho, Gulu and Pader districts were identified and trained in the implementation of recreation-based peacebuilding activities. All youth groups were equipped with recreation kits, including art supplies and sports equipment. Weekly radio talk shows were run by Youth Coalition for Peace (YCP) members. The program was able to reach well over 10,000 youth in Kitgum, Pader, Oyam and Gulu districts. The project is in the process of establishing a *Community Youth Support Centre*, which will be housed at CPAR’s Gulu office.

This project has so far made youth effective agents in the resolution of conflict and promotion of peaceful co-existence in their communities throughout the period of resettlement and reintegration. Further, in collaboration with YCP the group has developed methods for war-affected youth to facilitate peace-building and reconciliation activities and initiatives with their peers and within their communities using integrated recreation-based approaches piloted by the youth in a previous phase of the work. This clearly shows that peace-building is a long term process which requires investment and sustenance by building on past achievements.

The project has not only been a source of support for youth to participate in and spearhead conflict mediation at the community level, but it has enhanced their capacities and empowered them, through peace-building and related training. This has provided effective support for the reintegration of war-returnees, ex-combatants and war-affected youth in the Gulu, Amuru and Pader Districts. The project has also shown that peer to peer peace-building techniques are most effective in transforming the mindset of young people to support and work for peace. In this regard training young people in various skills such as communications, trauma identification and negotiations becomes an essential ingredient in peace-building.

Community radio is also a critical tool for reaching out to reduce fear, educate and reassure the community, and create a link to channels for help. Radio has a wider reach and can easily be used for communicating fairly quickly. However, radio can also have the opposite effect of abetting the conflict if it is not well managed. It is therefore important to consider its control before using it. One shortcoming of this project is that it is driven by the funders rather than the young people themselves.

Community Cattle Rustling in Karamoja

The armed conflict in and around Karamoja is mainly centred on cattle and cattle raiding. It involves four communities: the Karimajong, the Pokot, the Iteso and the Sabiny who all keep cattle. This is not a political conflict but rather livelihood related one fuelled by traditional beliefs and practices as well as the emergence of the machine gun in this sub-region.

The habit of cattle raiding continues to date and involves some ethnic sub-groups of the Karimajong raiding one another’s cattle as well as that of their neighbours, the Pokot and vice versa. The Iteso and the Sabiny have mainly remained at the receiving end of this aggression. Oftentimes the conflicts spill over the international borders to north-western Kenya and southern Sudan where nomadic tribes of similar persuasion are prevalent. The prevalence of armed

conflicts in the neighbouring failed-states also helps to fuel the age-old conflict by providing easy access to firearms and ammunition.

The nomadic nature of life in Karamoja and the Pokot area, a resource constrained environment, coupled with high dependence on cattle, causes conflicts. This has in turn become a major setback in that it denies children and youth access to basic formal and non-formal education, increases women and children's vulnerability in many aspects and increases the danger of HIV/AIDS, among other things.

Among the Karimajong and the Pokot, young men and elders are the main actors in the conflict. Women participate indirectly; if a man is known to be afraid of going on cattle raids, for instance, the womenfolk mock him and ensure that he fails to get a lady to marry. Young ladies in these communities prefer suitors who are known to have participated actively in cattle raids. These 'warriors' or 'heroes' are more likely to afford the hundreds of heads-of-cattle required for a dowry. In this hostile environment, only the very aggressive can assure the personal security of a young lady and her family.

A comprehensive solution to the conflict is being pursued that employs a multi-dimensional approach, ensuring the full participation of individuals at the grassroots. The Association of Evangelicals in Africa Relief and Development Commission (ARDC) is implementing a project that is aimed at mobilizing communities, especially the local churches, to

- Increase access to basic education among the educationally disadvantaged groups
- Conduct HIV/AIDS awareness
- Pursue peace-building.

This initiative has resulted to the formation of the Inter-church Coordination Committees (ICCs) that involve various grassroots stakeholders, many of them youths, in promoting peaceful co-existence among conflicting parties in and around Karamoja.

The objectives of the ICCs differ from one to another depending on the local context. Kapchorwa (Sabiny) ICC, for instance, is aiming, among other things, at promoting and developing a grassroots peace-building mechanism and fighting against rampant female genital mutilation. On the other hand the Pokot ICC promotes grassroots peace-building through active participation of peace animators, the majority of whom are youth that were once warriors. The elders are always invited to spearhead conflict resolution efforts by means of age-tested traditional peace-building mechanisms. The result, therefore, is a community owned initiative that promotes and develops the common citizen's ability to handle their own disputes when they arise.

The ICCs in Karamoja, Pokot and Sabiny of Kapchorwa use young men to carry out community awareness campaigns, mobilisation and sensitisation on issues that include

- the need for peaceful co-existence
- the importance of basic education as a means of increasing livelihood alternatives for the young and lessening the high dependence on cattle
- the importance of girl-child education
- the basic women and children's rights and the need to protect them.

Their contribution has been vital for the children, their contemporaries and the elderly. The number of school-going children has risen tremendously, and the number of girls involved in the female genital mutilation has reduced considerably. The increased interaction among youths, women and men in and around Karamoja has resulted in building of the inter-ethnic trust that is necessary to promote peaceful co-existence. The re-opening of the Karamoja-Pokot-Sebei border market in Chepsekunya resulting from this increased interaction is a positive step that will allow for more interaction and exchange of commercial goods.

The participation of youth peace animators in the disarmament exercise has helped to restore the trust between the warriors and the national army personnel engaged in the forceful disarmament exercise². The peace animators have been able to monitor the warriors within their communities as they plan for raids and report them to the local authorities ahead of time. They have also helped to restore the stolen cattle to the aggrieved communities in a peaceful manner.

ARDC and the ICCs recognise the importance of the traditional peace and reconciliation mechanisms (i.e., *Amomwor* or *Atowow* in Pokot and *Ekimomwor* or *Atuuwo* in Karamaja) in the hope that they can sustain the process that various peace actors have set into motion. These traditional peace ceremonies are carried out at neutral venues. Owing to the fact that the conflict has its roots in the traditional beliefs and practices, and it is evident that most of the Karimajong and Pokot uphold their traditional beliefs and practices and respect their clan elders, support given to the traditional peace ceremonies and meetings is important and could eventually lead to a sustainable solution.

The Karamoja conflict illustrates the complexity of peace-building. It particularly demonstrates that peace-building is a multifaceted effort requiring the input of various stakeholders in the community. It further illustrates how various needs and aspirations interface in a community where resources are scarce. Tradition, marriage and livelihood are all linked to the source of the conflict and the same must be true for peace-building. This model is worth considering as it shows how a community can successfully resolve its own conflict, and the potential of youths to transform from warriors into peacemakers.

Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities for Peace-building

Although Africa is diverse with a mosaic of cultures, the challenges that face young people in peace-building are similar. Accordingly the lessons and best practices may possibly be replicated – with caution - in other countries. There are common challenges and opportunities that young people in Commonwealth Africa can rally around to ensure a culture of peace, understanding and tolerance. Clearly challenges include tradition and identity, gender vulnerabilities, human rights violations, imbalances in power relations and issues of sustainable livelihoods. Any interventions will require that these critical issues are considered and programmes developed to overcome the sources of conflicts in these structures.

The opportunities lie in the fact that the number of conflicts on the African continent have reduced and the region is almost becoming calm. This means young people have an opportunity for a fresh start. The young people are well disposed to use the post-conflict reconstruction period to get on the stage and shape institutions and attitudes, taking into account the lessons of the region in the present and not so distant past.

It is evident that in every peace-building effort, there is need to network and build coalitions to be able to achieve the best results. Therefore young people must aspire to build bridges and work with other members of society to achieve their goals. An exclusively youth effort may not be as efficient in this regard. This must be coupled with good communication skills. It is also clear from the case studies that awareness raising is important as in most cases people are not well informed, or are exposed to information that keeps them in fear. In most cases where it has been

² By Issack Ernest Kitururu, Peace and Conflict Transformation in and around North-Eastern Uganda

used community radio seems to be an effective tool to achieve reconciliation and peace-building. This however is contingent on the need to run it on democratic principles.

Another lesson from the case studies is that sports help to unite and build bonds not only between friendly competitors but also former enemies and as illustrated Sierra Leone and Uganda. Sports too have a therapeutic effect not only on the individual but once individuals learn to be reasonable, they work towards making peace in the community.

It is also clear from the case studies that all strategies for peace-building converge towards sustainable livelihoods. The sustainable livelihoods framework allows us to focus on the people: the poor, the youth, the vulnerable, and promotes a systematic analysis of the underlying processes and causes of conflict. The answer to peace-building in Africa may lie in investments in sustainable livelihoods and entrepreneurship among young people. There is certainly underinvestment in this aspect.

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