



Report

ADPC Diaspora Academy (DA)

Diaspora-oriented Peacebuilding Training

1st - 5th of December, 2014



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



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Introduction:

Overview:

The first diaspora-oriented peace building training of the Diaspora Academy (DA) was held at The Hague Academy for Local Governance 1st-5th of December, 2014. The training was offered to 10 African diaspora peace activists representing leading diaspora organisations from Belgium, Finland, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The countries that the diaspora peace-builders originated in Africa are Burundi, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Sudan. This first peace building training will be followed by two more trainings in 2015 and 2016. Each training will be participated by 10 diaspora peace activists representing leading diaspora organizations in Europe that are active in the promotion of peace in their respective countries in Africa.

The training is aimed at strengthening the peace-making capacity of the diaspora peace activists/brokers and support them in the application of this gained skills in the peace-building activities they involved in their home countries of origin. By increasing the peace building capacities of diaspora peace activists, it is expected that their efforts to contribute to peace and social stability in their countries of origin become more effective and enduring. Acquiring adequate conflict transformation techniques, skills and practical tools will enable diaspora peace activities and their counterparts in the home countries to operate more efficiently in their peace making activities. It will also help to widen peace-building actors in the homelands by incorporating the diasporas in the process in a more structured and formal manner.

The target beneficiaries of the training are primarily the African diaspora organizations, organized professional associations, groups and individuals in Europe active or interested in areas of peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction in their countries of origin. Preference will be particularly given to those diaspora peace activists originated from the countries located in the Great Lakes, the Horn of Africa regions as well as Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Objectives:

The overall objectives of the training are to provide the participants with:

- *an awareness of the potential strategic role of the diaspora as peace promoters in the diaspora and countries of origin,*
- *a space for critical reflection on the concepts of peace and peacebuilding*
- *a better understanding of peacebuilding dynamics and insight into concepts and various approaches to conflict transformation tailored to their specific peacebuilding needs*
- *knowledge of practical tools to contribute to the process of conflict transformation, that can enhance the capacity of diaspora peace activists to operate more efficiently in their peacebuilding endeavours*
- *an introduction to potentially strategic partners and networks necessary for an effective peacebuilding operation*
- *examples and lessons learnt from experiences of peacebuilding endeavours that diaspora organisations, groups and individuals initiated to transform conflicts in their countries of origin.*

Methodology:

The elicitive participatory methodology was used during the course of the training. This methodology is highly participatory and assumes all participants are resource persons who bring their knowledge, experience, and skills to bear in the training and group learning process. The focus is on collaboration and learning together while developing and sharpening idea(s) into concrete plans through tapping into the groups' collective wisdom and experience. To further illustrate this particular methodology, the first day of the training consisted of the participants doing a "hands and feet" exercise. This exercise allowed the participants to reflect upon what they are bringing to the training as well as what they would like to take away. This exercise allowed the participants to see themselves not only as receivers but direct contributors to the group's learning experience. The specific training methods that were used were case studies, storytelling, participant presentations of their Back Home Action Plan (BHAP), presentations, lectures and short inputs as well as individual reflections.

Key Topics:

Several key topics and issues related to peace building and the role of the diaspora were addressed each day of the training. The presentation on the diaspora using soft power as a tool to build peace set the tone for the week. Concepts of justice and peace were discussed, further extending to the discussion just peace, sustainable peace, and victors peace. As some of the participants work in the areas of justice and economic development, these concepts resonated with their areas of expertise. Other important topics were conflict, violence and peace, which lead to grappling with key peacebuilding concepts, frameworks and interventions. The word *conflict* was translated into the different native languages of the participants to further evaluate its diverse meanings and its potential for positive transformation in different cultures. Issues pertaining to regional and transnational conflicts, shadow war economy, and human security were discussed vigorously. These topics were addressed in light of discussions on conflict and stakeholder analysis. Economic development and peacebuilding, the role of diaspora and the value of relationships were also addressed. The topics of development and conflict allowed participants to reflect upon issues of horizontal inequality as well as uneven development. Presentations and discussions on education and community empowerment, envisioning peace and the Back Home Action Plan presentations were also key topics of the training.

Key Insights:

“The participation in a peace process is not about the mathematics of numbers and percentages in relation to who is in majority or minority. It is about plurality, diversity, participation and ownership of all affected by the conflict.”¹

Local Participation: One of the key insights that came out of the training was the critical need to engage local actors and their own endogenous wisdom in peace building work. The project of peace building must begin with first addressing the question of what *kind* of peace local communities desire to achieve and based on such demands, evaluate how the diaspora could further serve as a positive partner to that vision. International-local peace building engagement with a common goal and understanding puts the local people, those that are the direct subject of conflict, at the center of writing a new narrative. Giving local communities ownership and a voice in the participatory process further solidifies common identity. The participants also gained a deeper understanding that such inclusionary process holds potential to build sustainable horizontal trust among communities affected by conflict.

Finding Inner Peace: The participants gained greater insight into the nature of conflict which manifests itself on an individual as well as on a societal level. Conflict at the individual level can be categorized as intra-personal and inter-personal. At the societal level, it manifests at the levels of intra-group and inter-group. One of the insights gained during the discussion was that individuals that are unable to transform their inner conflict toward positive gain could also produce a society in which conflict is not transformed for the greater good. Thus, as peace builders, participants evaluated the critical need to first build peace within themselves. Finding inner peace, whether it is through religion, culture, or education remains an essential and ongoing task for a peace builder. The story sharing exercise also gave participants insight into how to secure such inner peace. As participants practiced story sharing within their small groups, they identified this kind of activity as a key component to releasing their burdens and further securing greater solidarity with others.

Conflict and Stakeholder Analysis: The participants also gained a deeper insight into the critical necessity of conflict and stakeholder analysis. The facilitator, Jasmin Nordien, gave a simple yet powerful illustration that further demonstrated the importance of analysis before pursuing peace building work. She indicated that when one visits his or her doctor, it is important that a proper diagnosis is done before the doctor prescribes needed medication. In the same way, peace building work starts with similar in-depth assessment before planning and implementation. By the end of the training, participants had a broader understanding of the internal, external and international root causes of conflicts in Africa. In peace building initiatives, issues of Africa’s debt burden, unequal trade relations and conditions with industrialized countries, and its incorporation into the global economy are not considered as factors contributing to conflict.² There is also the case of the regionalization of conflict, as conflict faced by one country affects and/or is the product of another country’s conflict. One participant, Abdihakim Yusuf, insightfully indicated, *We need to recognize how we are benefiting from other country’s chaos as well.* The participants gained greater insight into the inter-linking between the global and local systems that are at play in producing conflict. They also came to the realization that these stakeholders could serve as key assets to peace building engagement.

¹Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, “Feast with your enemies,” 1.

² Yash Tandon, *Root Causes of Peacelessness and Approaches to Peace in Africa* (13), 1999. Print.

Soft Power: The use of soft power for the building of peace was a key insight discussed by the participants. Power is defined as ‘the ability to exert influence’ and soft power is an alternative option to peacebuilding, specifically focusing on, the power of the diaspora to attract through persuasion rather than force or coercion. The use of strategic soft power tools, such as the media and printing news, are critical to note in conflict transformation. As one of the participants and expert presenter, Stephanie Mbanzndore, shared her peacebuilding experience in the country of Burundi, she emphasized the role of media in featuring her positive work and spreading a message of peace to reach beyond her sphere of influence. For her, media played a critical role in challenging the culture of conflict and directing people’s political will toward the building of peace.

Challenges and Constraints:

Challenges in countries of origin:

Distrust: One of the challenges facing the diaspora community is the local community's distrust of their activities in their countries of origin. African diasporas, as the product of "the west" as one participant explained, might be rejected by the locals because they are no longer viewed as part of the home community. As many of the participants indicated, local people sometimes see the diaspora as the other enemy. Such negative perception of the diaspora serves as a resistance for their peace building work. The challenge therefore remains how to build a bridge between the diaspora community and the local community that cultivates a level of trust for collaborative peace building spirit. This challenge is also aggravated by the lack of appropriate infrastructures and partners on the ground mediating between local needs and diaspora activities.

The State: Another identified challenge was the state's inability to meet human security requirements and protect human rights due to weakness of state structure and lack of resources. This further led to the discussion regarding the necessity of state-building for sustainable peace building endeavour. There is also the challenge to work within a state system that is unwilling to meet the needs of its people due to power division that favours some and marginalizes others. Societies in which this is the case remains at the "latent" conflict stage until a triggering event brings about external manifestation of the conflict sometimes through violence. This was particularly evident in the discussion of the conflict situation in Ethiopia. Ethiopia currently is not categorized as a post conflict society, but its political hostile environment hinders true building of peace. The participants further struggled with the questions of how to work to dismantle such structure to further engage in building positive peace for the civil society. In light of this challenge, one of the insights that were gained was captured by Jasmin: "Structure is created by people. Therefore, structure can be dismantled by people." In light of these challenges, African diasporas must consider their peace building work as part of structural transformation of societal systems.

Corruption and accountability: The challenges of corruption and the lack of accountability that exists in their home countries were also repeatedly discussed by the participants. This discussion was also framed in light of systematic and structural forms of corruption. In places where a culture of impunity is prevalent, reversing such a culture and establishing a system upholding the rule of law becomes a key challenge. Such restructuring is needed in order to produce sustainable peace and break any cycle of conflict. The topic of accountability also expanded to discussing mainstream peace building institutions and ideologists such as the IMF, WTO and OECD as well as NGOs that might contribute to war making or sustaining conflict within Africa. The challenge for the diaspora then remains finding strategic ways to encourage grassroots movements that challenge corruption, support the building of the rule of law in their home countries and utilize resources abroad to lobby against policies of international organizations detrimental to sustainable peace in Africa.

Uneven development: The African diaspora play a role in creating uneven development in their home countries that has potential to bring about conflict. As remittances and development projects could be targeted toward a Diaspora's particular home community, this could potentially create uneven development within a specific region. One of the expert presenters, Fatumo Farah, shared this experience with regards to the particular insecurity facing the city of Mogadishu, as diaspora communities often concentrate investment in their

own places of birth. Such practice also brings a level of competition among different diaspora communities as they try to make their city or village better than others. This could lead to animosity among communities in the home country who are directly affected by the uneven distribution of development. Based on these challenges, another expert presenter, Professor Dr. Gerd Junne gave an insight into positive and negative natures of such competitions. For example, building hospitals might pose less of a threat than building a school, as the latter might also deal with issues on the content of what is being taught in the classroom.

Challenges in countries of residence:

Lack of knowledge and 'know how': African diasporas face many constraints in their host countries that hinder their peace building initiatives. One of the challenges facing the diaspora is the general lack of knowledge and resources for peace building work. Despite the desire to effect real change in their home countries, many diasporas simply do not know where to start or how to navigate their long-distance engagement with their home countries. As one of the participants, Mary Kuek indicated, "I want peace. I just do not know where to begin." Even with concrete ideas, the participants indicated the challenges of searching for appropriate funds and securing mental and material capital to implement their visions. The participants further discussed the need for greater capacity building and networking opportunities. The challenges of living as a diaspora loom large, as they are trying to meet their own needs and the needs of their family members while also securing the demands of dependent family members in their countries of origin. The socio-economic barriers African diaspora communities face also greatly impede their vision for peace building in their respective home countries.

Internal conflict in the diaspora: The second challenge that was vigorously discussed by the participants is the internal conflicts among African diaspora communities. Often, conflict among the diaspora is a reflection of conflict in their respective home countries. Mary further explained, "Since the current South Sudanese crisis started, my best friend who is not from my own ethnic group does not talk to me anymore." Conflict on the ground leads to diaspora communities being polarized further undermining their own capacity to work together and bring positive change in their countries of origin. This particular challenge led many of the participants to first apply their back home action plans to solidify trust, cultivate understanding and secure a common identity among their diaspora communities abroad. In order to show the positive contribution African diaspora communities can make in securing peace, one of the expert presenters, Fatumo Farah, shared a message of hope regarding a 1998 tribal conflict in Somalia. When the diaspora community from these tribes came together to discuss the issue, she explained that the fighting seized on the ground. This story of hope helped the participants understand that they are major stakeholders in the peace building process of their countries of origin.

Inspiring Peace Building Stories:

Peace has many faces -Stephanie Mbanzendoro

When asked why he became a peace builder, Ben Mussanzi wa Mussangu replied, “Peacebuilding, for me, began when I was young. My earlier memory was reconciling my parents when I was five years old...” This story brought others to the realization that peace building first begins within one’s intimate circle, further expanding to the larger spheres of influence. With the support of his wife Kongosi and other peace activists, Ben founded Centre Resolution Conflicts (CRC) which now has its branches in the DR Congo as well Bradford/UK. As part of peace and human rights activists, peace musicians (or Mussanzi Family Choir), Ben produces for CRC and hosts a monthly radio-show ‘Peace Music’ with a worldwide online listeners. “We are all products of conflict,” Ben said with humour that held a measure of truth. For him, every peace builder must evaluate how he or she could transform that conflict into peace in their communities.

Freddy Karekezi shared a particular conflict he encountered while shipping medical equipments to one of Malawi’s newly established clinic. On his arrival, the Malawian government officials noticed that some of the equipments he brought were expired. Angered that their country is being treated as a “dumping ground,” the Malawian government instructed Freddy to take all the equipment back to where he came from. Freddy explained, “I had to instantly think how to best mediate this conflict...” Based on the immediate need of the local clinic for the unexpired equipments, Freddy managed to convince the government representatives to keep all the good material and discard the expired ones. In the days to follow, the government as well as the doctors from the clinic showed appreciation for Freddy’s mediation work. The clinic is now fully serving the community.

Miri Koang is a young CEO and Founder of 2nd Chance, a non-profit organization helping young people in South Sudan as well as United Kingdom. Throughout the training, this dynamic young woman continued to reiterate, “my passion lies in serving the youth because they are the future.” In December 2013, 2nd change brought eighty people together to inform discussions on how to unite the former vice president and president of South Sudan during the recent crisis. Further articulating her vision for the near future, Miri hopes to conduct workshops and trainings to encourage youth and children alike in two places she called home, South Sudan and London. Her astute awareness of the need to engage the young population both in her home and host countries was a source of great inspiration for the participants.

When asked about his peacebuilding story, Mohammed M. Seid thought to write his story.

My involvement in peacebuilding dates back to 2002 when the murder of a man sparked violent conflict between two Somali clans in my region. As the formal legal system failed several times to bring the conflict to an end, I approached the elders for discussion about possible ways to resolve the conflict. I learned from them potential tools of traditional dispute resolution that enabled me, with the help of the elders, to initiate peace talks between the clans. The conflict was brought to an end. I learned that the main reason for the success was the legitimacy of the customary dispute resolution and its pioneers in the eyes of the local people.

Best Practices and Key Lessons:

“So a short answer to the problem of violence is that we need to work at various levels—at the individual level with education as the key element; at group level where a culture of tolerance and mutual respect need to be consciously inculcated; but above all, at a national level where durable and credible institutions which balance the rights and responsibilities of groups (however defined) need to be put in place.”³

Peace building through education: Considering Africa’s growing young population and the lack of employment opportunities, the participants expressed the crucial need of targeting the youth for peace building in their countries of origin. As one of the participants, Rebecca Kong, explained, *peace education is key*. Therefore, the key lesson is to strategically include youth both in the host country as well as the home country in peace building and development initiatives. Fatumo shared her foundation’s work with linking sport to peace and development. As there is a need for youth to be brought together to see their commonality, she used football as the common ground to further peace education. Another key lesson that came out of the training was the necessity to begin peace building work based on one’s own sphere of influence. This sphere consists of the space one has control over and begins with an evaluation of one’s sphere of concern. Stephanie’s presentation best captured this idea as she advised the other participants to begin their peace building initiatives first where they are. This lesson was influential as the participants critically evaluated their spheres of concern and influence to further craft their back home action plans.

Holistic Community Development: As discussed in the challenges section, diaspora engagements in their countries of origin has the potential to create systemic forms of inequality. Professor Dr. Gerd Junne characterized the dangers of horizontal inequality as eroding unity and trust among communities. To avoid such risk, he proposed the idea of focusing on *holistic community development*. This type of development also needs inclusive institutions mitigating such activity between the host and home countries. One of the participants, Mohammed Seid, offered the idea that this type of development scheme could be carried out through Asset-Based Community Development. Participants expressed their needs in learning how to do further assessment of community needs and further targeting their peace building goals toward holistic human and community development.

Diaspora Partnership: Regarding the question of diaspora cooperation with local, grassroots movements, Professor Junne also emphasized the strategic role diasporas can play in encouraging the changing of norms in their countries of origin. This could be accomplished through supporting grassroots mobilization for change. As he gave the example of the sign he saw displayed at Kenya University, “No Corruption Zone,” he challenged the participants to strategically consider how to encourage such grassroots mobilization against changing of norms. Furthermore, examples such as this show that peace building work does not always begin with partnerships with the national government. This highlights the importance of diasporas partnering with local governments, authorities and other civil society organizations in order to facilitate peace building. On a larger scale, diasporas also need to seek partnership among regional and international organizations dealing with their own particular area of interest. The participants gained a greater understanding of the need to locate partnerships at all levels of society in order to implement their peace building initiatives.

³ Ibid, 16.

Conclusion:

Overall Impact:

Overall, the training had tremendous impact on the participants. They expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to establish friendships with those who held the same vision of peace. For some like Stephanie, it helped her evaluate where she is and how she can best move forward. Further echoing the impact of the training, Stephanie expressed the small group experience as one that was deeply insightful for her.

The small group experience allowed me to share the burden of Mr. Leta. In his case, it's a minority ruling over a majority. The same thing in Burundi. I can feel the injustice and inequality that was burning inside of him. We shared the same burden. I am glad I could share my story and help others grow. I give my life to that work.

The participants joyfully expressed that the training had given them needed insights on peace building knowledge. It also brought to the table new ideas and knowledge on peace and conflict transformation. The wealth of experiences served as a source of inspiration, as participants learned how others dealt with similar problems in different contexts. The training also allowed for greater networking opportunity and created the needed bridge to connect peace activists. Listening to the participants' knowledge and experiences left one of the participants with these sentiments: *If they could do it. I can do it.* Others characterized the impact of the training as serving as a catalyst and reviving their passion for peace building: “[the training] moved my stagnant water,” expressed Abdihakim Yusuf. The participants expressed that they felt equipped with needed materials to develop a clear objective and vision through critical assessment of the conflict and stakeholder analysis. Sorie Kamara best captured the overall impact of the weeks training with the following statement: *The training has equipped me to be an instrument for the benefit of others.* The participants left with more knowledge, resources and peace building skills, circle of friendships and lasting support team as well as revived passion to do peace building work in their host and home countries.

Follow-Up Action:

One of the objectives of the workshop was to provide a platform in which diaspora peace activists can come together, establish viable contacts, learn from each other's peace-building work, exchange valuable information, share best practices and positive experiences in the field. After the training workshop ended, the participants requested ADPC to set up a programme which will help to strengthen the networks and strategic partnerships among the African diaspora peace-builders in Europe and their counterparts in their respective countries in Africa. They also requested to be connected with participants taking part in the peace building trainings in June 2015 and June 2016. The participants are currently taking initiative to remain in contact with one another via different media outlets to exchange needed skills, knowledge, support and resources fit for peacebuilding endeavours. Further follow-up will be taken by ADPC regarding the participants' implementation of their Back Home Action Plan.

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