

EDUCATION...ADVOCACY...RESEARCH...DEMONSTRATIONS...WORKSHOPS...TRAINING

RECONCILIATION

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OVERVIEW

As peacebuilders all of our work promotes the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. Often this is done in an indirect way through education or public awareness programs. However, some of our projects have explicitly focussed on the need for reconciliation.

This can be tricky work as we need to establish our voice and contribution in the political process, whether this is at the local or national level. Because adults can be reluctant to give us this space we need to be confident in the content and style of our presentations.

In the following pages we provide two examples of this type of peacebuilding intervention. This includes a special youth conference and peacebuilding rally in Angola and a drama project in Northern Uganda about the experiences of child soldiers with the LRA.

In both wars young people have been targeted. Their peacebuilding efforts begin with the knowledge gained through this experience. But these groups did not want to stop there, to only speak as victims of war. Instead they used this experience as the basis for their calls for reconciliation. People listened.



CELEBRATING PEACE

MOJUP, Huambo Province, Angola

The Situation

After the peace accords were signed in Angola, there was a recognition that it was important for the population to make commitments to peace. This was understood to be particularly important for young people whose lives had been dominated by the 30-year war.

MOJUP (Youth Movement for Peace) was established in Huambo Province by IECA Church approximately a year before the peace process. This enhanced its credibility and role as a peace promoter. In June 2002 MOJUP worked with the Young Christian Group and Messengers of Peace (Roman Catholic) to organize a five day peace event. This included a major youth conference (350 in attendance); a peace rally in the Town Square and religious services and community rallies for peace.

The event was a huge success – “something we have never had before”. All the activities were covered on national radio. The effect of this event continued after the five days. The resolutions from the youth conference were presented to the National Parliament and to the Huambo province authorities. A copy was also presented to the political parties and the army.

As the main youth group based in Huambo (the other two participating agencies are Luanda based) MOJUP played a strong leadership role in the organization of this event. MOJUP hopes to continue and grow from these accomplishments by working at both the provincial and national level.

How did this project promote peacebuilding and social justice?

It is important for youth to celebrate peace and what it can mean for their lives. Peace is about every day actions, enjoyment of life and respect for others. Public events where these values are enjoyed helps establish the population’s connections and commitment to a peaceful way of being.

YOUTH CONFERENCE FOR PEACE

At the conference youth prepared the following list of priorities:

1. Need for Education

Most young people are not educated. They have no professional or technical education. Also the quality of education is not good – the teachers don’t get a good salary so they only come to school for a short time and then they leave for other businesses and jobs that they have.

2. Re-insertion of young people back into civilian/village life.

There are many young people in the camps. Both government and civil society need to identify a kind of payment to these young people because they have nothing and no education. We can’t let them leave the camps without a little money, a little support to start their life. Unless we do that, they are likely to take revenge.

3. Media’s Role in Peacebuilding

The media should pass on the message of peace, give messages that emphasize reconciliation. Many people have never participated in the political life of the country due to the bitterness and bad experiences of the past. People were scared to belong to any political party because of the repercussions. These feelings continue.

We need to develop a kind of education on civil society. This shouldn’t be left just to the politicians. This should include human rights and sensitization so that people understand that everyone is important in creating a culture of peace.

RALLIES FOR PEACE

Two big peace rallies were held following the conference. Luis, IECA Church coordinator described them.

Midnight Peace Rally

“First we gathered all the participants from the conference into the centre of the city. Then we played traditional music very loud along with calls to people to come and join us for a gathering for peace. Everybody heard the music and they came – women, children, everyone.

After everyone had assembled we had speeches. First it was the commitment from the young people who had attended the conference: what young people should do, what we had committed ourselves to do. We read poems. People were singing songs for peace, people were praying.

We prepared a huge bonfire. A pastor was asked to light the fire of peace. After the fire was started, we passed around candles. Young people were lighting the candles: we were saying that peace is our commitment. Each candle that was lit signified a commitment for peace. At the end of that gathering, you would see people leaving in different directions with the candles – peace moving through the city.”

Church Service

“On the following day we went to Cala, a small place about 18 kilometres from Huambo. The municipality government had prepared a very big number of people. There were two lines from the entrance of the town. We met the officials who were waiting for us: representatives from the police, local authorities, traditional leaders and the Catholic and the Protestant churches. There was also someone there from England and Mozambique.

Then we went up to our church where 1,950 people were waiting for us. People from the lands as well as the town. After that we started the Sunday service, the worship. The challenge was – each one of us has a task to do for peace. Each one of us must do something for peace. Because from our point of view, the more we commit people the more people will be aware of peace and will monitor the peace.

After this we marched together – walking and singing. Amazing.”



YOUTH DRAMA PROJECT

Gulu, Uganda

The Situation:

In Northern Uganda the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) has abducted thousands of young people (normally around the age of 14) to serve in this rebel force's campaign to overthrow the Ugandan Government.

One of the LRA's tactics has been to force these child soldiers to commit atrocities in their home areas or to abduct children in nearby villages. Villagers are understandably bitter about these actions. Returning child soldiers, particularly boys are called "wild men" and "Kony's killers". They can be treated with hostility and distrust.

The Strategy

A special youth drama group was created with members from five high schools in Gulu Town. This group wrote and produced a script on village life; the abduction and experiences of LRA child soldiers; and the prospects for peace in the future. The play has been performed to large audiences in displaced people's camps and schools throughout the area.

The play does not avoid controversial topics nor does it pretend that everything is perfect inside the Northern Ugandan community. The beginning of the play includes humorous skits of village life where a family dances around the demands of a grumpy, dictatorial father.

The brutal actions of the LRA are represented. And, while child soldiers are rightly represented as victims in this situation, the play also acknowledges that some young people do become infatuated with the power of the gun. The play ends on a note of hope as it shows how peace could be achieved if the warring groups could think about reconciliation instead of fighting and recognize that all sides must make a gesture for peace.

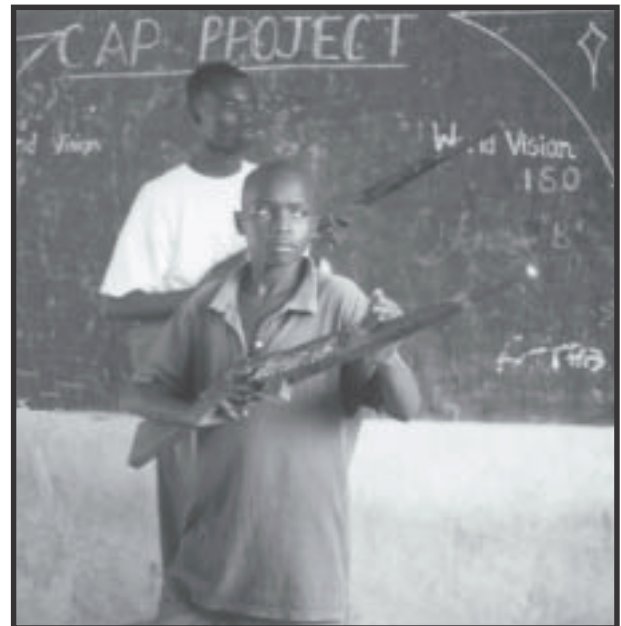
How does this project contribute to peacebuilding?

The play addresses issues that are central to the prospects for peace in Northern Uganda. The actions of the LRA has torn apart villages and divided former neighbours. This play invites villagers to see these questions through the eyes of child soldiers. While it demonstrates that youth understand the complexities of the history and the source of the bitterness, it also makes a call for forgiveness from those who have the most to forgive – the young people who have been both the victims and the unwilling participants in this war.

Audience Comments:

"It is a very good play. We wish that you would cover the whole district. Because maybe if it were shown everywhere, the message of your play would reach the rebels and maybe Kony and their commander."

"We wish that the President could have access to this play. Is there anyway that he could see this play? Because if he did maybe he would be provoked to accepting peace."



Play rehearsal

DRAMA GROUP DISCUSSION

“Our main objective is to bring in peace and reconciliation between those who’re in the bush and those who are at home. We decided it is the children who know their own problems, rather than the elders. So we wanted to make a call for peace.”

This interview was conducted by Joan Stassen, a Masters Journalism student at Carleton University and recipient of the Bill McWhinney Memorial Scholarship Travel Grant from the Canadian International Development Agency.

What do you do to reach those objectives?

Samuel: We perform drama. Through our drama we sensitise people to how they should react to those who have been in the bush with the rebels. They shouldn’t harass them because they are our brothers, they should not be looked on as criminals.

We also want to show the importance of peace talks between the government officials and the rebels. So we are showing out what should be done to bring in peace.

How many are in your group?

Samuel: 30. We started with 20 boys from a single school. Then there was need for us to recruit girls to play the parts that couldn’t be played by boys.

How do people join your group?

Julius: He has to be recruited and the recruitment depends on the creativity of a person. It also depends on his feelings about the war.

Why did you decide to use drama?

Lucy: We are using drama because it is easier to act what is taking place. We bring out the reality of things in Northern Uganda where we have problems. We see that actions speak better than words. Sometimes people cannot express themselves very well, but in a drama it can come out.

Fida: As you can see our land is very full of trouble. So I decided to join and make a drama so that it could sensitise those so that they know how to mobilize people and bring peace. Our land was a good land, but the rebels came and it is now really terrible for those of us who are staying here.

Kenneth: I joined CAP because of talking to my cousin brother who was abducted. He told me stories of life in the bush. It came into my mind, if there is a group of youth that can come together to see if there is a way to create peace that would be a nice thing.

We have seen that drama is a non-violent way of solving problems and educating people.

Michael: Since I was born I never heard of peace in our region. This drama group is the first time I have been able to talk about peace, to work for peace.

Can you describe the content of the play?

Lucy: The play is based on how we can build peace. It starts with a family and shows how things were before these rebel activities. In the second scene we show life in the bush where they are abducting and killing.

Later in that part we talk about the government’s plan for amnesty. At the end of the play we see where the brothers come out to make peace and reconciliation. This drama is really telling us what we expect to happen, what we are hoping for.

Do you talk about life in the bush?

Julius: Yes it is there. The first is the part that we call looting. It is where the rebels come and take property belonging to the villagers. Then on the way back to their place they are ambushed by the government soldiers. Then from there they abduct some other children and take them to the bush. This shows exactly how it happens, so people in the village can understand it.

In the final part of the play we show how children should be welcomed back home. We show them being taken to counselling centres, back to school and back to their parents. Others who want to become soldiers are also taken.

Does this reflect the experiences of some youth in the group?

Julius: It reflects exactly what has been taking place. The LRA don’t want old people. They want only children to be abducted. So in the play we only abduct children. Even the looting. It reflects the war actually taking place in Northern Uganda.

Is it sometimes difficult for the actors to act these things out if they have already been through this experience?

Julius: For me, I was abducted in January 1994. I was forced to carry heavy loads. What normally takes place in the bush is that children are forced to kill people. You may even be forced to kill your own mother and your own father.



Life in the bush is full of looting, killing and some other things that are not normal in the community. For instance, when you are asked to carry a heavy load, they don't feel you should say that you are tired you must continue going just like that as if you are not a human being. When you complain that you are tired they say, "Let this man just rest." What they mean by resting is killing you.

So life there is very difficult. And normally when you are ambushed or when you are attacked by the army, these government troops they put the children in front. Those are the abductees so that when the government troops are shooting they are shooting directly at the children.

Are these things you have seen with your own eyes?

Julius: Yes I have also seen these kinds of things. That is why we came up with the play. It is really what I saw in the bush and others saw in the bush.

I took about one and a half years in the bush. I escaped when we were in a battle. Friends of mine, those on my right and on my left were shot dead but I was just in the middle. I was just under God's mercy, that's why I escaped death.

It came into my mind "My friend, just fall down, if you don't, you're going to be killed." Then immediately I fell down. The rebel troops just started moving forward, because for them when they are fighting they don't move backwards. When they moved some distance from me I just moved back, slowly, slowly.

I got involved with CAP when it was about to be initiated. The person who started this group was also abducted so we were together in the same school.

As an actor, do you find it difficult to act out things you experienced in the bush?

Julius: It is sometimes difficult. I fear that if I act what I saw in the bush, that people will say, "That one is still a rebel." But it is not difficult to act out what I saw in the bush.

Do you sometimes think maybe you'd rather forget it, not even act it out anymore?

Julius: No...I feel I should continue because the drama is educating others and through it we may be able to achieve peace. So I don't feel like leaving this. I only encourage other people to join.

Has it helped you in some way?

Julius: It helps a lot because it even shows how our land was before this war broke in. It educates me to reflect back what was there before this war broke out. It also comforts me because when I'm acting I feel I'm not alone. When I am not acting I feel I am alone. But when I am acting, I feel at least I'm among my friends so I feel relieved.

Samuel: One other thing about the play. We have changed the script to keep up with the situation. For instance, now we talk about the amnesty act. Before that wasn't there.

Until recently we were performing our play in the villages. Because of the current situation these days it is not possible to go outside the town. But after the New Year we are looking forward to going to villages. Because, even though the situation is bad we have to.

What kind of response do you get from the audience?

Samuel: Mothers and fathers usually cry, they shed tears because they see the way their sons are killed or abducted. The majority break out with noise and with tears and with crying. When we are acting out the part of the abduction and the part in the bush, most of them participate by crying. It is very sad to watch the play because it shows what actually takes place.

There was one time that Richard was acting the part of Kony and he was about to be boxed because they thought he was the very man Kony.

When it comes to the part of reconciliation they all opt that peace should come.

Usually, after the play we ask what part isn't good. They tell us and we change that part. Many who watch the play say it helps them because it shows them how to reconcile. Because we show them how they should welcome the children back

Also we think that our drama can help stop people from joining the rebels. When we go to the villages and present the drama, maybe there are some people in the audience who thinking of going into the bush. But if they see the dangers and all those kinds of things it will help them not to go into the bush. And also we know that sometimes the rebels have snuck into our performance. We are hoping that they will learn about the amnesty through our play and come back home.

What have you been hearing from people about how the play helps?

Samuel: We have had many people tell us that they wanted to join the club to help us in acting the play. I predict it is bringing changes. People see youth joining together for peace and sensitising people. They think – we should join these youth.

Alfred: I've just joined recently. I see that the play makes a difference. I think this is because of the way it is written and acted. It shows a lot of forgiving and a heart caring for others.

A big message of the play is that you have to forgive. Is this realistic?

Julius: It is possible. I can forgive people even though I was abducted.

What about Kony (the rebel leader). Is it possible to forgive him?

Julius: I think we can forgive him, but I'm not sure we can give him what he wants—to be president or vice-president.

Do you think Kony should be taken to the International Criminal Court?

Julius: I think he has to be forgiven. Maybe he never thought of being in the bush but maybe some conditions forced him to be there. If he comes back home we have to forgive him so we can witness some kind of peace in this land. If we forgive him then I think we can be peaceful. It is a matter of being honest and having a heart of forgiveness.

Richard: You have to ask for forgiveness first and then we can think about the future. Many people have done wrong things. There is no legal action for those wrong steps. They are now staying as others. In South Africa they've gone through Peace and Reconciliation. For them people could have amnesty if they spoke the truth about what they did.

How important is telling what you did to in order to get reconciliation?

Richard: That is vital. I have one more thing to say. That is that I want people in the world to know that they should not give up on us, not give up on Africa. Here in Uganda maybe the situation is not good, many people are being killed. But they should not give up on us. There is an end to everything.