

Section I: A COMMUNITY DRIVEN CROSS-BORDER PEACEBUILDING PROJECT:

(Stemming the low intensity conflict tides between South Sudan & Uganda border communities)

Country where project took place: Republic of Uganda and Republic of South Sudan border
Sponsoring College: Future Generations Graduate School
Student's Home Country & College: Uganda, Future Generations Graduate School-West Virginia.

Project Summary:

The advent of colonial modes in Africa which introduced State borders and subsequent post-colonial administrative set-ups interrupted the hitherto cohesiveness of the local population in terms of cultural affinities, economic, social and linguistic ties, thus heralding conflict tendencies amongst the cross-border communities. Borrowing from one African community practical definition of reconciliation as "sitting under a tree and talking", the cross-border peacebuilding project set in motion decisive processes of dialogue and interactions at various levels that has significantly reduced and continues to steadily reverse the low intensity conflict that pervaded communities in the Uganda and South Sudan border areas.

This innovative community-driven peacebuilding project was implemented for a period of six months with funding from Davis Projects for Peace only without any additional fund injection so far.

Project Implementation

Initial contacts and approval to implement the project was got from the respective local administrative authorities from either side of the border namely, Local Council V Chairman as well as Resident District Commissioner of Lamwo District of Uganda, and the Commissioner Magwi County in S. Sudan. This was followed by identification of community animators and subsequent mobilization and sensitization of community members across the border on the intended project. A series of engagements were organized with selected key informers, opinion leaders and elders identified from the local community on either side, followed by Focus Group Discussions involving a broad range of participants deliberately selected representing the social strata of their communities, which outcomes fed into interactive joint meeting with political and civic leaders.

Historical memory approach, which recollects or recalls historical events, was employed as one of the mechanisms to help reduce and resolve the deep-seated low intensity conflicts amongst the border communities. The technique involved free communication with individuals and/or groups drawn from either side of the border who have had contact with, witnessed, or could vividly remember historical events that can be tapped into, with emphasis on memories of cooperation and connectedness. Through this technique administered in Key Informant dialogues, Focus Group Discussions and interfaces with official leaders and border authorities, the following key results were achieved:

- Perceptions by people at the grassroots level and relevant evident-based data gathered in relation to what constitutes conflict and desired cohesiveness amongst them.
- Historical information and facts were brought forth to help put in context current predicaments and define future modes of wellbeing.
- Fora for dialogue on contentious issues and monitoring were established which provided direct means for reconciliation and fostering peaceful co-existence. (Cross-border Peace Forum)
- Community were empowered and energized to transform conflict incidences and tendencies into avenues for cooperation and togetherness through an instituted cross-border steering committee.
- The project was billed as a considerably useful supplement to other approaches being spearheaded by the respective governments albeit at diplomatic levels, and served as an invaluable conduit for channeling community concerns and voices to key decision and policy makers.

However, in spite of the attested desire by other community members to join the dialogue, the initial process outreach was constrained by limited budget and challenges relating to very poor road network or non-existent in some places coupled with intermittent and unavailable phone network. Besides, we encountered a few dissenting voices especially from government operatives and ideologues who viewed our project as exposing government failures. On a positive note, uniformity in language and culture helped cement the interaction more solidly as beneficiaries discovered the reality of shared identity thus re-asserting positive relationship. It is reliably estimated that twenty families (average 5-8 people each) benefited from the project and this number is expected to rise significantly if the Forum so established is replicated to other areas.

Section II:

In spite of the fact that “peace” has returned to the border region after decades of protracted conflicts, the communities were bewildered by the flare of low intensity conflicts without clear comprehensible cause(s). Peace in this scenario means ‘no active military engagement in the area’. But beyond that, in the context of post-conflict recovery and cross-border dynamics, peace means “welfare of all the people is maintained at all times”, or as alluded to by one elder “being free from many vices that disgrace a civilized community”. Ultimately, to be at peace is “to satisfy all essential needs, achieve a responsible level of comfort, lead lives of meaning and interest, and share fairly in opportunities for health, economic and social interaction”. This fairly defines the aspiration of the post-conflict border communities.

This project kick-started the process of empowering the border communities to reach across and learn from each other so that a process of reconciliation and peace can be promoted on a permanent basis. The provision of space and voice to bottom-up narratives from the communities in an inclusive manner served to harness social cohesion in the short term. The dialogue process offered opportunities to revitalize the targeted areas people’s energy to re-establish and build new links between cross-border communities who were slowly being estranged by violence. This success will be built upon given the network already created to propel further community awareness that will stem the undesirable incidences of conflict that disrupt the functioning of a normal society and ease the imminent fear that had been accumulated in the people’s psyche, both real and imagined.

In the context of this project, the long-term perspective of cross-border peacebuilding will resonate around the way in which communities managed to set-up systems of information sharing across the border that leads to positive actions on either side, in other words building an ‘infrastructure for peace’. This was done by selecting point persons from every village represented in the dialogue to constitute the standing steering committee as Cross-border Peace Forum (CPF) members. The forum structure is to be replicated at subsequent administrative structures of Parishes, Payams, and Counties. With their replicate functions of monitoring, information sharing and facilitating dialogues, the CPF has been organized in such a way that it can resolve minor issues in their respective jurisdictions and refer others beyond their capacity to higher levels. Similarly, the voices and concerns of the community are easily captured and channeled to appropriate policy makers. As the benefits of this arrangement begin to manifest through increased fluid cross-border trade, social interactions and shared social services, the community themselves will thrive to safeguard their peace jealously and sustain this set-up for their own benefit and for the good of the youthful future generation.

Personal Statement: The project demonstrated to me how community when appropriately empowered can build peace and spur socio-economic advancement across international borders for the ultimate welfare and posterity of the people, instead of waiting for outside intervention as is normally the case. “Grassroots communities and their institutions remains a true repository of the values, norms, principles and heritage upon which the humanness of one another is held dear and inter-cultural accommodation, tolerance and inclusiveness can be forged to bring about reconciliation, cohesion and lasting peace”.
James Latigo

Some action Photographs



Border community members in a training/ dialogue session



James Latigo facilitating



Community members putting down their points of deliberation in a chart



Commissioner Magwi County addressing community representatives