

## COMMUNITY BASED PEACE PROGRAMS FOR ARMED CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

*A Guide to Program Development*

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*People must protect themselves and their communities from structural violence by learning to address and resolve violent conflicts through nonviolent means. Peace programs in practice today do not equip communities to resolve ongoing conflicts of structural violence through nonviolent means. A critical gap exists between programs which try to build cultures of peace in development or recovery settings and programs which try to end ongoing armed conflict. A review of these programs and general peace research yields an understanding of best practices and ideas on how to create a community based program to resolve an ongoing armed conflict. Niger is used as a case-study on how to incorporate the learned best practices into an actual program. Reflecting on the developed program for Niger offers the opportunity to discuss overall the best strategies and potential difficulties in creating peace programs to empower communities in times of armed conflict to prevent and address structural violence. This paper concludes that such programs are feasible and very much needed today.*

### Introduction

In numerous villages, cities and countries around the world, people repress and exploit others for their own benefit. People use political, economic, educational, media and other organizations for this repression and exploitation. Repression and exploitation are a type of violence, known as structural violence, even though they often do not involve direct personal injurious acts by one person on another (Cromwell and Voegelé, 2009). Structural violence allows some people to benefit from unequal and damaging exchanges with disadvantaged people. People must protect themselves and their communities from this structural violence by learning to address and resolve structural violence conflicts through nonviolent means. However, peace programs in practice today do not equip communities to resolve ongoing conflicts of structural violence through nonviolent means despite an understanding

of the peace program elements required to address structural violence. A critical gap exists between programs which try to build cultures of peace in development or recovery settings and programs which try to end ongoing armed conflict. A review of these programs and general peace research yields an understanding of best practices and ideas on how to create a community based program to resolve conflict resulting from structural violence. Niger is used as a case-study on how to incorporate the learned best practices into an actual program for such a situation. Reflecting on the developed program for Niger offers the opportunity to discuss overall the best strategies and potential difficulties in creating peace programs to empower communities in times of conflict to prevent and address structural violence. This paper concludes that such programs are feasible and very much needed today.

### **Structural Violence in Today's Conflicts**

Worldwide, the focus remains on ending violent conflicts involving direct harm to individuals rather than building peace. The focus on direct violence results from a poor understanding of the many layers, levels and types of violence, how they feed into each other, and how they can be used against people in the world. Violence, as it is understood here, includes any abuse, injury or destruction of people through physical force or through an abusive or unjust exercise in power. Cromwell and Vogeles (2009) outline how violence occurs at three levels: the individual level, the organizational level, and at the cultural level. Violence at the individual level (direct violence) occurs when one does bodily harm to another human being. Structural violence happens when individuals or groups use organizations or cultural norms to repress or exploit of others. Out of direct and structural violence can grow a culture of violence. A society accepts a culture of violence when it allows direct and structural violence to occur and accepts the notion that violence can be the »right« answer at times (Cromwell & Vogeles, 2009, p. 233). From this perspective, nationalism, sectarianism of religious communities, ethnocentrism, and certain business models can all be seen as types of structural violence that may or may not be accepted in the society in which they exist.

By choosing to focus only on direct violence, we ignore the structural violence that feeds into it and what allows it to become an acceptable means of action. Existing research supports that modern conflicts involving direct violence result, in part, from grievances associated with structural violence, such as poor economic conditions, inequality and political exclusion (Smith, 2004). When the world allows structural violence to persist, the leaders of unequal groups, be they ethnic, political, economic or social, through time, rewrite their histories and shape their curricula, celebrations, rituals and narratives to create and communicate an identity around their grievances that

suits their current political purposes (Salomon, 2004, p. 259). These leaders can then mobilize individuals which identify with the grievances and support the political goal of seeking redress and ending the structural violence. Unfortunately, these groups often mobilize into violent action. They do so either because they do not feel other options will work or because they are greedy groups (or groups with greedy leaders) that seek profit and power that will come with violent conflict. These groups or leaders use the grievances as political cover for their action arguing their cause is only against the structural violence oppressing their safety, freedoms, and capacity to live a full and happy life in a culture of peace.

Individuals and communities living in these societies polarized around structural violence and inequality suffer in ways that lead them to accept a culture of violence. The individual's freedom of expression and behavior are limited. Individuals lose their sense of self-value at an individual level and only find value as part of one group or the other. Individuals no longer see the value in their fellow human beings that are outside the group since structural violence engenders viewpoints that allow no room to recognize the legitimacy of other perspectives. Social coherence breaks down, and trust is lost. These conflicts can become intractable as the individuals on the opposing sides become further ingrained in their cultures of violence, clinging to their convictions and as the leaders continue to gain from the conflict. Thus, structured violence can lead to widespread direct violence and a culture of violence where individuals attach themselves to the identity and beliefs of their group and choose to believe theirs is the only truth that matters.

### **The Evolving Solution: Education on Cultures of Peace**

To address the many grievances, types of violence, and greed motives present in a violent conflict, the focus must not be on simply ending the direct violence. A peace agreement to end an ongoing conflict of direct violence will not have a lasting impact unless the structural violence that people mobilized around is addressed along with the culture of violence the conflict created. The signing of a simple cease fire or peace agreement, while at times symbolically important, is only one single act in time. The signing a peace agreement by designated power brokers cannot rebuild the social capital that is lost when individuals define themselves as separate according to group identities and commit atrocities to each other. To truly end a violent conflict, all parties must address grievances, rebuild social capital, develop new positive convictions about former opponents, and share positive experiences working towards common goals. All of these steps towards violent conflict resolution are lengthy processes that span over long periods of time. They are not simple acts to be performed by those in power when

their demands have been satisfied. By directing our energies on building a culture of peace to resolve a violent conflict, we move away from the idea that the choice to end a conflict is in the hands of those in power to a framework where building a culture of peace is a process everyone can be involved in.

To design a program to build a culture of peace in an ongoing violent conflict, we must first understand what a culture of peace is and what is required to build such a culture. The United Nations has defined a culture of peace as one with:

*values, attitudes and behaviors that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavor to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society (UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13).*

UNESCO acknowledges that to build comprehensive cultures of peace, peace building and education activities must do the following:

- promote sustainable economic and social development
- promote respect for all human rights
- ensure equality between women and men
- foster democratic participation
- advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity
- support participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge

Additional literature exists promoting the idea that cultures and communities of peace must learn to

*»[reject] power as the primary arbiter of human relations..[and] accept the inevitability of change but not resort to violence to change the process of events and redress inequalities« (Said, Lerche & Funk, 2006, p. 112).*

*The powerful group psychology that plays a role in structural violence is understood by those in the peace education field, and it is recognized that peace education must push people to explore »ideas only because they truly improve our understanding – and not because they make us feel superior, distract us from fear and uncertainty, or help us to avoid difficult questions« (Said et al., 2006, p. 106).*

*Also understood is that peace education should allow »communities to learn to look past the institutionalized or nationalized truth promoted by their own government« (Chaudhri, 1968, p. 365).*

*Therefore, peace processes must be taught and understood at all levels from the macro international level, to the intranational level, to the community level, to the micro level of interpersonal relations (McGregor, 2006, p. 44).*

Peace building must be inclusive, not exclusive, so that people move from feeling helpless and no longer believing they have agency to a belief they can improve their lives or communities. The world possesses the theoretical understanding of all that peace education needs to address. The ideals underlying these education objectives, if realized, would equip individuals and groups with the tools to address the root causes of structural violence and enable people to resolve peacefully the conflicts caused by structural violence.

### **Approaches to Peace Creation**

Through a brief literature review, I explored several types of peace building and peace education psychosocial programs. Below, four program types are reviewed and discussed. These peace programs represent well the current models being used to end ongoing violent conflicts and educate individuals in hopes of preventing future conflict. The examples demonstrate how programs work with government and organization leaders, communities and individuals. The programs chosen also show the different foci of peace programs operating in environments of ongoing conflict, general peace education programs for peace time, and peace reconciliation programs implemented after the direct violence of a conflict has ended. Examining methods used at these various phases of conflict exposes a number of flaws in current programs but also offers a number of ideas and best practices that can be used for a community-based program to be implemented at the beginning of or during a conflict.

### **Programs in Times of Conflict: Peace Talks with Leaders**

One popular method of promoting peaceful solutions to structural violence at the state level is sponsored peace talks or mediation meetings. These meetings' small scale and limited number of participants offer simplicity since usually only two perspectives are considered during the talks. The talks focus on convincing the decision makers to halt the violence against each other. However, many pitfalls occur when peace is determined through bilateral talks. Lorna McGregor (2006) explored the case of Sri Lanka to demonstrate bilateral talks' shortcomings. In Sri Lanka the exclusion of several important groups from the peace talks allowed the two participat-

ing parties, the government and LTTE (also known as the Tamil Tigers), to maintain their authoritarian control over their respective parts of the country and did not give a proper voice to the civilian needs in these areas. Additionally, among the excluded were a Muslim delegation representing the interests of the Muslim community, the political party the People's Liberation Front (JVP), as well as other Tamil parties in opposition to the authoritarian nature of the LTTE. By excluding large swaths of the population, the participants used the peace talks to their ends, to gain legitimacy, to avoid redress for violations against their own population, and as protection from transparency and responsibility to those they represent, if they are not authoritarian.

A similar story unfolded in the postwar period in Colombia and Guatemala. Indigenous Indian communities were excluded from local mediation councils. Only the guerilla movement and the government had representation in local mediation councils. The exclusion weakened the peace building process by excluding community people. Their exclusion led to plans for peace but little understanding of how those plans would be implemented, for example the demobilization of soldiers and their reintegration into society (Anderson, 1999, p. 9).

Bilateral talks put the power to resolve the conflict in the hands of a few individuals as well as the international community that may or may not choose to support the peace talks. Psychologically, this leaves the population feeling largely unable to create peace for themselves. For example, in Sri Lanka, the people's desperation for peace, the bilateral talks became conflated into a peace process, »creating a dependency upon their momentum and excluding initiatives not framed in the same tone or voice as the talks proper« (McGregor, 2006, p. 46). Peace becomes something to be achieved by those in power, rather than developed with the help of everyone. Bilateral talks thus move people away from feeling capable of participating in the creating a culture of peace process. This exclusion means most of the grievances and structural violence existing in the society will not be properly addressed and resolved. Social capital will not be rebuilt if only those in power are involved. After bilateral talks, people then find themselves living with an absence of widespread direct violence but without true peace.

### **Programs in Times of Armed Conflict: The Reflection and Trust Approach**

The Reflection and Trust (TRT) approach, another peace building method used during ongoing conflict, works with individuals from the opposing communities. The TRT approach brings together people from each side to discuss their personal experiences, their understanding of their group's narrative and viewpoint and how the two connect. The meetings work to have

each individual see the humanity in the other side through the development of personal relationships with individual members of the other group and through an increased understanding of how the other side sees the conflict. This method blends two common peace education approaches: the method of developing interpersonal relationships between individuals from the two sides through meetings without discussing the conflict and the separate method of having groups meet only to discuss their different viewpoints to understand each other's narratives without building in personal contact (Salomon, 2004).

Gavriel Salomon reviewed the research on the effects of the TRT approach and similar interpersonal programs of peace education. Initially, researchers received positive feedback from program participants, particularly on the personal effects of sharing one's story or »testimony« with the group. The participants shared that honest and detailed personal storytelling of their »memories and pain, inner conflicts and insights, combined with the emotional support of the group, allows one to go 'beyond victimhood'« (Salomon, 2006, p. 268). By enabling individuals to rediscover their inner-strength and learn that the community can be supportive, the individuals are able to move past their experience as a victim that wants justice or revenge and towards constructive activities. However, evidence has shown that short workshops that result in initial positive friendships that increase a willingness to interact with members of the other group have a time-limited impact. As time passes and individuals re-enter their lives, they become absorbed once again in their own side's narrative, and their willingness to accept the other side's perspective decreases (Salomon, 2006, p. 271). While the TRT approach can have some success in achieving in the short term changed attitudes, increased tolerance, reduced prejudices, and weakened stereotypes, lasting changes in an understanding of one's own collective identity and the identity of others has not been proven successful. Though, even short-term success is not guaranteed. Some peace program studies have shown that programs can re-enforce negative attitudes and strengthen someone's belief in their own story if they already had strong convictions going into the program (Salomon, 2004, p. 271). In certain cases of ongoing conflict participants cannot even engage in the exercise because to put their feelings to the side and empathize with others creates a feeling of betrayal to their brethren (Salomon, 2006, p. 260).

### **Programs in Times of Peace: Participatory Rural Appraisal**

Another framework around which organizations currently do peace building work is the Participatory Rural Approach (PRA), outlined by Barbara Thomas-Slayter (2009). Organizations use this approach currently in development work to create a stronger peace. This program is not used in armed

conflict settings. The steps an organization must take in a PRA program are outlined below:

1. Site (community) selection; receiving approval and support from local officials to proceed.
2. Team selection and composition. Program directors must involve community members, different government agencies, and local organizations.
3. Preliminary visits to discuss the PRA with the core team and launch the PRA program in the community. The team explains the PRA methodology, what the program will and will not do, and learns what the expectations of community and sponsoring agency are. The team must learn about the community.
4. Data collection proceeds. The core team hosts group discussions and meets with different individuals to get an overview of community problems. The team makes certain all data required for community decision making has been collected before public meeting.
5. Team and community members synthesize and analyze data to present it to an open community meeting.
6. As a whole, the community discusses the problems, and together they rank problems in priority order and explore opportunities to resolve them.
7. Problems are reviewed by rank, and the community discusses the feasibility of addressing them. Then a plan is prepared to work towards addressing the problems.
8. Plan is adopted and implemented (Thomas-Slayter, 2009, p. 340).

The PRA works to build peace by teaching communities nonviolent methods to discuss and resolve their communal problems and their group grievances. The PRA has been built on the conviction that ordinary people can critically think about their own community's needs and grievances and have resources that can address those needs and grievances nonviolently if mobilized collectively in a manner agreed upon in the community. Thus, the approach is community based and supports the idea that collective inquiry and group discussions can reveal to community members information about grievances and possible ways to redress these grievances. The approach draws on the principles of development work not just in its belief in community based work but also in recognizing that projects and programs are more effective if people are engaged through previously established organizations and institutions. By working through the local institutions and established organizations, the PRA endeavors to strengthen civil society and make information systematic which enables nonviolent mobilization.

The main difficulty in this approach is working through the conflicting views between individuals from different classes of society who have access to different resources. For example, if the men do not feel affected by



the problem (the difficulty in collecting firewood), they do not see the need to give it a priority ranking. However, this difficulty also makes for the program's strength in that, to be successful, program facilitators must help the community find ways around these differences in opinion and see their common problems. The facilitators of the approach must also be careful to respect tradition and those in power while also including groups that are often excluded. The approach has yielded some success through programs in Kenya and Somalia, as individuals usually excluded from community decision-making felt happy they were given a formal role in the process (Thomas-Slayer, 2009).

### **Programs in Post-Armed Conflict Situations: The Superordinate Goals Approach**

The superordinate goals approach (SGA) to peace building resembles the PRA in that it focuses on community members working together to achieve common goals. The approaches both aim to build social capital between disparate groups in a community. The SGA and PRA also share the goal of teaching communities about the process of creating consensus and addressing grievances through nonviolent means. However, the SGA specifically focuses on these goals over the development project and thus supplements the community's collective project work with explicit discussions and education sessions on building trust and peace.

Michael Wessells (2009) explains the SGA in his discussion of a Christian Children's Fund program in Sierra Leone after the armed conflict ended. When Sierra Leone's war ended in 2001, the social fabric of the country was in tatters. During the war, the communities had competed for basic supplies such as food and water, so after the war communities no longer trusted each other and existed in isolation. The soldiers and rebel group members had committed terrible atrocities, leaving communities worried after the war ended if the soldiers and rebels could return home peacefully and become productive members of communities that had, during the war, tried to fight them off. The program included the following activities:

- Community »sensitization« dialogues between 4-5 neighboring villages:
  - Representatives were elected by each community to participate in the dialogues.
  - Dialogues focused on how Sierra Leoneans are one people that can unite in common goals.
  - Meetings aimed to unite people, reduce community tensions, and lay foundation for later talks.
- Planning discussions:

- Community identified needs for children in areas.
- Groups brainstormed ideas for community projects to support children’s needs.
- Community chose a project that was the highest priority (e.g. rebuild a school, build a health post, repair a bridge) and decided on project specifics (e.g. design, site selection, materials, etc).
- Community members chosen for work teams to build projects. Teams included youth from both sides of conflict and youth that did not participate in conflict.
- Empathy building:
  - Facilitator lead community discussions on how all youth suffered during war, even child soldiers.
  - Youth and children and their families shared stories about their suffering during the war.
  - Testimonies built empathy and unity as people began to understand each other’s experiences and their shared suffering.
- Peace workshop for youth on work teams:
  - Lessons emphasized unity and how old stereotypes no longer applied.
  - Elders and healers taught lessons on their shared history of traditional proverbs, songs and dances.
  - Workshop discussions established agreed upon ground rules for building project work.
- Work Program:
  - Youth paid for work so they could buy basic supplies for themselves.
  - Vocational counseling and training provided by local artisans, who followed up their training with continuous mentoring.

The community reported the project built trust between the communities and an appreciation for planning and working together on projects. Participants also reported a better understanding of how the war had affected everyone, and how everyone was a part of the peace building process. Youth were more comfortable with each other and no longer held on to negative, polarizing views of each other. Finally, the adults felt more comfortable with the former soldiers after seeing them work together to contribute to society (Wessells, 2009).

### **Lessons Learned from Existing Peace Programs**

All the above programs offer intersecting insights into how to design and conduct peace education and peace building programs. The programs demonstrate the importance of knowing who to involve, how to start the pro-

gram within the community, how to deal with issues during the program and how to sustain the program. Below, I list three best practices pulled from the above approaches and discuss their importance. I demonstrate how programs can incorporate these best practices by discussing them in the context of setting up a peace program in Niger.

The PRA and SGA demonstrate the value of working on a community level to conduct a proper needs assessment. Involving different groups in the discussion of the community's needs and problems reveals grievances and concerns that matter to community members and generates agreed upon solutions to these problems. Thus, the assessment process allows the peace building program developed from the assessment to focus on structural violence and nonviolent redress options in the community. The community based assessment also builds the trust and understanding between a community's disparate groups that only comes through sustained interaction with each other. By inviting all community groups to participate in a discussion of *community* problems, the assessment process can empower marginalized groups without threatening already empowered groups in the community. By focusing on shared problems and finding their solutions, communities avoid seeing issues as one group's problems with another group. Instead, they see one group's problems as a community problem that in some way affects them all and that they must all work together to resolve. The individuals begin to focus on their common goals and not their different agendas. A thorough assessment also allows program leaders to emphasize that peace building is a process that focuses on building the community and that peace is not just the absence of armed conflict. The assessment also gives reason for the following sustained interaction between different groups. Sustainable program effects are more likely when individuals who participate in the programs will continue to interact after the specific community project has concluded. In sum, the PRA and SGA community assessments reveal the structural violence issues in a community and leads to programs that show how this violence is a shared community problem that can be nonviolently resolved.

All the approaches above demonstrate the value individuals see in having a voice in and participating in activities that build peace and a better community. The TRT and SGA both show that testimony and participation by individuals from disparate groups increase group or community empathy and awareness of each other's perspectives, empowers marginalized people by giving them a voice in the community, and validates the marginalized individuals narratives and grievances. The research on and responses to the above programs demonstrate that people on different sides of a conflict must be allowed to discuss their own narratives to feel validated, empowered and capable of understanding each other. This need arises from the fact that in violent situations individuals develop core beliefs of superiority, injustice, vulnerability, and distrust supported by convictions that the other side's per-

spective is illegitimate (Salomon, 2006, p.45). The interactions that expose individuals to each other's humanity, be they sharing personal experiences through testimony or building a shared history through working together on a project, push people to detach themselves from their violent ideologies and open them to respect the others' perspective and humanity. These interactions must build on the idea of one community, though, because simply becoming friends and understanding the other side's viewpoint only leads to a temporary relenting of one's negative convictions if the interaction is not sustained. Therefore, community-based, long term interventions that move people away from their polarizing narratives and focus on a common village or national identity offer greater chances of success.

Finally, the PRA and bilateral peace-talks approach both demonstrate the importance of involving the community institutions and movement leaders in peace programs. As seen in Sri Lanka, even when the leaders involved in peace talks do not accurately represent the community, their decisions still have a broad impact on society. Leaders play a role in shaping, spreading and changing their group's narrative and collective opinion on the community and other groups. The leaders' involvement therefore lends legitimacy to peace programs. People feel proud when they are part of a process their community leaders are also a part of. This collective participation reinforces different groups' sense of recognition and legitimacy and no longer allows them to use their grievances to mobilize into violent action.

## **Building Peace in Times of Armed Conflict**

The review above demonstrates that organizations have made progress developing programs that build cultures of peace and address structural violence. However, the review also reveals a gap in the existing types of peace programming. Existing programs described above have limited impact on structural violence in situations of ongoing armed conflict. In armed conflict situations, programs focus on either building individuals' understanding of peace or creating peace through high level negotiations. Community level peace building programs are only implemented in post-conflict or peacetime situations. The current programs reflect the dominant paradigm that conflict must be ended before peace can be built. In reality, conflict is best ended by creating an inclusive peace process that builds on a shared understanding that one group's grievances are the whole society's problems and must be redressed through collective efforts.

The world needs peace programs for situations of armed conflict that believe in the psychosocial principle that communities can help themselves when given the tools and education on how to do so. Group armed conflict results, in part, from structural violence. Those grieved by structural violence resort to direct violence often because they do not understand, know

about or believe in non-violent tools for conflict-resolution. Programs to end armed conflict and build a lasting peace must therefore build an understanding, knowledge and belief in nonviolent methods that successfully redress their grievances and put those methods into practice.

### **Building a Peace Program for Armed Conflict Settings: Niger Case Study**

Using Niger as a case-study, we can see how lessons learned from the above programs can be used to develop a community peace program that helps combatants and civilians collectively address structural violence. Niger declared independence from France in 1960 and has since then had several democratic governments and military coups. Today, Mamadou Tandia, elected in 1999 and re-elected in 2004, leads a democratic government. Niger is currently one of the poorest countries in the world with a poorly educated population of over 13 million that has almost no access to healthcare. The main sources of income for Nigeriens are subsistence crops, livestock and uranium exports (CIA, 2009). The uranium deposits are in the northern desert region of Niger, a region long seen as ‘useless Niger’ and home to marginalized herders. In February 2007 the Nigerien Movement for Justice (MNJ) emerged and began to attack military targets in the northern region. The attacks have continued through 2008. The MNJ is a group predominately made up of Tuareg people from the North, who make up 9.3% of Niger’s population. The MNJ claims the government is taking the uranium deposits from their land and refusing to give in return proper compensation to the people in the North, which includes the Tuareg people. The MNJ claims their political objective in their armed attacks is to make the government curb its corruption and agree to use the wealth generated in a region be shared with the people of that region. The Niger government’s response has been to isolate the North where the Tuareg live both economically and politically. The government has attacked the armed Tuareg with armed force and permitted the army to conduct extrajudicial killings. The government has also labeled the MNJ as traffickers and bandits, which has some justification. The government’s main argument is that rebels could participate in the democratic system and receive recognition as a political party and redress their grievances through the political system. Both sides have committed terrible violent acts to each other and civilians (Polgreen, 2008).

| <b>Proposed Program</b> |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Goal</b>             | Persuade Tuareg to use nonviolent means to resolve grievances with the government   |
| <b>Target Group</b>     | All communities affected by the armed conflict and Tuareg rebel group members   |
| <b>Assumptions</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personnel can safely meet with communities in conflict area</li> <li>• Tuareg rebels can be persuaded to participate in the program</li> <li>• A sense of community can be developed among a primarily nomadic group</li> <li>• Government will allow an outside group to work exclusively with Tuareg to improve Tuareg's ability to work within democratic system</li> </ul> |

| <b>Objective</b>                          | <b>Assessment – conducted by assessment team (local translators, local NGO, and supporting international organization)</b>  | <b>Activities – conducted by program team (local translators, local NGO)</b>  | <b>Process Indicators – International organization acts as monitors and provides support while local NGO</b>   | <b>Output indicators – recorded by local NGO and corroborated by international organization</b>   |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| Provide communities affected with a voice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Explain objectives of program to community</li> <li>– Arrange to meet with individuals to get an introductory understanding of individual needs</li> <li>– Learn cultural norms for arranging community meetings</li> <li>– Learn key groups that need to be represented at a community meeting</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Arrange a community meeting with below agenda</li> <li>– Have community invite local rebel and government representatives to participate in the meeting</li> <li>– Open with ground rules (e.g. no interrupting, no name calling)</li> <li>– Initiate an open discussion of what the community needs are</li> <li>– Record concerns in writing for everyone to see</li> <li>– Ask community how they would like to share these concerns with each other, the rebels and the government</li> <li>– Ask community to choose one need that they can work together to address</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How many individuals are willing to meet with assessment team?</li> <li>– Do assessment and program teams ask open or closed questions to get feedback from community?</li> <li>– Community attendance at meeting</li> <li>– Number of different groups represented at community meeting</li> <li>– Are different community groups participating in the discussions?</li> <li>– Number of interruptions by »power individuals«</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Survey – do individuals in the community feel like they better understand each other's needs?</li> <li>– Was community able to agree on one or two needs to address with a community project?</li> <li>– Does the community continue to use meeting to discuss community issues?</li> <li>– Do rebels agree to allow community to safely proceed with the projects?</li> </ul> |

(continues)

| Objective                            | Assessment – conducted by assessment team (local translators, local NGO, and supporting international organization)   | Activities – conducted by program team (local translators, local NGO)   | Process Indicators – International organization acts as monitors and provides support while local NGO   | Output indicators – recorded by local NGO and corroborated by international organization   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Educate rebels on nonviolent methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Discuss with rebels traditional methods of resolving conflict</li> <li>– Find out current level of knowledge of nonviolent methods for political action</li> <li>– Present objectives of the program (to think of new ways for them to solve their existing problems for the people of Niger)</li> </ul> | <p>Rebel Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Review several nonviolent means of political action used in other parts of the World</li> <li>– Ask rebels to outline together what their grievances are</li> <li>– Discuss ideas they have for ways they could work to solve their problems in a nonviolent way</li> <li>– Have rebels draw up a plan of action for using a nonviolent method to address top two grievances</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Do rebels agree to meet with assessment and program team?</li> <li>– Do assessment and program teams respect the rebels feedback (are they willing to see fault in Niger government)?</li> <li>– Do rebels agree to consider nonviolent methods to be legitimate?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Rebels collectively agree on top two grievances</li> <li>– Nonviolent plan of action drawn up by rebel group to address top two grievances</li> <li>– Rebel leaders agree to attempt using non-violent methods</li> </ul> |

(continues)

| <b>Objective</b>   | <b>Assessment – conducted by assessment team (local translators, local NGO, and supporting international organization)</b>   | <b>Activities – conducted by program team (local translators, local NGO)</b>   | <b>Process Indicators – International organization acts as monitors and provides support while local NGO</b>   | <b>Output indicators – recorded by local NGO and corroborated by international organization</b>   |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| <p>Build community bonds and interpersonal relationships that generate lasting empathy and understanding and reduce violence</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Discuss with representatives from different community groups how project(s) should be organized and how projects can involve members of several groups</li> <li>– Find out from project teams what they agree on for ground rules</li> <li>– Have community decide on how to best compensate project work groups</li> <li>– Find out from community what local organizations or government institutions should be involved and/or informed of the project</li> <li>– Discuss with local government officials how they could possibly support the project</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Have individuals in project teams introduce themselves and their story to the group</li> <li>– Have project teams discuss the importance of working together on the project in order to build unity</li> <li>– Discuss the importance of understanding each other's needs how oppression and exploitation are forms of violence</li> <li>– Execute project according to communities plan</li> <li>– Provide workers with agreed on compensation</li> <li>– At project completion, have project team present project to the community (and local government officials if appropriate) and share what they learned about each other and working together to accomplish goals</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Are ground rules enforced and followed?</li> <li>– Do the project teams include members from all appropriate community groups?</li> <li>– Are team members given appropriate tasks to complete given the culture and traditions of the community?</li> <li>– Are project groups compensated timely?</li> <li>– Does project group agree on how to present project?</li> <li>– Is community knowledge used to direct project?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Does project get completed?</li> <li>– Does community use completed project as intended?</li> <li>– Do project team members report increased understanding an empathy for each other in short and long term?</li> <li>– Does project make the community feel safer?</li> <li>– Do community members feel empowered to work against systems of structural violence?</li> <li>– Are local government representatives aware of the project and the communities' needs?</li> <li>– Can program spread on own merits and be implemented in a similar nearby community?</li> </ul> |



## **Discussion of Implementation of Best Practices in Niger Program**

Of course, armed conflict situations pose serious obstacles to local and international organizations that wish to conduct peace programs. States and non-state parties frequently target civilians as a strategy in armed conflict. Simply protecting these civilians from harm and provide for their basic needs can be difficult enough. To gain access to these civilians with the goal of letting them discuss their problems and their suffering can be dangerous and incredibly difficult since it threatens those in power. For this reason, a key part of program's success is to include leaders and rank and file members of the conflicting parties in the assessment process. Organizations can then explain to them goals of the program and how it fits with their goals and grievances and how it can make each group a stronger and more resilient party that can support the communities they care about and their country as a whole. Their involvement in the assessment process also shows leaders that the program can be sustained and supported since it will be built on local cultural practices and use local knowledge and resources (Wessells, 2009).

Strategies currently used to bring parties to the table in bilateral peace talks today can surely be applied in getting their buy-in for this type of peace process. The parties must be assured they are seen as important and given some sense of authority and power in the process. Government officials and rebels that currently profit personally from the conflict situation will, of course, be difficult to convince. However, if the leaders are addressed collectively with their subordinates and possible with their fellow community or family members present, pressure to participate can build. Leaders often convince people to fight or support their fight by promising them it is an effective way to redress their grievances. These leaders gain their authority through building this support and then using supporters to threaten and demonize others outside their group. Since these leaders do not usually share all the gains they get through armed conflict with their supporters, they must demonstrate that they are really working for the cause to maintain subordinate support. The importance of giving voice to individual combatants and their communities is that leaders and groups cannot use the excuse of fighting on behalf of the community if the community is present and insisting they want the armed fighting to end.

The program outlined above focuses on building a culture of peace as it fosters democratic participation and participatory communication by giving voice to all groups to identify and address community needs. What has been incorporated into this program is a parallel set of meetings and workshops specifically for the rebel group members to develop their capacity to play a new democratic role and nonviolently represent their communities' needs. This approach allows the rebels to participate in meetings and workshops together with the community, and they learn to listen and understand po-

tential constituents. Therefore, these dual processes within the program foster democratic participation of the individuals and also the democratic participation of the rebel groups in the political process. By involving the community, programs better reveal the diverse needs that exist in the communities to leaders beyond those they previously have chosen to focus on. Thus, leaders become more accountable to their supporters and see the development problems they must address for their citizens if acting as their representatives. In return the communities gain access to government processes, this access is significantly related to mitigating deaths in certain conflicts (Besancon, 2005).

Finally, the Niger program emphasizes that building peace is a process that must advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity. Community-based approaches build solidarity as local groups work together for a significant period of time in projects and learn that they are all capable of gaining power and influencing decisions. The groups can recognize their collective capabilities and use those skills and knowledge to organize and control their own lives (Berliner & Mikkelsen, 2006). The sustained project interaction combined with testimony breaks down negative central beliefs and deep-seated convictions that were cultivated and sustained by wider social and political contexts. Involving all community members, including the media, politicians, educators and ordinary community members, in the process teaches everyone that it is possible to transform the overall cultural approach to conflict to be nonviolent and peace-oriented. The focus on meeting a community need pulls from the recognition that it is difficult to make the transition from conflict to peace without some measure of social and economic development through empowerment of local people to earn an income, meet their own needs, and understand the alternatives to fighting (Verkoren, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

Organizations must be willing to design and implement community-based peace-building programs that address the underlying structural violence in ongoing conflict situations. Such programs are possible. Current practices can inform potential programs, but cannot, as is, be implemented in armed conflict situations and create lasting effects. Suggested here is the starting point for community based peace building programs that involve the armed parties in community dialogue and education sessions on nonviolent means of redressing grievances. The programs should be project based, allowing for sustained interaction between individuals, and should address agreed upon needs of the community with local community resources. By including elements of the testimony and TRT approaches, the programs build empathy and understanding on the individual level to build the culture of

peace. Crucially, the programs should recognize the grievances of the armed parties and empower them to serve their causes better through employment of superior nonviolent methods.

From here, further research must be done on the effectiveness of this suggested approach to peace building in actual armed conflict situations. The research must include long term follow up measuring the improvement in safety of the people from both direct and structural violence and their perception of whether they live in a culture of peace.

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