Manual for Creating Democracy and Peace Groups to Prevent Election Violence

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The African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) of the Friends Peace Teams strengthens, supports, and promotes peace activities at the grassroots level in the Great Lakes region of Africa (Burundi, Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda). To this end, AGLI responds to requests from local religious and non-governmental organizations that focus on conflict management, peace building, trauma healing, and reconciliation. AGLI sponsors Peace Teams composed of members from local partners and the international community.

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Purpose

This is a manual for the establishment of Democracy and Peace Groups to prevent election violence and to organize effective peace building groups at community level. It is based on the experience of a Quaker organization, Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) during the 2010 elections in Burundi. It is intended for peace building organizations that are interested in developing groups specifically focused on preventing violence before, during and after elections.

Background

The Democracy and Peace Groups grew out of the uniquely effective methodology developed by HROC to respond to the immense need for trauma healing and reconciliation following a 13-year conflict that tore Burundian communities apart along "ethnic" lines and traumatized citizens on all sides. The Healing and Rebuilding our Communities program brings together people from a community of different identity groups, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, for three-day trauma healing workshops and participants develop working relationships and even friendships with diverse people, including with former enemies, alleged or real perpetrators of violence. Many participants in the basic workshop move on to do the advanced workshop, and some to become "Healing Companions" in their communities following a three week training. They are trained to listen compassionately and accompany family members and neighbors on their journeys of healing. Many participants also attend one-day follow-up sessions and community celebrations that bring together everyone in a community that has been through the program. For a manual on the basic workshop and for more information on HROC, please see www.aglifpt.org/Program/hroc.htm.

The Democracy and Peace Group membership was drawn from participants in these trauma healing workshops. The idea for the groups was introduced during the follow-up session and they were launched during the community celebration. Because of this the groups had already established mutual trust and respect and the members had become familiar with concepts of peace and reconciliation. Although the Democracy and Peace Groups can be developed outside of the HROC framework, it is important that the groups are given the opportunity to create a space of trust and mutual respect among themselves.

Contacts

For more information, questions, and/or concerns, please contact Adrien Niyongabo at adrien@aglifpt.org or David Zarembka at dave@aglifpt.org. If you decide to form Democracy and Peace Groups, we would welcome feedback on your experiences.

Objectives

The objectives of a Democracy and Peace Group are to:

1) Support people on a grassroots level to organize themselves as citizen reporters to effectively prevent and mitigate violence while providing a peaceful presence during elections.

2) Raise awareness of the particularity of election violence,

empowering groups with the knowledge to prevent and mitigate violent incidents.

3) Offer a nonviolent channel for the expression of dissatisfaction or concerns over election processes. In other words, if people in a community know that what has happened to them is being reported, perhaps they will be less likely to take revenge or speak out violently.

4) Build relationships and create groups of mutual cooperation in divided communities

5) Bring international attention to both election-related violence and peacebuilding efforts, thereby expanding an international witness for peace.

6) Provide credible information to international government bodies and the UN when appropriate, to encourage proactive, positive and peaceful diplomatic intervention if necessary.

7) Provide credible information to national and international media if and when appropriate with the goal of applying pressure to any groups that may be acting dishonestly and exposing violations.

Benefits

The Democracy and Peace Groups

1) Provide a forum for people to report the development of tension and violence before, during and after elections, and a position from which to act to prevent violence from occurring or escalating.

2) Reflect on, demonstrate and spread awareness about good behavior before, during and after elections.

3) Provide a space to improve relationships across divisions and increase community cohesion by allowing members to meet regularly and share daily life.

4) Can provide reliable information, in tune with developments on a grassroots level, to international agencies and media to inform their work, encourage positive intervention on a larger scale and expose irregularities.

5) May be inspired to continue meeting together to work for community cohesion and peaceful conflict resolution in their communities after the elections.

Challenges

1) Unless managed sensitively, bringing together a diverse group of people in a Democracy and Peace Group in the context of political tension could result in animosity between members.

2) Group members may be hesitant to participate because of threats or the perception of threats.

3) In the context of increasing tension during the elections, group members may be scared to continue meeting together.

For example, when the opposition parties withdrew during the Burundian Presidential elections in 2010, political party members threatened those who were planning to vote in the election. Because of these threats, some Democracy and Peace Groups were hesitant to continue meeting to discuss the elections.

" One of the people whose house was burned [during the election campaign] participated in the HROC workshop. After calling in the problem, we were encouraged to go to the site where it happened and help the victims. When one victim promised to seek revenge, we urged him to seek nonviolent solutions, for example by pointing out that he might in the process hurt an innocent victim and merely start a vicious cycle. Thus it is more important to act cautiously and have those truly responsible brought to justice. After his house was burned he went to live with his mother in a simple straw hut. We kept up with him, and some of us donated things to help him out, I gave him two pieces of clothing myself, since we were afraid he would become angry and commit violence in revenge, but he has remained peaceful. (Birongozi, Rutana province) "

Step 1: Selecting Participants

1) It is important that the participants in the Democracy and Peace Groups already form a cohesive group where all members trust each other and provide each other with mutual support.

Some examples of exercises that might help to establish a safe and respectful environment include:

- Put participants in pairs and ask each to talk to the other about themselves – where they live, what they do for a living, etc. Then invite everyone back to the big group, and then each person presents his or her partner. It is important to allow the person being introduced to correct any mistakes or to add anything to the big group.

- Give each person a piece of paper and the instructions to write his or her name on the paper and then a drawing of something that he or she likes. Then each person will explain the drawing to everyone and put it on the wall. Give the group time to walk around the room and look at everyone's drawings.

Source: HROC Manual for Basic Workshop

Although these are some examples of exercises that have worked well in the Burundian context, it is important to be creative and responsive to the dynamics and needs of the group.

2) An appropriate group size should be determined based on the size of the community.

3) It is also essential to ensure that those who are invited are representative of the community as a whole in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, political affiliation and religion.

HROC invited participants from two trauma healing workshops in each of 18 communities, making a total of 40 members in each Democracy and Peace Group. The number was effective because it allowed the full participation of each member, and a broad representation of the communities.

Step 2: Planning for the SMS-enabled network

As well as regular meetings to discuss the elections, the democratic process, peaceful conflict resolution, report on developments in the community and build relationships, the Democracy and Peace Groups are trained to use a FrontlineSMS-enabled network to quickly circulate their reports of incidents of violence or irregularities during the election period.

1) The FrontlineSMS-enabled network

• Allows rapid and discreet communication across communities divided by conflict.
• Provides an affordable way to share information, reducing transportation and other project related costs.
• Allows for rapid response to quickly developing emergencies.
• Promotes the collaborative sharing of information within the Peace and Democracy Groups.
• Allows centralized recording of information being distributed locally or regionally, enabling centralized monitoring and evaluation or more directly, centralized involvement or intervention when appropriate.

2) It is important to keep in mind some of the challenges of using the FrontlineSMS-enabled network.

• It requires resources, planning, training and administration.
• It may shift the focus away from the face-to-face Democracy and Peace Group meetings. Because of this, it is crucial to maintain the regular meetings of Democracy and Peace Groups as the project's core activity.
• It can feel impersonal and lead to a lack of ownership. Though if the network takes hold, it can also on the contrary give a group of peacebuilders a sense of awareness and ownership of what is going on in their communities.
• Centralized information could be a target for the government or other groups to use for their own purposes, if they are able to get a hold of the information.

3) Resources needed:
• FrontlineSMS: recommended dedicated computer, modem or data-enabled phone to connect the computer to the cell network.
• Staff time to oversee the network, monitor usage, and ensure FrontlineSMS program is working.
• Funding to provide phone credit to participants.

4) Before setting up the FrontlineSMS network, it is worth collaborating with participants at all levels to plan how and for what reasons the network will be used.

Among the decisions that need to be considered are:

• The extent to which the network functions in a vertical/hierarchical or horizontal fashion. Most networks will have a combination of both, since FrontlineSMS simultaneously makes possible both sharing information between members or a group (horizontal) and also sharing and recording those messages centrally (vertical). Different projects may emphasize these two approaches to different degrees to fit their needs.
• An assessment of the technological capacities of the country or countries in which the program is operating.
• Whether the traffic of messages will be high, in which case a short-code may be necessary, which will incur additional cost.
• How to develop clear procedures about how participants deal with different types of situations. For example, since SMS messages sometimes get lost or are not seen by the recipient until later, emergencies requiring immediate attention would likely be better communicated through phone calls or face-to-face contact, rather than, or in addition to SMS messages.

Step 3: Training of Trainers

1) Rather than bringing in external facilitators, it is important that trainers be drawn from the communities themselves.

> The group facilitators in Burundi were drawn from participants in the HROC workshops who had also completed the 3-week training to become Healing Companions.

2) The facilitators of the Democracy and Peace Groups should receive training in leadership, the particularity of election violence, the purpose and role of Democracy and Peace Groups and election observing.

> The following is an example of the training given to facilitators of Democracy and peace Groups in the Burundian context:
>
> Day 1: The Kenyan example
>   a. What role did "tribal" identities play in contributing to election violence?
>   b. How could this have been prevented?
>   c. How can such violence be addressed once it arises?
>
> Day 2: Trauma and Elections
>   a. How post-election violence can be associated with the act of voting, political discourse, and democracy
>   b. Democracy is based on open contestation between political competitors for the support of a majority or plurality of the population. This can provide opportunities for healing or exacerbate divisions. Suggest ways that elections can be productive and how it can be mutually supportive with other local processes for community dialogue and engagement.
>
> Day 3: Facilitator Training: Democracy and Peace Groups
>   a. Purpose and role in the community of Democracy and Peace Groups
>   b. Presentation of agendas for Democracy and Peace Groups and the workshop that introduces them to participants
>   c. Cultivating Community Leadership
>   d. Brief remarks on democratic theory as more than just casting a ballot: majority rule and minority rights, participation, protecting marginalized groups
>
> Day 4: Election Monitoring and Role Plays
>   a. Election monitoring, including both formal and informal roles
>   b. Beginning of role playing for facilitators
>
> Day 5: Wrap Up and Evaluation
>   a. Review of content and part-two of role-playing for facilitators
>   b. Evaluation of Seminar

Step 4: Citizen Reporters Training

1) All participants in Democracy and Peace Groups should be given training as citizen reporters.

2) This training should include:

- An overview of the project
- Input from participants on perceptions of the possible risks based on their understanding of the project and on the current situation in their communities
- Specifics of the election process
- The development of indicators of potentially volatile situations, as well as positive incidents in communities.
- Tools to observe and measure changes in these indicators
- Guidelines on how to gather credible and verified information
- Guidelines for how citizen reporters should communicate with others in their community
- Guidelines on how citizen reporters will interact with local government officials
- Possibilities for collective non-violent action
- Development of a code of conduct for citizen reporters to mitigate risks

A possible exercise for Citizen Reporter Training:

Activity: "The Ball Game": Partisan Politics versus the Problem-solving model

For 20 people.

Materials: 3 balls, tape and pieces of paper

Preparation:
1. Using masking tape, divide the ball into two hemispheres by taping around the ball to mark the "equator." Then mark the two hemispheres differently, for example with an "x" and a "o."
2. Roll up 12 single sheets of paper lengthwise into a small wand and tape them so that they hold together (don't worry if they are not very strong!)
3. Mark a small goal – perhaps 1 meter wide, for example with two water bottles, or with masking tape.

Process:
a. Ask for 12 volunteers to participate. The other 8 will be observers.
b. Form the participants into 3 groups of 4 each, then within each group, divide them into two sides – e.g. the "x" side and the "o" side.
c. Give each of the twelve participants a paper "wand."
d. Game 1: Party politics: Tell the participants that when the game starts they should use the wand to try to get their side of the ball face up, so that if they are on team "x," for example, the x is on top and the o is side down. The team that has their side on top when the time runs out is the "winner."
e. Start the game, and continue it for a minute or two.
f. Game 2: This time the game will be different. It is no longer about getting one's side of the ball face up, but instead working together to move the ball into the goal. In order to ensure that this happens in an orderly way, have each group taking turns moving their ball (slowly!) to the goal. Note that this time all four people from the two different teams work together for the same goal.
g. Ask participants and observers about what they observed in the two games.

Note: The use of paper wands is meant to be frustrating. They may even become so exasperated that they begin to use their fingers or hands directly, which can be understood as a kind of "corruption" or unfair manipulation.

A possible exercise for Citizen Reporter Training

Activity 2: Mock Election Exercise (A Cooperation game)

For 20-25 participants.

Materials:
1) paper
2) a box or hat to act as a "ballot box"
3) candy or some other treat – enough for at least 1 per participant.

Process:
1) Assign people to one of two groups: the red group, with 12 people, and the blue group, with 7 people. The last person, and any additional people can participate as election observers.
2) Have them meet in their groups and decide on a leader who will represent them in the election. If time permits, give them a few minutes to decide on a platform, that is, a set of policies that their party will promote. Tell them that, upon deciding upon a leader, this person will be asked to give a 1-2 minute speech to advocate for why people should vote for their group.
3) Give each of the two leaders time to make their speech.
4) If time permits, you can have a 5 minute "campaign period" during which everyone attempts to convince people of the other side to vote for their side.
5) Before holding the election, inform both sides that the team that wins will get candy. Since the teams are of two different sizes however, they will get two different amounts of candy as follows:
   o If red wins, red team gets 10 candies.
   o If blue team wins, they get 20 candies. (since they are disadvantaged)
6) Hold an election, for example by giving each person a small piece of paper on which they write "blue" or "red" and place their votes in a box. People are not required to vote for their own team. Then have an open process by which the votes are read out loud and counted.
7) Give the candy out to the winner as promised (9 times out of 10 the red team will win). The candy should be given to the leader of the team who gave the speech, with no instructions about how to distribute it to their teammates. Note that if the red team wins, they will have to make a difficult decision about who to give candy to and who will not receive candy, since there is not enough for everyone.
8) Debrief 1: (Assuming that almost everyone votes for their own team and thus red wins.
   o Ask the red team leader if he or she thought it was a good process.
   o Since there are 12 people on the red team and they were given 10 pieces of candy, there should be two people who, even though they voted for red, and red won, did not receive candy. Ask them if they thought it was a good process.
   o Ask the blue team if they thought it was fair (they are likely to say no, since they started with fewer participants and never had a real chance of winning).
   o Explain or otherwise elicit from the participants an alternative possibility: They could have all agreed to vote for the blue team, and then divided the candy equally among everybody. In this way, everyone would have received 1 piece of candy, whereas the way it worked out, only 10 people received candy.
   o Ask them how this compares to their experiences in real elections and give candy to everyone who did not receive it as part of the game.
9) Alternate Debrief 2: If people see that they can cooperate and vote for the blue team, you can discuss how this happened, and what would have happened if they had not cooperated.
10) Alternate Debrief 3: In the above discussion, there are presumed to be two outcomes, either people vote for the red team and the red team has to divide its 10 candies among its 12 members, or everyone votes for the blue team and everyone gets 1 piece of candy. There is a third, more cynical or corrupt possibility that participants might realize. People within the blue team could convince only 3 members of the red team to vote for them in exchange for receiving a piece of candy. As a result, they could have 20 pieces of candy to split among only 10 people. If this happens, you can discuss the effect of corruption on those who were not part of the group.

Step 5: Technical Training

1) The technical training should include:

- How the SMS messages will be transmitted locally and to the central hub.
- In what way the information in the SMS messages will be used and distributed.
- The technological tools and confidence to act as reporters and trainers of reporters
- Basic use of phones, how to send and recieve SMS messages, etc
- The specifics of how to send SMS messages to the group, using the FrontlineSMS system which requires, for example, each message to begin with an at (@) sign and the name of the group.
- Depending on the needs of the project, participants may be taught other ways to structure their messages so that communication is clear, for example by beginning each message with a subject word so that conversations between participants can be distinguished by topic.
- Restrictions on the use of the phones

2) If possible, the FrontlineSMS technology should be implemented on a small scale to provide participants a chance to become comfortable with the system, as well as to identify problems both in technical aspects, as well as users' understanding of the process. Considering the results from practice examples, changes may need to be made either from a technical point of view or in the method of how the project operates. This includes an evaluation of how the network is being used and how it does or does not meet the needs of the users. In response, this could lead to alternative configurations, additional features or supplemental training that would make for more effective and efficient use.

The Ball Game Exercise

Step 6: Democracy and Peace Group Meetings

1) A minimum number of meetings previous to, during and after the elections should be determined.

2) In determining the length, timing and frequency of meetings, it is important to keep in mind the responsibilities of participants in terms of work and families etc. so as to allow for the success of the project and avoid burdening the participants.

3) An appropriate mechanism for reporting on these meetings should be developed, including attendance and narrative reports.

4) The content of the meetings is not limited to but could include:

For meetings before and during the elections:

- A discussion of the definitions and significance of democracy and peace.
- What constitutes peaceful elections?
- What is the particular nature of election violence?
- How do people in the community see the upcoming elections?
- Do people in the community understand the voting procedures?
- What is the security situation in the community?
- What is the role of the Democracy and Peace Group in the community?
- How can the Democracy and Peace Group respond to the security situation in the community?

For meetings after the elections:

- How did the elections go?
- What is the atmosphere like in the community?
- How do people see the election and the results?
- What is the security situation in the community?
- What was done by the Democracy and Peace Group before and during the election?
- What effect did these actions have?
- How did the local administration respond to incidents and irregularities during the election period?
- What can the Democracy and Peace Groups do to keep the local administration accountable?
- What is the role of the Democracy and Peace Group in the post-election period?
- How can the Democracy and Peace Group respond to the security situation in the post-election period?

The Democracy and peace Groups in Burundi met at least two times before the beginning of the five-month election period, three times during the elections and at least once after the election for an evaluation. Each of these meetings lasted approximately half a day and each group decided together on the time they would meet.

5) In addition to these suggestions, it is important that the facilitators of Democracy and Peace Groups do not feel restricted to these topics and questions, but are able to respond creatively and appropriately to the specific needs of their groups and communities.

6) It is important that the meetings are intentionally participatory. In the case of larger groups, this may necessitate small group discussions along with large group sessions.

An example of a Democracy and Peace Group meeting agenda:

1) Song and Prayer
2) Words of Welcome
   - Presentation of participants
   - Objectives of the meeting
3) An exercise of gathering. It is important that the exercise chosen is linked to the content of the meeting.
4) A discussion of the definitions and significance of democracy and peace.
5) What constitutes peaceful elections and what is the particular nature of election violence?
6) Break
7) How do people in the community see the upcoming elections?
   - Are people aware of their right to vote?
   - Do people know the candidates and location of polling stations?
   - Do people understand the voting procedures?
   - What is the security situation in the community?
   - What precautions have been taken by the group and the local administration?
8) Light and lively exercise
9) Evaluation
10) Closing

Step 7: Follow-up

To maintain the momentum of grassroots peace activism, it is important that groups are given the opportunity and are encouraged to think about how they can continue meeting together after the post-election period.

1) Each group should have at least one evaluation meeting in which participants are asked to reflect on the work done during the election period, how they could improve their activities and how they will continue to work together.

2) To ensure sustainability, it is important that the groups take ownership of, and are empowered to continue their activities increasingly independently.

Examples of FrontlineSMS messages:

[sent to the Mutaho group] A grenade was heard in Ngungu, 4th of July at 2 a.m. A family was at home where it exploded, but no one was killed.

[sent to the Buterere group] People are quite calm in general, but there are some opposition party members who have decided not to sleep at their home because they fear that someone will come and capture them there.

[sent to the Kamenge group] There were some people who had grenades and arms that were captured on the 12th Ave next to the Adventist church. Others were captured on Ave. Terminus. The latter were in the midst of robbing a house, the civilians who captured them took their pocket money and split it up amongst themselves.

Testimonies from Democracy and Peace Groups

We focused our efforts on speaking with youth who we thought were at risk of getting involved in violence. We used playing soccer as a starting point to our relationship. Then later when the topic shifted to politics, we would urge them to consider carefully where violence led in the past, in 1993, and suggested that if they love their country they will find other means of addressing the problems they perceive. For example, after the communal elections [on May 24, 2010], one young man said that he would go into the forest to join an armed militia because he had fled a number of times and he did not want to do so again. Since we knew he was a good student, we suggested that such behavior might be common for uneducated people, but that he, having had a chance to receive an education, should think more carefully. He seemed to take this to heart. We also spoke with parents to urge them to keep an eye on their children, for example to consider where they might have been if suddenly they start coming home late.(Birongozi, Rutana province)

In our Democracy and Peace group, we start by discussing recent events that have been taking place, such as the elections and other local events. We also discuss the teachings from earlier in the program, such as the mock election role play that we did in the follow up day. As it turned out, the elections were just like what happened in our role play – with one of the parties contesting the outcome. (Birongozi, Rutana Province)

In the Democracy and Peace groups, we discussed problems in the community, such as conflicts between political party members. For example, there was a confrontation between members of different political parties, where one accused the other of witchcraft causing her to pass the due date of her child. I asked a Catholic priest to speak with her to ask her not to accuse the other of witchcraft, and the conflict ended. (Gitaba, Rutana province)

I feel like the training helped me to play a more active role. For example, the mock election activity [in the follow-up workshop] helped me understand the problems with people being too partisan. Now when I see people being very polemical, I ask them, "Do you know the candidates who might become President? And do you think they would come to help you if, for example, you ended up in jail?" (Rutana province**)**

I don't feel that my voice is being heard. I am just an unimportant citizen. But problems begin at the local level, so if HROC helps at that level, perhaps the leaders will see the difference and will respond in turn." (Birongozi, Rutana province)

We discussed the question of what is democracy...Here democracy [i.e. the elections] can kill, it can destroy a family...Democracy is still young in our country, and so we focused on questions of how we can promote democracy in our community. (Gitaba, Rutana province)

One thing I learned is what a true leader is. Previously we tended to look at leaders as simply dictating what others should do. Now I know that they need also to listen to others. (Gitega province)

Members of the opposition accused me of complicity with the rigging of elections, they said, "You were there while they stole the election." I told them it was not stolen, at least at the polling station where I observed, but they did not accept this result, they said I was just lying.