

Report on Election Violence Prevention Seminar

HROC Burundi

6 July 2009 – 10 July 2009

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Overview

The intent was for participants to come out of the seminar with (1) an overview of the program, (2) a core set of knowledge relevant to carrying out the program, and (3) facilitator training, including practice, in how to lead the 2-day follow-up workshops for the program. The knowledge involved (2) included (a) a comparative understanding of election violence in Burundi and Kenya, (b) an idea of the relationships between trauma and elections, (c) some idea of the relationship between elections and democracy in an ethnically divided state, (d) knowledge of the community problem-solving model, and (e) practical knowledge of what to do in the case of politically-motivated violence occurring in their community.

The breadth of the tools and knowledge provided would be too much for the groups to use all of, but it was hoped that people would be able to choose the tools they found most helpful. To counterpoise this flexibility however, we also tried to give the program some concrete, focused direction through a clear idea of what would be presented in the 2-day follow-up workshops.

Participants

Pastor Sarah was said to be coming but didn't show up. I think otherwise we had everyone we planned for, though Adrien would have more details. A few people missed the first day or so due to the end of the Jubilee.

Facilitators: Hezron, Mamai, Malesi, Adrien, Florence, Anna, Andrew. We also had Ernest as a translator.

Day 1 – Election Violence: Kenya and Burundi

1. Kenyan Experience – Their presentation focused on four aspects:
 - a) Root causes
 - b) Overview of the actual violence
 - c) What could have been done to prevent the violence
 - d) What was done to address the violence
2. Neela Ghoshal (Human Rights Watch Researcher) – Election Violence. Neela began with a brainstorm on human rights and a quick overview of recent political critical points. She then elicited people to talk about some of the recent political violence that created the current context. She then presented her findings about politically-motivated killings, torture, and arbitrary detention in Burundi. I think this helped to focus our understanding of one aspect of what needs to be addressed and gave people one framework for thinking about what happened and for expressing the gravity of politically-related violence.
3. We then gave people a chance to meet in small groups from their province to discuss the violence they had seen in their communities already.

Day 2 – Trauma and Elections

1. Started with a quick de-brief of Monday, then gave a chance for people to ask questions of the Kenyans.
2. Activity: Role-play election. This activity is structured with two competing groups that are of different sizes. The larger group of 12 people is promised only 10 pieces of candy to share amongst their members if they win, whereas the smaller group is promised 20 pieces of candy if they win. The two groups choose a leader/candidate, who then give speeches and an election is held. When the large group is elected (as tends to happen) they have to decide which of their members doesn't get candy, and the alternative possibility is presented, i.e. that everyone could have decided to work together to elect the smaller party and everyone could receive candy. The idea was to get people thinking about whether, and how, elections relate to *democracy* (in relationship to being more meaningful than just repeating ethnic division and in protecting minority rights). In fact, people became very engaged in this activity, but not for the intended reasons. In stead, they became very interested in playing out the elections and identifying the hyperbolic and unreasonable rhetoric of politicians and to ensuring proper counting of votes. This may have been because of a small translation error that made “free and fair elections” come out as “good elections” and made “mock elections” come out as “bad elections”, though we tried to address this once it was identified. And it was relieving to see the energy with which people engaged in this activity.
3. After lunch Adrien led a session on trauma healing and elections. This included a small groups session that people were very engaged in and didn't want to stop. People spoke about the problems that happened after 1993 and the trauma they experienced. To some degree this broadened into a discussion of all violence after 1993, and not just that specifically related to the election, though arguably they are tied together in people's minds.
4. The Kenyan facilitators were worried after day 2 that their sharing of the Kenyan experience of violence had done too much to worry people and promote fear, so we ended the day with them sharing some of the positive things people were able to do to respond in hopes that people would feel more empowered.

Day 3 – Democracy and Elections, Community-Problem Solving Model.

1. Activity: Ball-game – In this activity participants in teams of two try to push a ball so that one side (or the other) is facing up. They are given only rolled up pieces of paper, which bend easily, so it is a frustrating game. Some people resorted to pushing the ball with their hands, which we had prohibited. Then in the second part of the activity, the teams work together to guide the ball to a goal. The participants drew the desired conclusion – that if elections are just about one political party or the other trying to get their side to win, the result is chaos and no forward progress, much unlike when people cooperate. As an added lesson, people drew a comparison between cheating in the game with people using their hands and political corruption.
2. Community Problem Solving Model – The basic idea is that communities can (1) decide on a problem that is a concern to all through a participatory process and then (2) work towards addressing this problem through the skills and resources they themselves possess. This also provides a model for how to focus the electoral process on a issues-based campaign that is nonpartisan and not ethnically-based. Malesi, Hezron, and Mamai explained this model through how communities responded to problems following the Kenyan violence, including active listening, bringing grassroots concerns to political leaders, reaching out to youth, etc.

Malesi then led a session in which regionally-based small groups were asked to identify problems that need to be addressed.

3. An overview of the Election Violence Program was given and then people were given time to begin preparing for their turn to practice facilitating. The first group facilitated a session, in which they tried to run through all the activities very quickly, but this still gave an opportunity to point out some ways to improve.

Day 4 – Election Monitoring and Role Plays

1. Pastor Levy gave a passionate speech about the need for election monitors and the consequences that would result if things do not go well (this was a little scary). He then discussed the functioning of election monitors, based in QPN experience. This was very helpful, and included some clarifications about how the different independent electoral commissions function (national, provincial and communal), and how our project can fit in with this. In the case of politically-related violence, members of the Peace and Democracy Groups could raise their problem first within their group as a whole. From there they could bring the problem to HROC staff who could then work with them to bring the issue to the appropriate electoral commission, if appropriate. They would then continue to be in touch about the outcome (or absence of action) from the electoral commission.
2. We then had a number of groups practice facilitating and provided feedback. People were getting the basics of the exercises, but it would be great to follow-up on these to ensure the important messages aren't getting lost.

Day 5 – Role Plays, Closing and Evaluation

1. Brainstorming session on what makes elections “free and fair” led by Hezron.
2. Review of the outlines of the Program and of the Agenda for the 2nd Follow-up Day.
3. Malesi led a discussion on group leadership and sustainability. She started by having people list the characteristics of a good leader. Then she asked people “What happens when that leader leaves, or falls sick, or is absent?” This got people thinking about good leadership that could sustain a group beyond one particular person. The purpose of this was to get people to think about how the Democracy and Peace Groups could be made sustainable beyond the life of the grant.
4. Adrien led a discussion of group leadership and goal-setting, with the aim of getting groups to make concrete, specific goals that will ensure that groups are productive.
5. Evaluation (written evaluations collected by HROC team)
6. Closing (interconnected string web of people activity)

Next Steps

1. Pastor Levy raised the idea of having Quakers registered as election monitors as well as possibly trying to participate as members of the Communal independent election commissions. What do we need to do to pursue this?
2. If Adrien and Florence haven't already done so, we need to make sure that the facilitators all have a clear sense of the project, the agenda for the 2-day follow-up workshop, and the schedule for the rest of the activities.