

Sleeping with a Spear

October 1, 2009

Report #117

The house that we slept in had one big spear in the corner of the [Nandi] house. My fear about this spear clicked my mind - not knowing how many people it has killed in 1992 land clashes and the 2007 disputed election results. When I hear "Nandi" what triggers my mind is bows and poisoned spears. Being a lead facilitator I could not hide my fear. I wished we could stay in a hotel. After team-building I spent a sleepless night fighting my conscience and the perception I had of this people. In the morning we had a knock on the door. A young boy had come to pick us up to go to the river and have a cold bath which is routine in most of this community. It takes heart to go through this experience and indeed through AVP. I have slept in the house of a Nandi, eaten together and took a bath in their river. I have learnt that indeed we are one and we will always need each other at one point in life. If we build trust and love we will impress peace all over. Peter Serete, AVP lead facilitator.

Below are reports from two follow-up days of Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC – pronounced HE-rock) workshops and three basic Alternatives to Violence (AVP) workshops. The important aspect is that these reports are from our on-going work in Kenya. To be effective, I believe, one must be involved for the long term. Too many non-governmental organizations have one to three year timelines to accomplish their goals.

To me that can be no more than a beginning. AGLI began work in Kenya in 2003 introducing AVP. It took two years just to have trained, experienced AVP facilitators and another two to train Kenyan facilitators to be AVP trainers themselves. This was finished just in time for the post-election violence in Kenya in January and February 2008. During the next ten months the Friends Peace Center-Lubao did 226 AVP, HROC, and listening sessions for 5,010 participants. As you can see from these reports, the work of non-violence, healing, and reconciliation must continue if the goal is to prevent another round of violence during the 2012 elections.

While we are bombarded with the violence that breaks out in the world, these reports are inspiring. They show that healing and reconciliation can also occur – even if they do not make the daily headlines.

Peace,
David Zarembka

Dave Z comments: The following report for HROC follow-up workshops were written by Dorcas Nyanbura, Kenyan HROC facilitator.

Turbo, Kenya – HROC (Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities)

September 18 and 19, 2009--Follow-up Sessions 4 & 5
Turbo Friends Church – 43 Participants
Facilitators: Devorah Juma and Dorcas Nyambura

AGENDA

- Song and prayer
- Introduction
- Review of the basic workshop
- Brain storm of the effects of HROC

The method that we used was similar to the workshop setting – where we all sat in a circle – since it enhances the sense of community. We started the meeting at 10:00 a.m. The turnout was very good and the participants happy because we had gone back to see how they were faring after the training. Most of them had similar feedback.

Below are the questions used to collect the data and the participants' responses.

1) How has HROC changed your life?

BIRGEN At first, when I came to this workshop, I was not talking to my neighbors and whenever I saw them, I could recall what they did to my animals. I am a Kalenjin but I was targeted because of my political affiliations. My neighbors, who are my tribesmen, came and looted my properties. I was forced to run away from my farm but now am back. The worst thing is that I had planned to revenge but after training, I decided not to do so. I am grateful for the wonderful training that you brought to the community for HROC has really changed my life. The hate I had is now going away and I have begun reconciling with my neighbors and all the things we did together are back.

WAITHERA HROC has really changed my living style with my neighbors. During skirmishes my house was burnt down by people I knew. I had promised never to forgive, talk, or even greet them. But after learning in the workshop that when one wants to heal, you start with yourself – then others, I cooled my temper down, took action of forgiveness, and now my enemies are my great friends. Some came last month to help me boma my house. [Boma means to put mud between the posts and sticks of a mud and wattle house.] I thank organizers of this program for having transformed my life and for my enemies.

2) Is HROC necessary in this community?

CHERONO Yes it is necessary because for us who have undergone training, there's change in our life and also when you share what you learnt in the workshop with others, they admire to be trained too. So, it's necessary so that a lot of people will be healed from their trauma. In this community, we require more and more workshops – because as a community worker I have seen people who are highly traumatized – and if possible reach out to everyone and the whole community will live in harmony like before.

KABUNGA *It's important because after our training, I managed to share with my friends in the community and they admired so much they could also undergo the same training and most of them realized they were traumatized and required to be taught how they can deal with their trauma.*

NDIRANGU *It's so much important because on my side it helped me heal and also it has taught me tactics on how to live with others. I also remember one day I met a crowd which was beating up a young man because he had stolen. I took up the stand and defended him. I asked that he be sentenced to 30 days community service but I took him and he helps me work on my shamba [small farm] for a fee. Were it not for the teaching I got about reaching out to the good part of everyone I could not have stood up for him and I could not be selling a lot of vegetables thanks to an extra strength.*

3. How is your relationship with your neighbors after HROC workshop?

MADEGWA *We are now able to work together, visit each others homes and also help one another in our farms. We are also free to visit other communities.*

ROSE *Our relationship is now good because after forgiving each other we are free to borrow from one another's home, our children can play and visit one another without fear.*

4. Have you shared/disseminated the information you learnt in HROC?

NJERI *Yes, although at first it was hard for some of my friends to agree with what I was sharing to them. Some said it was hard for them to forgive those who had wronged them.*

ASWANI *Yes I have tried to share and most of them have admired so much they could also be trained HROC workshops as they considered the teachings to be of great importance in their lives and needed teachings that would change their living with one another."*

OBONYO *Yes. As I deal with orphans and widows – and these are people who need those who can listen to them – I've had an opportunity to share what I benefited in HROC basic workshop. Although at first it was hard to share because majority are still freshly wounded, they were easily carried by emotions as I tried to share; but at end they found it was so necessary as they needed to be healed too.*

We were able to have the two remaining follow ups in Turbo. They went on well. It seems they have been busy since they did their basic workshop. The reason for this is that they are planning to register a welfare group. They have had a series of meetings to that effect and after the follow-up we were able to witness the election of office bearers. This went on well and all who were present were happy.

Dave Z comments: The following reports for three AVP basic workshops were written by Peter Serete, AVP lead facilitator at the Friends Peace Centre-Lubao. He and the other two facilitators were from the Luhya ethnic group. The Kalenjin group includes the Nandi. The Masai are another group in this same area. The Kikuyu are yet another group that was targeted during the post election violence because they were the same ethnic group as President Kibaki.

Change Agents for Peace, International (CAPI) is AGLI's sister organization based in Nairobi, Kenya, and mostly supported by Norwegian Quakers through grants from the Norwegian government.

AVP (Alternatives to Violence) Workshop Report

September 1-3, 2009

St. Karol Lwanga Catholic Church, Kipkarren River, Kenya

Sponsor: CAPI 16 Participants: 5 male and 11 female

Workshop Description

We had a balanced class of Luhya and Nandi and a few Kikuyu. This training came at time when the Government of Japan, in conjunction with the International Organization of Immigration, was giving out basic building materials to the families that were affected by post election violence – which involved both communities. The workshop picked up well with 19 participants; three of our participants didn't finish with us because they had gone to collect their building materials.

Testimonies

Through active participation, attendees showed their interest in all session through the process of asking questions and giving input.

Josephine, a business woman, said on day two that the training had brought instant change in her, *“I could fight men and women in the market place just because of rumors and petty gossip, and that had led me losing many friends. I have realize that my transforming power was covered by anger and lack of self control. I went to the market yesterday evening, very calm and friendly, and people were surprised. Many thought I was pretending, not knowing that AVP has saved me.”*

Samuel Ruto said he has run twice, away from a friend who had done AVP and wanted him also to learn. *“At first the training was at Musembe when my friend who is Luhya invited me. I came late in the afternoon, when I looked through the window I saw something written Tree of Violence, I sneaked slowly – I disappear. I knew this people were investigating on people who did violence. My friend did not give up on me. Next time it was at Chebarus and again I boycotted. When I heard of this training I took courage and came. I must admit that out there a lot of my friends are still living in denial of dark moment of violence they did. This training has help me to open up through sharing and my heart is lighter and I feel I have a responsibility to*

inform my friends in my village about AVP and that it will help them to say no to violence. Please reach many people like me and our country will heal. There is change after this training. I didn't know if we have solutions to the conflicts we encounter; these teachings are like salvation."

Mama Elemina. *"No peace; no development. I did know ways of peace but now I have understood that I have transforming power and I should let it use me"* said **Janet Chematia.** One participant asked, *"Does it mean when we do all this we are cowards; e.g. using 'I messages'?"* Alternatives to violence is not a method for cowards, it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponents, but to win his friendship and understanding.

AVP (Alternatives to Violence) Workshop Report

September 4-6, 2009 at Cheptanon, Kenya

Sponsor: CAPI 20 participants: 12 male and 8 female

Workshop Description

This workshop was a back-to-school training including youth in high school and those who had dropped out from school. Most of the participants were Nandi from the hill of Cheptanon who are very active with the support of the Anglican Church of Kenya.

Testimonies

Our drama started during our homestay. We stayed in a home of a Masai who is a soldier. In that family we had herdsman who was a night runner [a crazy person who runs around at night pounding on people's doors, throwing stones on tin roofs, etc.]. Lucky enough we were told in advance and it wasn't a problem. The workshop with young people was very interesting through open sharing; we related all topics to what affects young people – issues of unemployment, HIV/AIDS, relationships, poverty and the role of youth in peace-building. We used questions like – Why are young people used in violence? Why are only older people considered to bring peace? These were the main issues that these young people wanted us to address. Through the process participants realized the direction AVP was building on – personal realization that violence can not be paid back by violence.

"When I wrote my problem during the empathy exercises I thought people will laugh at me, I was very guilty as my friend read it in a small group that we were in. I have been living in self-denial after I got pregnant. My parents wanted to kill me for that act. I ran to my grandmother. That is where I am still living up to now. This training has shown me alternative ways to deal with problems, during the empathy exercise my friends took my problem as theirs and helped me to come up with a solution. From here I am going back to my parents. I know they may not accept me back but I feel through this training I am a better person." – Anonymous

AVP is an experiential process and it heals people who are willing to share and learn from others. In a small way it develops character: people who become physically passive but strongly active spiritually.

AVP (Alternatives to Violence) Workshop Report

September 7-9, 2009

St. Peters Ngenyilel Catholic Church, Ngenyilel, Kenya

Sponsor: CAPI 21 Participants: 13 male and 8 female

Workshop Description

Ngenyilel is in Uasin Gishu in North Rift Valley. It is one area that was affected by the 1992 tribal clashes. The workshop was done in a Catholic church in Ngenyilel. All participants were from the Kalenjin community with young people, middle aged and few older men and women included.

Facilitator's Comments about the Workshop

The facilitators that have worked in Rift valley will all agree with me that it is very hard to stay in the homes of the Kalenjin community. Many a times we will get a house of Luhya, or any other tribe. In Ngenyilel it was not easy to get hospitality from one of our own [Luhya]. A time came when we put aside our insecurity and fear and try it out in a house of Mama Clementine Kilele who hosted us in homestay. The house that we slept in had one big spear in the corner of the house. My fear about this spear clicked my mind - not knowing how many people it has killed in 1992 land clashes and the 2007 disputed election results.

When I hear "Nandi" what triggers my mind is bows and poisoned spears. Being a lead facilitator I could not hide my fear. I wished we could stay in a hotel. After team building I spent a sleepless night fighting my conscience and the perception I had of this people. In the morning we had a knock on the door. A young boy had come to pick us up to go to the river and have a cold bath which is routine in most of this community. It takes heart to go through this experience and indeed through AVP I have slept in the house of a Nandi, eaten together and took a bath in their river. I have learnt that indeed we are one and we will always need each other at one point in life. If we build trust and love we will impress peace all over. – Peter Serete, AVP facilitator.

Testimonies

Why are you compensating the Kukuyus and yet we all suffered during post election violence? Why are you here? Who told you that we don't have peace? These were the questions that Mzee Simon Kibirgen Murei had before we started the training. On day three this is what he had to say,

From time immemorial we've been accused of being violent. I refuse to accept that and I want to admit that both victims and perpetrators of violence should all be treated with equality to avoid future conflict and to my fellow Kalenjins we need to restore our good will of

neighborhood we had before 1992. This peace training has just reminded us of what we should do in case we are caught in violence within our self, family, community and all Kenya. Come again and teach us more.

Teresa Ruto – *So as we go away this afternoon, let us go away [with] more than ever before. I came with fear; I have never attended a seminar like this in my life. The seminar did not discriminate against people in terms of age, gender, religion, ethnic group and even the level of education. If we unite and use this teaching we will not experience violence again. Through this experience I feel like I have a lot to reconcile, especially with my neighbors, with whom we've not be in good terms.*

Recommendations

“Where were you?” This is one question that our dear participants will remember to ask after realization that the tool of alternatives to violence work better in resolving conflicts. We find an open entry to this community through participants themselves. Most of them have seen the need and agency of AVP and they are really helping us reach other people in Rift valley and to me this move is very supportive.

In future, training and bringing up facilitators from this community will also add marks to the peace work that we are doing. The participants that were trained from this community got committed in other things.

Conclusion

For all of us today the battle is in our hands and only our willingness and desire to take responsibility to achieve our dream of peaceful coexistence among our beloved brothers will make it so. As we know, the road ahead is not altogether a smooth one. There are no broad highways to lead us easily and inevitably to a quick solution. Some have a hidden interest to suppress the effort of other people in non-violent resistance: we must keep going.

Peace Cannot Stay in Small Places – I read this phrase in an AGLI PeaceWays newsletter about Rwanda and indeed it is evident that we have the responsibility to reach our brothers who are willing to share their ignorance in failing to realize they have the potential to solve the conflicts which are inherent. We should use every opportunity that comes our way to reach out and share the skills of nonviolence.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to Change Agents for Peace, International, the facilitators, and, our brothers who help us in mobilization and help us to win the trust of Kalenjins.