



PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE

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Lessons Learned from the peace building and conflict transformation training

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About two years ago after the elections in Kenya, the country's western provinces became areas of uprising. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung saw a need to act and founded the project "*Strengthening non-state actors' capacities to prevent and resolve conflicts in areas affected by the post-election violence.*" Today, as part of the project, a workshop takes place every week in different towns in the western provinces of Kenya to teach Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) peace and capacity building.

I attended the workshop in Malaba/Teso where I met Asmini Juma and Bonface Musoko. Both individuals are working for civil society organisations that are part of the same project. Asmini is an active member of the *Nambale Youth Advocacy Group* and Bonface is the Head of Counselling Department at the *Mwatikho National Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture*.

The Nambale Youth Advocacy Group

The *Nambale Youth Advocacy Group* was initiated in 2002 and registered by the Department of Social Services in 2003. The group, which was founded by young intellectuals, seeks to organize, encourage and empower communities to identify, plan and implement projects that address HIV/AIDS issues, provision of youth friendly services and enhancement of socio-economic development. The activities of the group are carried out within the boundaries of the Busia district in Western Kenya.

In the district of Busia, different ethnic groups like the Luhyas, Luos, Kalenjins and Maasais live together. After the elections in 2007, the district was marked by violence and frontier disputes. Since then, there have been violent clashes around the Busia-Teso border. Nearly 15,000 people have been displaced and over 12,000 people, mostly Kikuyu, fled to Uganda and are not willing to return to Kenya. A high rate of unemployment and poverty, and disparities in the distribution of wealth stir up new conflicts. Religious and cultural differences between ethnic groups and the young and old lead to more potential

clashes. In addition, HIV/AIDS has gained more attention in relation to the aftermath of the post-election violence.

The *Nambala Youth Advocacy Group* emphasizes four main fields to empower the communities: Human Rights, Health, Socio-economic Empowerment, Peace Building and Conflict Resolution. In every field they have already undertaken many activities, such as campaigns against gender based violence and children rights, youth forums to address peace in the regions, events fostering interaction with different communities to solve and prevent conflict, and entrepreneurial skills training for youth.

As a present concrete example, Asmini told me that alcoholism is a big issue in her district. Many people, especially men, see drinking alcohol as their last solution of solving their problems. Unfortunately, the high alcohol consumption raises a second problem: the spread of HIV/AIDS, because alcohol lowers their inhibition threshold for unprotected sex. This is where the civil society organisa-

tion *Nambale Youth Advocacy Group* intervenes. *Nambale Youth Advocacy Group* tries to mitigate the socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS by preventing new HIV/AIDS infections as well as drug and alcohol abuse.

Lessons Learned in Busia

As soon as Asmini returns to her community, she will share with others what she has learned during the workshop with her colleagues. She will work with her colleagues to discuss how they can integrate the needs of their communities and the skills they acquired during the workshop. Some ideas Asmini is already considering are a football team for the youth and regularly meetings for groups of women. In these groups, participants would start preaching peace and prepare the community to it. The group of the women could be trained in peace and capacity building. These women could learn how to discern conflicts early, and how to act accordingly. Peace is already occurring in the families and Asmini is convinced that a peaceful coexistence and sensitivity to conflicts are most important to combat the problems such as alcoholism and HIV/ AIDS in her community.

Mwatikho. The National Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture

Founded in Bungoma in 2001, Mwatikho is a national human rights non-

governmental organisation (NGO) trying to create a torture-free society where all people can enjoy fair and humane treatment. Linked to local civil society organisations and other international organisations, the NGO seeks to promote the rights of torture victims and to protect Kenyans from all forms of state perpetrated torture.

The district of Bungoma faces many challenges including ignorance, poverty, miscommunication and displacement of people. Politicians manipulate the community for their political interest by bribing the community with money to cause friction among community members. Since the majority of the community is poor, politicians benefit by causing disputes in the community that results in killings and the displacements of families. The government never identified the source of those problems, like poverty, and never caught the people involved. Police corruption, brutality and torture also pose a challenge as does misunderstandings between civil society organisations and the government.

These include the following: Ignorance- politicians manipulate the community for their political interest by bribing the community with money to cause friction among community members; Poverty- the majority of

the community is poor thus the politicians benefit from that by causing disputes between the community which results in killings, distraction and displacements of families; The government never identified the source of those problems and never caught the people involved; Police corruption, brutality and torture; Misunderstandings between the civil society and the government; and displacements of the habitants during post election violence.

Mwatikho has already started to react by uniting different ethnic groups like the Sabaoti and Bukusu. The organisation has established awareness campaigns, trained people of different ethnic groups in cooperation with other organisations and offers social activities like football, group counselling and support by religious leaders.

Lessons learned in Bungoma

Bonface is hopeful that this project will help to overcome the issues faced in the community by defeating the fear of conflicts crises, identifying opportunities and capacities for sustainable peace for individuals and organisations, helping to predict the escalation of conflicts, giving time to develop strategic responses to the crises and creating a social commitment to act. Through the knowledge and skills gained

through the workshop, Mwatikho will create awareness in the community. Furthermore, the exchange of ideas with other civil society organizations will expand the capacity for peace building.

Challenges

The workshop offered many good starting points for the work of the organisations in this project. But Bonface told me that there is fear that by the end of the program some CSOs in the network might not continue operating because most of them have not started to include peace building in their ongoing program. Additionally, most of the organisations are community-based organisations (CBOs) thus the area of operation is limited legally by the government. For example, a CBO registered in Teso district is not allowed to operate in Mt. Elgon. Furthermore, unsurprisingly, some politicians interfere with ongoing peace activities in favor of their political interest.

Bonface has made several conclusions. First, he believes there is a need to come up with a strong sub-committee in the network of the project,

a need for the European Union to fund individual organisations to support a smooth running of peace building from the ground, a need to link civic education with capacity building in peace building, and finally, a need to follow up on the activities of the individual organisations.

