



## POINTS OF VIEW

### SUMMARY:

*In this interview Charles, coordinator of the Gulu Centre for the Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers in Uganda and Luis Program Director for IECA Church, Angola, compare experiences and discuss programming issues in working with war affected young people.*



CAP/World Vision Gulu Drama Project

# 16. COMPARING PROGRAMMING IDEAS

## A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ADULT PROGRAMMERS WORKING WITH WAR AFFECTED CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN UGANDA AND ANGOLA

### LINDA (MODERATOR):

I thought we could begin this discussion by having each of you explain your situation; the kinds of difficulties children are encountering in your country and also something about your project with youth. Charles, could you go first please.

### CHARLES (GULU CENTRE):

Thank you. So, there has been a war in Uganda for the last 15 years in Alcholi land, where I am from. There has been suffering by many children. They have been abducted by the rebels, the LRA: abducted from schools; abducted from homes. They are taken to the rebel camps in the southern part of Sudan. The children are given military training; they are tortured; they are made to kill other young people. The girls are given as wives to the rebel commanders. They suffer in many ways.

After they escape, they have many problems, quite a lot of problems. They come out with gunshot wounds; they come out with chest pains; amputated hands and amputated legs. Most of the girls have STD. Some of the girls are pregnant and others have a child or two. And when they reach home many find that their parents have been killed. So they have many things to contend with. In addition to physical problems, they also have psychological problems and moral suffering .

In 1995 World Vision opened a centre to support these children. To date over 5600 formally abducted children have been rehabilitated in our centre and are now in the community. Once the children return to the communities they have other problems. Many of the parents are now living in the protected camps and have no food or health services. The schools have been broken down and the parents are very nervous to send the children to the schools for fear they will be abducted by the rebels.

We provide many different services for the children. We give them counselling, medical care and some skill training. Our target is to help these children to prepare them to go home. Once they have returned to the community we continue to support them and, as much as we can, we try to help children to return to school or to receive other assistance.

We are working on two levels. The first is to do public awareness through a youth drama project. The second is to provide support for the girl mothers. These are girls who were abducted when they were very young and taken into captivity. They have been used as sex slaves by the rebel commanders. All men using them for sex and being very brutal to them. They come back discouraged, often with children. Our target is to try to help these young people deal with their problems.



*In its early days MOJUP conducted several cleanup campaigns and tree planting activities. The fact that MOJUP (Youth Movement for Peace) was established in Huambo Province by IECA Church approximately a year before the peace agreement was signed has greatly enhanced its credibility and role as a peace promoter in Angola's post-conflict era.*

**LUIS (IECA CHURCH):**

I would like to know how you do follow-up with these children after they have returned to their communities.

**CHARLES:**

We have centre-based outreach coordinators who go out into the community to support these children. Unfortunately, there are only four of them and the number of formerly abducted children in the communities is very high. So we have trained caregivers - volunteer caregivers - in each community. In each community we try to have three volunteer caregivers. The community know that they have been trained by WorldVision to support these children.

**LUIS:**

OK, for my situation. For Angola, we have started our project in Huambo Province. We call our project the Youth Movement for Peace (MOJUP in Portuguese). We are working with young people from different organizations and from different faiths.

We have set up a program to mobilize young people to work for peace. In Angola the young people are the main victims of the war which has been going on for over 40 years. We carry out workshops where we raise specific issues about the war and how it is affecting young people. We discuss many things in the workshop to develop a group analysis. They give us their experiences and we talk about them together. We want to know about the difficulties they are facing in their homes and their communities. Then they go back to their communities and create small groups, called "peace unities". We have two overall coordinators and each peace unity has two coordinators as well.

To date the activities have focussed on cleaning up campaigns, radio debates and discussions within the churches and political organizations. This is a new approach that we are taking so we are encountering some difficulties. It is a bit dangerous to talk about peace, particularly in Huambo province. This province has been very much affected by the war. We are identifying solutions as we go.

**LINDA:**

Could you explain some of the problems you have encountered?

**LUIS:**

When we started, there was no other program running. Because talking about peace among young people is sometimes hard we had to agree amongst ourselves to take risks for that, mainly in Huambo

It's hard because young people are involved in the war, and young people are the principal victims of war in Angola. So whoever wants to change the situation has necessarily to work with young people, changing mentality and also attitudes. That's why it's hard for those provinces that have been highly affected by war because people are scared of saying something and also they are shy in terms of participation.



*Drawing by Cely Pongolola, Angola*

*In June 2002 MOJUP worked with the Young Christian Group and Messengers of Peace (Roman Catholic) to organize five days of peacebuilding activities in Huambo. This included a major youth conference (350 in attendance); a peace rally in the Town Square and religious services and community marches for peace.*

*This event was a huge success – “something we have never had before”. All the activities were covered on national radio. Resolutions from the youth conference were presented to the National Parliament, the provincial authorities, the major political parties and the army.*

**LINDA:**

How did you organize your work in Huambo?

**LUIS:**

First we sent a letter to the provincial secretary for IECA in Huambo. After that, we went to Huambo to talk to people about our ideas for MOJUP. We met with the IECA leadership in the province. Then we went to see the provincial governor. We talked about IECA as an institution, how it is working for peace, unity and stabilization, and a youth movement for peace in Huambo.

We also had to visit other religious leaders in Huambo in order to explain to them what we are trying to do. We wanted them to understand our objectives and to send young people to the workshop. Then after that, we went to see the political parties’ representatives in the provinces, mainly MPLA, Unita Renovada, and other parties that have offices in Huambo. That’s what we did before the workshop.

**LINDA:**

Is that important to do in Angola, to ensure that the political parties know what you are doing?

**LUIS:**

Yes, it is very, very important to do that. Let me underline it. It is very, very important, because people can easily misunderstand the main objective and goals as well. So political parties will sometimes threaten young people so they won’t attend any activity that addresses peace issues. That’s why it’s very important to see them before starting anything to make them sure that we are not acting as politicians.

Their response was good, but with some questions. They wondered what really was our intention, if it was what we said. Even during the four days of our workshop we had a kind of, let me say, a kind of policing, people suspecting and trying to go behind to see what is really going on, what we are doing. It made us nervous.

**CHARLES:**

I am interested in your comment about it being difficult to speak about peace with young people in Angola. Why is that?

**LUIS:**

For many years young people have been victimized by the war. It is not easy to talk peace in Angola because whoever talks about peace can be identified with the rebels or being against the government. So people don’t want to risk it. The young people are often forced to fight, or strongly encouraged to enter the armed forces. So they are the main victims, that is why they’re scared to talk about peace.

**CHARLES:**

It can also be very difficult here. That is what I raised this question. Many people have been killed because they wanted peace. Two years ago some

elders were killed because they wanted to talk about peace with the rebels. So the situation is almost the same. Escaped children, former soldiers with the rebels particularly. If they speak out for peace they can endanger their lives. The rebels will go after them. How did you organize the workshop?

**Luis:**

In the first day, we concentrated on creating an amicable atmosphere. We heard from each participant about their background, what they do, where they were born, which home they are living in, if with their parents, cousins, uncles, aunts, something like that, what they do in their daily life.



*Drawing by Cely Pongolola, Angola*

We talked about how much each one of us has been affected by war. We took a full day hearing about war experiences, because most of them came from villages, so they are in Huambo in a condition of internal displacement. Most of them, for instance the Majupe coordinator, a young girl of twenty-one years, she lost her father during the war. That was a very good experience to hear from each other, what kind of war experience they have had and how much it has affected their lives and also their dreams for the future.

**LINDA:**

What were the main issues?

**Luis:**

Most of them are studying, but they are having difficulties. Although the schools belong to the government, there is a kind of feel they have to pay in order to get pencils, pens, books, notebooks. The parents are not financially able to support their studies. Those of them who are living with relatives, it is difficult because their relatives don't care about studies, they think that studying is not a priority because it is expensive.

There has been so much war. Even now, when they hear a kind of noise, even the door shutting, they are scared.

The stories were hard - at certain points I was crying. The next day we focussed on the dynamic of conflict, how the conflict starts, moves to other people. We talked about how two opponents can mobilize other people and how this can divide a family, divide a community, divide a province, divide a nation and divide the world.

**LINDA:**

Do they know the history of the conflict? I remember in Luanda that some of the young people were saying "Well, we don't even know why this conflict began."

**Luis:**

Yes. We started focusing on how people have been divided. Normally, we said, people follow a political leader without knowing the interests, positions and needs of that leader, they just follow.



CAP/World Vision Gulu Drama Project

*The Youth Drama Club in Gulu prepared a play about the experiences of child soldiers. It was developed by high school students. Some, but not all, had been with the rebels.*

*The play ends with a plea for reconciliation. It has been performed in schools, displaced peoples camps and villages throughout the Gulu area.*

In Angola young people have been used for the war, killing each other, but belonging to the same nation, and in Huambo, belonging to the same tribe. Young people are being used by both sides. Actually, they are the same families. So this is very complicated.

Then on the third day, we discussed a lot about MOJUP and how the peace unities could work.

**CHARLES:**

What is the position of girls?

**LUIS:**

Sometimes, many times actually, girls have been raped by the rebels or by the government. They are also used as slaves. One of the big problems that they face is that they get pregnant when they're very young. When they return home, they often do not receive support.

For us, it has been easier to involve the girls than the boys. A high percentage of male youth are joining the army. The girls keep out of this so it is easier to mobilize them. We have more girls than boys.

**CHARLES:**

For us it is different. We find that boys respond better than girls. The boys who have been fighting with the rebels come out disgusted with fighting. Most of them prefer to go back to school. It is more difficult to interest the girls in school or in skilled training. They fear that people will make fun of them, especially the child mothers. People give them nicknames. If we have a workshop or a meeting they turn up but not to go out on their own. They're not happy.

When we first began we kept the former child soldiers separate from other youth. But with sensitisation and the work of the caregivers in the community we're finding that young people will work together. We encourage the young people, the former child soldiers when they're going through rehabilitation. We tell them that they have to make a special effort, that they have to reach out to other young people in the community. So this is improving.

**LINDA:**

Luis, I wonder if you could talk a bit about girls' participation.

**LUIS:**

Well, our cultural traditions mean that girls are shy to speak about their feelings. We're trying to encourage them to talk about this so that they can work together, to face these problems and also to increase their participation in peace work.

**LINDA:**

Do you think that youth have a special role or special contribution they use can make in peace building work?

**CHARLES:**

Here in Uganda I can see that the youth can have many positive roles to speed up the restoration of peace in our country. Youth have suffered the most because they are the ones who were abducted. They should have a strong role in talking about peace.

However when it comes to our roundtable discussions on peace, young people are not represented. And youth form a majority in northern Uganda. Youth want to be involved in these peace talks. They have a lot of bright ideas but the adults are not listening.

**Luis:**

For us it is similar. We need to mobilize youth to reject war lords. Then they can stand together and say, "Enough, enough." We need to work to have their voice heard.



*Angolan and Ugandan youth dancing together at CAP international meeting*