



PROMOTING REGIONAL RECONCILIATION THROUGH PEACE EDUCATION

REPORT ON THE GREAT LAKES YOUTH EXCHANGE AGENDA

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Promoting Regional Reconciliation and Peace Education in the Great Lakes Region

1. Introduction

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), based in Cape Town, South Africa in partnership with Five (5) Universities located in the Great Lakes Region and with Shalom Educating For Peace, organized a workshop with the objective of **analyzing how students and other young scholars in the region can contribute to peace, stability and regional reconciliation in the region through local initiatives and Peace Education**. Initially six universities have been contacted to be part of the workshop, but one, the university of Butare, was not able to provide a team of students who could participate in the event. The universities which sent students to the workshop are the following: Two universities from the DRC, namely the Free University for Great Lakes Countries (ULPGL) from Goma, The African Evangelical University (UEA) from Bukavu. Two universities from Burundi: Hope Africa University (HAU) and University of Lake Tanganyika (ULT). In Rwanda: the Protestant Institute for Arts and Social Science (PIASS).

The workshop was the first in a series of initiatives aimed at creating spaces for an inter-university exchange and which are dedicated to the youth of the Great Lakes Region. The creation of a space for exchange is justified by the need to raise awareness among young people of the positive role they can play in peacebuilding and in fostering reconciliation nationally and regionally. It is well known that the youth in this region has been instrumental during the various conflicts in the region. Many young people have been used by political entrepreneurs to commit crimes and violate human rights. During the workshop it was obvious that youth can play both a negative and a positive role when involved into politics. The role of the exchange was therefore to encourage the youth not only to make positive choices but also to actively play a significant role in promoting peace and reconciliation.

The students who participated in the workshop benefited from this capacity development project. The meeting with students from various universities in the region was an excellent opportunity for networking and establishing avenues for collaboration on youth projects aimed at Peace Education in general. Out of the workshop it became clear that networking and collaboration is a way of joining efforts for a common cause. One of the avenues available is the online media. The use of Media platforms that were presented during the workshop and whose representative expressed readiness to work with the youth and their respective institutions will be a key to the success of the project. The Media platforms ready to accept and publish youth opinions include the Waza Africa and the Yaga Community, an on-line media that works closely with young people from many African countries. This platform encourages the youth to participate in the life of their communities.

2. Background

The Great Lakes region continues to endure instability and violence. Conflict drivers operate across borders and no sustainable solution has been found to mitigate these transnational factors. The work of the United Nations Mission (MONUSCO) in the DRC is not delivering the expected results, although it remains the world body's most expensive peacekeeping mission. Costing an estimated USD 1.4 billion, MONUSCO is the largest peacekeeping operation in the history of the UN. Local communities, particularly in the eastern Congo, still suffer the depredations of local armed militias that recruit from a willing pool of unemployed poverty-stricken Youth and exploit ethnic tensions to pursue their militarist aims. Meanwhile, the central government in Kinshasa remains weak and unable to assert authority over its territory. This is particularly evident in the eastern DRC, which has precipitated civilian casualties which are estimated to be in the tens of thousands.

In Burundi, tensions have mounted as a result of contestation against the third term of President Pierre Nkurunziza. The political instability caused by these tensions has had a negative impact on the whole region. Burundi crisis has been characterized by a strong participation of the youth, including those from different universities. IJR is seeking to address the tensions in the country by helping

its Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in December 2014 to enable communities and individuals to come to terms with past atrocities. This important work should pave the way to greater social cohesion and help to contribute to more effective national and regional peacebuilding efforts.

In Rwanda, although commendable efforts to respond to various challenges related to the post-genocide context been made, the journey towards sustainable reconciliation is still facing challenges such as mistrust between the 1994 genocide victims and perpetrators. To ensure that the deplorable genocide do never ever reoccur and prevent another violent conflict which would also have serious implications at the regional level, it is necessary to write the historical wrongs, heal the wounds of the past, properly address long-standing grievances, building trust among citizens within and inter-countries in the region and inclusively engage all stakeholders and “antagonistic parties” in the process of sustainable reconciliation.

One of the important aspects of all crises in this region has been the presence of young people at the forefront and on the battlefields. Some of them have been manipulated and used by politicians with vested interests. For others, participating into armed groups was the only viable solution in the midst of unemployment and poverty. Moreover, others have been passive over what is happening though affected. One should not ignore that the Great Lakes Region has a very young population. According to the Population Index Mundi, the young population in this region represents 63% and the medium age is 19. Obviously, any viable solution for peace and stability needs to take into account the needs of the youth for sustainability.

In order to bring its contribution in promoting peace, stability and reconciliation, The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) partnered with local institutions and organizations with the purpose of finding ways to mitigate conflicts and tensions. IJR uses the methods of training and capacity building on conflict transformation and through the creation of platforms for dialogue. Currently, IJR and her partners are encouraging young people, especially University students to become active peace agents and reconcili-actors. It is hoped that these dynamics will help promoting sustainable reconciliation processes and durable peace in the Great Lakes Region.

3. The workshop

In partnership with regional and local universities and with Shalom Education for Peace (SEP), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation organised a two day workshop destined to analyze the place and the role of the Great Lakes Region Youth in peacebuilding and Reconciliation from the 23rd to 26th August 2015. The workshop took place at Nobleza Hotel in Kigali (Rwanda). Participants were students and scholars from three countries of the Great Lakes Region: DR Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. The workshop brought together 35 people including 28 students and 7 young scholars, researchers and representative of the civil society organisations. The students and scholars came from Hope Africa University (HAU) and the Universite du Lac Tanganyika (ULT) from Burundi, the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS) from Rwanda, the Universite Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs (ULPGL) and the Universite Evangelique en Afrique (UEA) from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

4. The objective of the workshop

The overall objective of the workshop with several universities was to analyze the contribution and the role students as part of the Great Lakes Youth can play in promoting peace, stability and regional reconciliation.

4.1. The specific objectives

The specific objectives of the workshop were the following:

- To understand how the students and youth in general can play a more important role in promoting peace locally and regionally
- To evaluate the needs of the student/youth in terms of capacities building that will allow them to be equipped as peace agents / peace ambassadors

- To evaluate the main challenges that prevent students/youth and scholars in the GLR to play a prominent and more positive role in peacebuilding

5. Activities

Participants arrived as planned at Nobleza Hotel on the 23 August 2015 and were convened to a Welcome Diner. During the welcome dinner, participants introduced themselves to their colleagues and voiced out their expectations from the workshop.

On behalf of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), Patrick Hajayandi welcomed the participants and explained the reason that pushed the IJR to organise such a workshop in the Great lakes Region. He mentioned that the purpose of the workshop is mainly to create a platform for young people to express their opinions and to positively contribute to building peace and promoting reconciliation. The youth holds the key to a peaceful and stable future of this region that has been ravaged by violent conflicts for many years. It is impossible to imagine peace and stability in the Great Lakes Region if the youth is not involved and if its needs are not taken into account during the planning and decision-making process.

6. Expectations from participants

- To understand the causes of conflicts in the region
- To come up with solutions to peace issues, to be able to resolve conflict problems and to be able to close the sources of violence in the region. This implies that the youth is able to resolve conflicts peacefully and not violently.
- To build and formalize a network of action to overcome regional peace threats;
- To share experiences that can help in working together and to know what others think about the situation in the region;

- To acquire skills and improve knowledge in peace-building so that the youth is equipped to train youngsters
- To see the youth having a background of peace not of violence;
- To help the youth in dealing with the negative past and the controversies of their countries history.
- To see committed youth engaged in building peace in their communities

Dr. Jean de Dieu Basabose, the Legal Representative of Shalom Educating for Peace delivered a welcoming speech to the delegates. Then Patrick Hajayandi, IJR's Senior Project Leader in the Great Lakes Region gave an overview of the program. He also emphasised the importance of involving youth in peace and reconciliation efforts in the Region.

Dr Penine Uwimbabazi pronounced the opening remarks on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor of the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS) who did not manage to attend the meeting. The session was followed by several presentations aimed at setting the stage for discussions around the place and the role of the youth in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

7. Analyzing the role and the place of the youth and scholars in the Great Lakes Region's peacebuilding (*Presentation by Dr. Gerard Birantamije, Lecturer at ULT*)

The analysis was presented by Dr. Gerard Birantamije, a political expert and a professor at the University of Lake Tanganyika (ULT). His presentation evolved around the **Role of students and scholars in times of Crises and specific challenges of youth as peacemakers.**

In his presentation, Dr Gerard Birantamije noted that in the Great Lakes region (Burundi, Rwanda, and DRC), youth can be seen as one of Greek mythology's gods "Janus" with two heads looking in two different directions. First, this youth is like Janus, because it is divided into two groups: on the one hand there are young people who think about war and violence. On the other hand there are those

who think about reconstruction and peace. Janus also meant "doors" and the youth are obviously presented in the dual role of "gate" towards violence or towards peace.

The youth is involved in violence because of political manipulation. Young people are easily manipulated and very often they show readiness to commit acts of violence or even crimes.

Drawing on examples of the past violent experience from the three countries in the Great Lakes Region, Dr. Birantamije explained the crucial role the Youth played in the violence that characterized the post-independence period. In Burundi for instance, the fight for independence led to the dividing of the political arena into two camps: those who wanted immediate independence and those who thought that Burundi's independence could be delayed. The two camps benefitted from the support of the youth in their struggle. Burundi will know the first ordeal moments from 1965. And in terms of events, it is the young elites that were the basis of the crisis. The crisis was a consequence of the premature disappearance of Louis Rwagasore, the leader of Burundi's independence. The competition around his replacement generated more violence that is thought to be at the core of all political problems the country is still facing today. And at the center of the struggle was always the youth belonging to the different parties. The 1972 crisis, 1988, 1993 also saw a significant mobilization of youth against other youth.

In Rwanda and the DRC, the same pattern applies in the same terms. Independence was gained in pain. In 1959, the first massive killings took place in Rwanda. The violence was tightly linked to independence struggle. In Congo, the Lumumba's assassination and the Katanga crisis that erupted thereafter, paved the way for a bloody dictatorship that plunged the country into chaos. Though out these crises, the involvement of the youth has been documented. In 1972 and 1993 particularly in Burundi, in Rwanda in 1959 and 1994 and the research on the death of Lumumba as well as the two Congolese wars, all confirm the prominent role of young people used to commit atrocities.

According to Dr. Birantamije, the implication of the youth was made possible through ideological mobilization. The youth collected information on people to be executed and in some cases they were involved in committing the extrajudicial executions. Examples of

youth involved in violence include the *Jeunesse Revolutionnaire de Rwagasore* (active in 1972 in the massacre of Hutus in Burundi), the Interahamwe in Rwanda (active in the 1994 genocide against Tutsi), the Mayi-Mayi in DRC (1996-1998) etc.

On the other side, there is a part of youth that decided to fight for peace and stability. The association of Rumuri students in Bujumbura addressed a letter to president Micombero denouncing the killing of Hutu intellectual in 1972 for example.

Talking about the challenges the youth is facing in the Great Lakes Region, Dr. Birantamije mentioned two important things: The crisis of values and the lack of role-models. Among the values in crisis, *Ubuntu (humanity)* comes in the first place. The repetitive killings in the region show how people have forgotten this value around humanity. Concerning role-models, the Great Lakes Region has not been lucky enough see the rise of an inspiring leadership. A lot of leaders have been characterized by corruption and clientelism. In such a context, the youth does not have good examples to follow and this is reflected in the repetition of the same negative practices, over and over again. Those challenges and many more like for instance the political manipulation of the youth need to be addressed systematically. The question is how and what to do for the youth to become an instrument of peace in the region?

There is a need to inculcate in the youth the values that are lacking and the culture of peace and reconciliation in the region. This will be possible through peace education.

After the first presentation, Dr Penine conducted a problem solving exercise called “A dangerous river” for participants. The purpose of the exercise was to show how the youth generally react in times of crisis. Youth needs to work in team, think critically and have leadership models that can help them move in the right direction. They are dynamic, courageous, yet inexperienced.

8. Youth Activism in Burundi in the context of violence (*Presentation by HAU and ULT students*)

Since the inception of independence in 1962, Burundi's young people have found themselves at the frontline of the political struggle. Initially youth movements were created without political influence or political orientation. Such movements include for example the African Culture Youth Union and Burundi (UCJAB) in 1957 and the National Union of Burundian Students (UNEBA).

In the context of the struggle for independence, a Youth movement affiliated to the leader of UPRONA, Louis Rwagasore, was created. This movement called "*Jeunesse Nationaliste de Rwagasore*" (*JNR*) was spearheaded by the young elite from the University of Burundi. Later on the same movement played an important role as platform from which new leaders of the country emerged. Under the new name of "*Jeunesse Revolutionnaire Rwagasore*" (*JRR*), the movement was a key actor during the political events that led to the 1972 crisis. Clearly, the role of the youth has been important in shaping the history of Burundi, whether negatively or positively.

Today, the Youth is still playing an important role in the current political crisis Burundi is going through. Since 26 April 2015, with the announcement of President Nkurunziza's candidacy, the youth from opposition parties took to the streets in massive demonstrations. They protested against the reelection of Nkurunziza for a third term in office. In some parts of the country, the protests have been characterized by violence resulting from clashes between the youth and the national police. This is particularly the case in some of Bujumbura quarters/areas, in the capital of Burundi. At the same time there is another part of young people who are organizing platforms for dialogue or other forms of youth participation in the hot debate around Burundi's politics and social life. Those organizations include REJA, AMEPCI and the online platform for opinion sharing- YAGA Bloggers community.

Giving examples of alternative ways of Youth participation in Burundi, two practitioners shared what they do in order to contribute to the debate around politics and transitional justice.

9. The use of on-line media to promote peace and reconciliation (by Armel Gilbert BUKEYENEZA, journalist and blogger at YAGA and WAZA Africa)

In a move to inspire the young participants, Bukeyeneza shared his own experience as a young person on how he overcame the problem of unemployment which is a big challenge and which, to a certain extent, is fuelling the political crisis in Burundi. Gilbert started organising debates, conferences and writing stories on blog while he was still at the university. After his internship at Iwacu Newspaper, he became a journalist. With the assistance of Radio France International (RFI) he started publishing his opinions on Mondoblog. Today he is coordinating a media platform for the community of Burundian Bloggers called YAGA. The platform is open for everyone who wants to share their opinions with the world. Bukeyeneza called for the participants to the workshop to use the YAGA media platform in order to express and to share their views and vision for the Great Lakes Region. This blog can be used as a tool to promote peace in this part of the country.

10. Memorialization process in Burundi: the contribution of AMEPCI (by Aloys Batungwanayo, researcher at the University of Lausanne and Hope Africa University)

The memory is an important attribute for individuals and societies. The memory keeps something which has marked your life. There are two kind of memory:

Literal memory which can leads to violence by bringing the spirit of revenge and the exemplary memory (*memoire exemplaire*) which brings change and reconciliation. Drawing from the examples related to memorial sites in Burundi, Rwanda and Cambodia, Batungwanayo explained these two types of memory.

In a context of cultural violence with structural and massive violation of human rights, the leadership is often characterized by the denial of the committed crimes and in many cases the victims have no way to express their grievances.

In Burundi, the denial of committed atrocities in the past has been at the foreplay. Another problematic issue in Burundi history is the absence of a shared history and a lack of plural memory.

The formation of a plural memory implies a search for truth and the transmission of this truth to future generations. To build a plural memory means allowing a reading of events in a way that helps in coming to terms with the past and draw lessons from the years of violations of human rights. The failure to do so contributes to the perpetuation of violence from the old generation to the young one.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission already in place should play an important role in the emergence of the Burundi shared history. This will help in curbing cycles of violence and in preserving the youth from falling in the same problems. AMEPCI, as a mainly Youth organization, is involved in helping the victims of past atrocities to make their voice heard and their needs taken into account. In the process of reconciliation, AMEPCI is trying to bridge the needs of the old generation and the aspirations of the new generation.

AMEPCI members believe that it is necessary to commemorate, convey the plural memory, give a voice to victims, witnesses, perpetrators and the whole country to talk about their history but also analyze the system that allowed the violations and abuses. This will help in truly dealing with the past. It will help in establishing a basis for sustainable peace through the promotion and protection of human rights.

11. The Congolese Youth and its attitudes towards peace and stability *(Presentation by UEA students and scholars)*

In DR Congo, young people have been involved in the different conflicts that engulfed the country since the first war that led to the ousting of president Mobutu in 1996. They created self-defense forces and other militias that are still active in Orientale province, Katanga, Ecuador, North Kivu and South Kivu. In most cases, these young people were instrumentalized to fuel political and ethnic violence in the territories mentioned above.

In DRC, the youth represents more than half of the Congolese population. It is both an indispensable force to build a strong and prosperous Congo and a time bomb when it comes to stability and security matters. The failure to address their needs can easily lead to renewed violence.

The attitudes and behaviors of the Congolese should be understood as tangible expressions of opposition to the attitude of the government and its partners with regards to peacebuilding efforts, to justice and national reconciliation.

The opposition is manifested in several forms including the rejection of the established order, clashes, the joining of armed groups, xenophobic speeches, tribalism, mob justice, the substitution of the State, disorder, etc.

The participation of Congolese youth in these activities is an obstacle to peace and stability. It largely results from a deficiency of adequate supervision that exposes youth to the sense of social neglect. This explains why, in the still recent crisis in the DRC, youth has been famous in the active participation in the militias, rebellions and popular resistance (various troops movements from Mai-Mai and local defenses in North and South Kivu, the Bakatakanga in Katanga, the followers of the prophet Mukungubila to the west of the country, the Filimbi movement, the troops of Mbudi dia Kongo in the province of Bas-Congo. Initially, these popular resistance groups pretext protecting their land and promoting the interests of their respective ethnic groups. However, they have been accused of being involved into bloody violence, rape, and looting and roads cutters phenomenon. Other young people who do not belong to armed groups and who feel as abandoned in rural and urban areas are quick to dive into gangs and criminal movements (eg: the armed phenomenon Kuluna).

Another category of young people exposed to violence and intransigence is that of political parties' youth. Grouped in different leagues of youth in political parties, the youth category is described as unconscious by a certain opinion. It not only plays a leading role in political intolerance and dynamics of conflicts between political leaders but it remains soaked in a violent militancy.

Regarding the student youth, it also contributes to the continuing tribal hatreds, identity conflicts, power struggles, etc. Grouped in “*Same village communities*”, students have been easily manipulated by political and traditional leaders and other stakeholders who want to use them in protecting their own interests.

12. Peace Education and Reconciliation through tree planting the case of ex Rulindo Community (by Jean de Dieu Basabose, the Legal Representative of Shalom Educating for Peace)

He s the circle of violence and use the metaphor of the tree. Most of the time, youth acquire violent behaviour from the adults which is transmitted from one generation to another. There is big need to promote Peace Education to overcome old habits of violence. As a tree, after times, old leaves fall down and new leaves replace them and it is the same about our communities, there is a need to replace traditional negative way of dealing with conflict by positive means that promotes a culture of peace.

Children and Youth constitute the major portion of the population in the Great Lakes Region. Jean de Dieu noted that according to World Index, Mundiⁱ shows that more than 60% of the total population in the three countries are under 25 years old and the median age is under 19 years: in Burundi, 65 % of total population are under 25 years old and median age is 17 year; in DRC, 64.4% of population are under 25 and median age is 17.4; in Rwanda, 60.9% of population are under 25 years old and median age is 18.7). In order to be effective, our initiatives should consider targeting the largest section of the population. Therefore, devising initiatives that reaches children is absolutely necessary if we want to successfully work for sustainable and lasting reconciliation and peace in the region.

13. The place and the needs of students and scholars (youth) in Peacebuilding processes in the Great lakes Region

Universite Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs (ULPGL) shared the experience of an established infrastructure by students called “*Programme d’Accompagnement des Etudiants*” (PAE). It is a program that helps students to get involved in the development process of the country. The program gives the students an opportunity to play a positive role in the communities as they empower other students with entrepreneurship skills through organised seminars, conferences and field visit. There is a connection between entrepreneurship and the prevention of violence: Entrepreneurship leads to the creation of employment for youth who otherwise would prefer to join armed groups or violent gangs due to lack of income and occupation.

Clement Mutetwa from the Evangelic University in Africa (UEA) spoke on the role and needs of youth in the process of Transitional Justice in the Great lakes Region.

According to Mutetwa, the youth needs to be trained and empowered in peacebuilding processes and reconciliation so that they can become actors in promoting the culture of peace in the region.

Guillaume Lubanga from the *Universite des Pays des Grands Lacs* (ULPGL) described the place reserved to the youth in the Great lakes Region. He also showed that there is a need to promote youth initiative in relation with the research, trainings and in how to make valuable interventions aimed at addressing community needs and promoting reconciliation.

Etienne Tuyishime and Floriane Niyungeko from the Protestant Institute for Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS) spoke on the necessity to include the youth in the process of Peacebuilding in the Great Lakes Region. Everybody in the region is aware on what happened in Rwanda and Burundi between Hutu-Tutsi and in DR Congo between Hema and Lendu, and also stereotypes between communities in the region.

They are many reasons for Peacebuilding in the region for the following reasons:

- To end Ethnic Conflict;
- To end economic conflict
- To end Armed Conflict;

- To eliminate stereotypes from the mind of the regional population

Scholars must promote researches, publications and create spaces for the sharing findings and for debate. There has been a recurrent problem of lack of true debate, in a non violent atmosphere, despite the differing views.

Thadée Kwizera from the University of Lake Tanganyika and on the behalf of the delegates from Hope Africa University discussed the role of youth in the process of reconciliation in the Great lakes Region. He noted that youth are playing negative role in the Great lakes Region. Looking to different violent conflicts that occurred in the region, the youth has been dominantly playing a negative role in contributing and exacerbating violence. Today, this trend needs to be reversed because the youth, if well equipped with knowledge and skills, can play a role of peacemaker and peace ambassadors.

14. Perception of the Youth in the Great Lakes Region

The situation of violent conflict in the GLR is a serious challenge for the youth. In this particular region the youth represents a vulnerable group for politicians. The situation in the GLR is not only characterized by the violation of human rights, lack of social justice, infrastructure damage but it is also seen as a hostile environment for their development.

In the Great Lakes Region there are cross-border dynamics that should normally pave the way to a mutual development. However the ongoing conflicts and forms of violence prevent this long awaited development from coming. At the national level, the leadership seems to have failed to its mission of creating conditions that enable the youth to thrive. At the same time, some international actors including Great powers and multinational corporations are not making things easy because of their own interests in the region and which do not necessarily coincide with that of nationals.

The problem of power alternance and the trend from many leaders to prolong indefinitely their stay in office is yet another source of tension. When the leadership is not helping the youth and it wants to remain in power, the youth becomes desperate. The change of

leadership gives hope that things may finally change. The deterioration of the situation in the GLR is caused by this trend of head of states to remain in power.

In the GLR the anti-values are increasingly accepted as a normal lifestyle. The models are not those who fight for peace but those who are the most violent and feared. Another challenge is linked to the persistence of divisions along ethnic lines. For example, in DRC many people prefer more to be identified with their ethnic groups than being seen primarily as Congolese. This problem is exacerbated by xenophobic moves, intolerance and revenge, which perpetuates violence. All this is a hindrance to social cohesion and a challenge to regional development.

The economic interests related to natural resources has been a source of much trouble for the population living in the GLR and especially to those located in the Eastern DRC. In this chaotic situation, young people have been employed to commit crimes, to forcibly transfer huge populations in search for minerals etc. The region is also suffering from a negative image forged from outside the region or continent. There is a need to change this situation.

15. Causes of violent conflict according to the Youth from the GLR

The principle of non-interference in internal affairs of the GLR is one of the causes of conflict according to participants. Besides that, there is the non-respect of international conventions as well as the lack of action against those violating the convention. This is exacerbated by the influence and interference of great powers in the region. This interference tends to perpetuate what is seen as a neo-colonialism tendency. It has destabilizing effects.

The lack of solidarity and the absence of a common vision for the leaders of countries located in this region is a serious obstacle to peace and stability.

The corruption around the exploitation of natural resources reinforced by bad governance and contributes to the alienation of the GLR. The corruption feeds on greed of leaders (political and others). This prevents the development of projects that could help people to emerge from poverty. Due to poverty many people are hungry and lack the basics. And as goes a saying: “A *hungry man is an angry man*”. Corruption goes hand in hand with unfair and unequal distribution of resources

There is a manipulation of the people’s identity for economic and political purpose. But there is also a negative role played by the families and the narratives transmitted from parents to children. Those destructive messages received from family members negatively influence the behaviour of the young generation. They reinforce prejudices and stereotypes (forged false image of the other) for the youth, especially when it is not well informed.

The information also plays a critical role shaping the recent history of the region. In the region it has been mostly used for manipulation although there are examples of media and information tools used to promote peace. The media intoxication and the manipulation of information have been used to destabilise the region. The lack of sufficient knowledge and information on history and the lack of unbiased source of information make it easy for political entrepreneurs who want to manipulate the youth. Other sources of violence in the region include discrimination, injustices and different forms of inequalities and gender issues.

16. What could be the contribution of the youth in a non violent resolution of the conflicts?

The youth is ready to promote peace dialogue. This can include the use of social media and other information platforms for permanent peace exchange in the region.

Young people can sensitize their parents and increase their awareness on the need to educate children on peace.

The youth can physically interact with others across the region through different activities such as sport and artistic competitions.

The youth can denounce and fight against different forms of violence and destructive ideologies through research and publications.

For this to be a success, the youth needs to be trained through Peace education program. This program should touch on conflict transformation, non-violence and mediation and negotiation approaches.

17. Challenges and opportunities for youth in contributing to Peace and Reconciliation

17.1. Challenges

When it comes to creating jobs as a way to auto-development and self-reliance, the youth encounters obstacles when trying to access credit, loans. In fact, the youth is not able to provide guarantees. Connected to this, is the lack of capacities in project elaboration.

Many young people cannot draft marketable projects which can be an additional cause of not accessing bank credits.

Some of young people who would like to express themselves they cannot do it because they are not informed on existing spaces for expression.

The youth is still subjected to political manipulation. At the same time many young people still underestimate their own capacity or they lack self-esteem which undermines what they think they are or can do.

Many young people do not know exactly what they want to achieve in life. This could be seen as a problem of orientation in life (some young people have difficult in determining a career they want to follow). This is due to a lack of responsible guidance.

There are challenges related to corruption in many aspects of life, like in job seeking and this keeps many young people unemployed despite their talents and skills.

The fact that the youth is not represented in decision making process is a big issue. The youth is extremely under-represented in government institutions. As a consequence, their needs are not taken into account when programs are being elaborated and budgets allocated.

Fear has been identified as a psychological factor that is preventing youth from resisting and challenging evil within their communities and in the region.

17.2. Opportunities

There are structures that could enable the youth to play a role such as churches, some associations, media groups, cultural clubs and other organisation. The youth can socialise and contribute to peace through such activities as soap opera, rotary clubs, singers 'choirs etc.

The existence of social media can be used as tool to promote peace, social cohesion and development.

In the particular context of peace education, there are a considerable number of organisations that could help in developing skills and extend knowledge of the youth in the Great Lakes Region.

For those who would like to use entrepreneurship in order to curb unemployment and the related violence, there are some institutions that are already providing skills and guidance in project elaboration, management and enterprise launching. (See BBIN, CECORES etc).

18. Promoting Regional Reconciliation, Peace and Stability

Discussing on the question of Regional Reconciliation in the Great lakes Region, the participants admitted that it is something possible. However its success will mainly depend on the political will of the leaders in the region. Promoting regional reconciliation will imperatively start by addressing the issue of stereotypes that have been developed among the nations of the Great Lakes Region. In order to address the prejudices and stereotypes, the combined efforts of all actors and at all levels will be needed. This will go hand

in hand with the promotion of narratives and memories that enhances solidarity among regional population, especially those living in the border areas. It implies that the truth telling processes at the national level feed in those at the regional.

18.1. What could be the responsibility of the respective governments in promoting peace?

- Promote Regional Dialogue;
- Promote security;
- Abolish discrimination;
- Promote judiciary action to fight against Human Right violations;
- Create a fund to help victims of violence;
- Promote the establishment of National Infrastructure for Conflict Transformation;
- Respect of different legal texts signed by the different countries;

18.2. What could be the role of youth in the process of Regional Reconciliation?

- Youth must create and participate in activities which can promote Peace and Reconciliation in the Region such as sport, culture, debates, exchanges and other related activities;
- Join youth associations which promote Peace and Reconciliation;
- Create a space for dialogue between youth in the region;
- Create cooperatives which can help youth auto-development
- Share experience and ideas on peace through Media platforms, such as social media and other forms.

19. Needs for youth in order to become operational

The following are the needs enumerated by participants as more significant:

There is a been of de-traumatisation, pre-adaptation and rehabilitation centres to assist the victims of violence

The need to be part of the research and contribute to conducted research, which is supposed to be objective and impartial. The youth needs to contribute to analysis and understanding of conflicts and to finding solutions.

They need to be equipped with knowledge and skills. This will enable them to transcend all prejudices and stereotypes, through developing a culture of tolerance. In this context, young people can play a role of mediators at all levels.

The youth could extend peace education through the existing structures such as peace clubs, cultural and artistic exhibitions.

Youth need assistance in develop critical thinking. This should be reinforced by the creation of spaces for debate between the youth of the region and political leaders. In this way the youth will be able to understand the real political agenda of political parties and their leaders.

There is a need among the youth to know the real history and what happened. This shows once again the importance of transitional justice mechanisms such as a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They need reliable information and a possibility to share their knowledge. They need freedom, especially the freedom of expression and free access to information.

They youth needs Role Models. In an era where most of leaders seem to be too selfish, the young generation needs to see an inspiring leadership that can stir up their energy to work harder for the region.

There is a need for increased awareness on conflict issues emerging in the region and a support for the youth in making good choices, based on real understanding. At universities there is need for the informed youth to take a stand against the culture of bullying, (especially on newcomers students in Burundi and DR Congo since it creates violence). Young people need to work with elders to acquire wisdom.

There is also a need for a favourable environment to play an important role in resolving conflicts. This could be possible if the youth is associated in the search for solutions to problems that are undermining the development of the region including the decision making process.

They need a space for exchange and experience sharing at the regional level – there is a need to create a structure that will coordinate their activities.

The youth needs material, financial, intellectual, social support and orientation or guidance in order to increase their contribution. The regional governments and other development partners should put a specific emphasis on job creation through all possible mechanism in order to empower the youth. All this needs a secure and a political sound environment. Youth need to be optimistic as the only weapon for change

20. The way forward

Participants suggested the following actions for the future:

- Participants dedicated themselves to be ambassadors of peace, change should start from them. They will start by sharing what they learnt from the workshop through workshop, training and conferences
- To have training on peace and conflict transformation. The knowledge on the principal concepts around conflict and peace are still not sufficient.
- Use of existing media platforms, ranging from the on-line media, radio broadcasting programs to other forms of advanced communication. This will include for example to propose themes related to peace to be discussed on radio at Hope Africa Radio.
- Do research with the support of senior academicians
- A creation of a comity to follow-up on what participants will be doing back home and share contacts or support those taking action
- Some of the young people decided to do something in their communities and meet next time to evaluate the progress of the commitment
- It would be good to spread the information about the conference and have many applying candidates

- To work on projects which answer the problems of local communities and to submit the projects to regional organisations such as CEPGL, ICGLR or other institutions that can provide support
- It was suggested to have a social media that keeps the group updated on what others are doing
- Think about “youth and peace in the region” articles which could be published as a book.
- To take into account the ideas expressed during the workshop and try to implement them
- To ensure that there is a continuity of the youth platform for exchange.
- Explore the possibility of having a Youth Peace prize (possible every year)

The closing remarks were done by the Honourable Giovanni Renzaho, the representative of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) of Rwanda. He expressed his gratitude to the organiser of the workshop as it is a path to promote Regional Dialogue and Reconciliation.

At the end of the workshop the participants confirmed that the exchange was a rich event that allowed them to have a broader understanding of the problems and political crises that the Great Lakes Region is facing. From the workshop, some students promised to develop new and innovative strategies aimed at addressing issues related to promoting or sustaining peace and reconciliation through different initiatives. These actions are expected to take place as an outcome of the workshop.

ⁱ Index Mundi, <http://www.indexmundi.com>