

- **Kibimba Project Proposal**

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### **Historical Description of the Community of Kibimba**

Kibimba is a colline located in the zone of Kabanga, in the commune of Giheta, and in the province of Gitega. The communes of Rutegama, Ndava, and Bugendana border on Kibimba and each of these communes are situated on the border of three different provinces (Muramvya, Mwaro, and Gitega). Kibimba thus occupies a strategic geographic position as the focal point for three provinces, and for the fact that the colline is situated in the middle of Burundi's two largest cities, Bujumbura and Gitega.

Given the central location and rather developed community infrastructure of Kibimba, the colline became a 'meeting place' for villagers in the surrounding communities. A hospital (managed by the Friends Church of Burundi), a primary and secondary school, and a church constituted the social and religious institutions that established Kibimba as a significant place of ethnically mixed community interaction until the uprising of 1993.

Historically Kibimba became recognized as a cultural centre for both arts and education. Many well known Burundian artists studied in Kibimba in addition to a significant number of the country's political and religious leaders which earned Kibimba's school system a national reputation.

In August of 1993, Kibimba became internationally renowned for a very tragic event. Seventy secondary school students were taken to a gas station and burned alive. The retaliation and hostilities that ensued brought regular life at Kibimba to a halt. The lives of the general population were jeopardized as Kibimba became a battleground between the army and rebels groups. The schools and the hospital closed as people could no longer safely access them and the secondary school became the centre for a displaced camp regrouping people from Kibimba, and the border lying communes of Rutegama, Ndava, Bugendana, and Mbuye. With the creation of a displaced camp the colline of Kibimba became divided into two separate areas: the displaced camp on one side and the hospital and church on the other. Kibimba thus became characterized by a spirit of hatred and vengeance and was known for its volatile nature. The events at Kibimba, however, mirrored the larger politics of Burundi during this period.

### **Formation of Peace Committee**

In the beginning of 1994 the Kibimba hospital began functioning again with the support of a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer. It offered services to person of all ethnic groups, although due to the high level of existing suspicion and fear, the reopening of the hospital served instead to increase

tensions between the displaced camp and the hospital. The displaced people group were afraid to return to their native villages and Hutus refused to frequent Kibimba even to go to the hospital. In order to address these tensions representatives of the hospital including Suzanne (MCC), with the Chief of the displaced camp Matthias Ndimurwanko took the initiative to organize a committee whose aim would be to address the situation of conflict at Kibimba and explore how to rebuild trust and peaceful cohabitation in the area. An organizing committee was hence formed consisting of 10 Burundians made up of equal numbers of both ethnic groups. Matthias played a key role in the establishment of this committee as he had been the former director of the primary school who narrowly escaped the Kibimba fire, yet remained nevertheless a strong advocate for peace and cohabitation. As the Chief of the displaced camp, Matthias continued to earn the reputation as a community leader.

The organizing committee began to invite local administrators, chiefs of surrounding collines and sous-collines (i.e. sous-cartiers), leaders of the displaced camp, the hospital and the primary school to meetings where they posed the basic question: How can we live together again in this community of Kibimba? Together these individuals began to generate ideas. Gradually these meetings became more frequent and more consistent leading to the creation of a Peace Committee comprised of 70 members most of whom played leadership roles in their communities. The original committee of organizers was altered to include women and was integrated into the larger Peace Committee but continued their organizational and administrative functions. The committee members included people from the collines of Kibimba, Musama, Rweru, Murayi, Kaguhu 1 & 2, Rutegama, and Nyamurege. These collines are located in the communes of Giheta, Rutegama, Ndava, and Bugendana. These communes form a 12 km radius around Kibimba.

The Peace Committee which was officially formed the 6th of December 1994 elected Matthias as president, a position he holds until today.

### **Peace Committee's Strategic Vision**

The peace committee was initially formed with the vision to promote peaceful cohabitation and to restore the community life of Kibimba. At present the scope of its vision has been broadened to include not only a perspective of reconciliation (the rebuilding of relationships) but to address broader security issues, and social and development projects aimed at improving the economic well being of the community.

### **Objectives**

The central objectives that guide the work of the Kibimba Peace Committee are:

- To increase the security of the community members.
- To foster a spirit of trust and cooperation between people of different ethnic groups.
- To rebuild the infrastructure (religious, social, economic, and political) of the colline.
- To improve the economic well-being of the community.
- To become proactive at the community level in addressing issues related to group violence and other criminal activities.
- To improve communication between civilians, the military and local administrators in, and the areas surrounding, Kibimba.
- To create spaces for exchange.
- To reframe the community in a positive way; women's projects and youth sports activities.

### **History of Activities**

The first concrete project of the Kibimba Peace Committee that brought people together consisted in reopening the primary school December 6th of 1994. Matthias reassumed his position as director and hired teachers of mixed ethnic origin encouraging them to continue working together despite outside pressure. In order to get students to attend the newly opened school, peace committee members personally visited households and encouraged parents to send their children to school. The reopening of the school was a significant step forward in the promotion of peace and reconciliation in that it united children and teachers of all ethnic groups and brought together parents around a common cause at various school meetings. Peace education is taught in the primary school.

In 1995, the peace committee raised the issue that suspicion and fear created a situation in which the hospital served one part of the population only. A suggestion was put forth that the hospital open a restaurant under the direction of a foreigner. The peace committee asked an MCC volunteer to manage the restaurant. Once MCC agreed, the peace committee opened a restaurant and then began to encourage the local population to frequent it. During this period, buying food was a problem in general as people feared being poisoned. The presence of an expat contributed to the fostering of trust in the restaurant, a trust which was eventually transferred to the hospital itself. The restaurant thus became a focal point where community members met, lingered, and eventually spoke to one another.

The Peace Committee then initiated the creation of a sports club of about 60 youth from the area. The objective of a sports club was twofold. Firstly, it acted as a positively centred activity to address increasing social problems involving youth. Young adults with much time on their hands and little to do began to get involved in less desirable activities. As well they could be easily recruited by groups ready to exploit them. So daily sports practices got kids off the street and organized them around a fun activity. Secondly, competitive games became a forum for peace and reconciliation messages and avenues for players as well as spectators to meet and dialogue.

The sports club continues to meet three times a week for football practices. Competitions are organized between strategically chosen teams. The sports club soccer teams are made up of both Hutu and Tutsi players and they play against teams from other regions, in addition to local military teams or against other local administration. Besides being fun and bringing different players together who generally lived in fear of one another, a diverse group of spectators gather to cheer along teams rather than identity groups. Following these soccer matches, peace committee members serve refreshments and would give a 'teach piece' on conflict resolution to all present.

In 1995, the Kibimba Peace Committee asked the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) for formal training in peace education. A 2 week workshop on conflict resolution was organized for peace committee members in response to this request. Inspired by these workshops the peace committee began a theatre group. They wrote, directed, and performed plays on forgiveness and reconciliation in Bujumbura (2 performances, one at Trinity church and one at the university), Nyabihanga, Musama, and surrounding communes. Each performance piece was followed by a three day workshop and dialogue process involving groups of mixed ethnic origin. These plays were well received.

Unfortunately, in 1996 the political situation in Burundi took a turn for the worse greatly affecting the fragile peace being rebuilt in the Kibimba area. The eruption of violence that ensued disrupted the functioning of the peace committee and forced two MCC workers (as well as all other expats) to leave the country. Discouraged and unable to organize meetings, the peace committee slowly disintegrated. Of the Peace Committee members, only Matthias remained in Kibimba and continued whatever peace activities were possible. In 1998, Mi-Parec (Ministere de Paix et Reconciliation sous la Croix) together with Matthias collaborated to try and revive the Kibimba Peace Committee. During 1998, Mi-Parec facilitated two 3 day follow up conflict resolution workshops. Since then peace education has been a central objective of the peace committee.

In 1998, the gender issue was given more consideration and women were given a more prominent place in the peace committee. Until then the peace committee's focus had been ethnic conflict with little attention being given to balanced gender representation. In 1998 women were included in the overall structure of the peace committee (three of the ten person organizing committee were replaced by women, and 2 women from every colline attended the 75 person peace committee). Placing women in leadership roles led to the promotion of projects specifically targeted for women. In 1998 a straw mat project

was initiated as a positively centred activity to gather together women of diverse backgrounds and provide an opportunity for them to dialogue informally. Once a week women from the area met to make mats and slowly they began to develop friendships. The women's mat project evolved into an income generating activity with a peace building component. The mats were sold to Christian Aid for distribution in displaced camps, hospitals, and to people whose homes had been pillaged. Women involved in the peace committee began to support other women from the villages organizing visits, bringing them food, and accompanying them on their journeys into villages. These acts of 'encouragement' served to build relationships between women. Later, strengthened in their sensitivity and commitment to one another, women of the Peace Committee deemed it important to begin a literacy and peace education club for women.

The peace committee from its inception to present has devised and implemented strategies aimed at guaranteeing the security of the population in the Kibimba region. The peace committee succeeded in discouraging the population from supporting rebel activities and were successful in their efforts to promote community collaboration in other concerns over security issues. When communities heard rumours of rebel passages they would warn others in the surrounding area, or together the population would pack up and leave their villages finding safety in neighbouring communes. In this way the population was able to avoid getting caught in the cross fire between military and rebel groups. Furthermore this 'passive resistance' was one way of signaling to rebel groups their lack of support. Once the population stopped accommodating rebel passage way through the area they became targets for angry reprisals and even torture.

Another activity of the peace committee that greatly influenced the realm of security was that peace committee members became advocates for individuals unjustly imprisoned. The testimonies of people from another ethnic group had a significant impact during one's trial. Several individuals were liberated from prison due to the support of peace committee members.

As confidence in the peace committee grew, villagers asked the peace committee members to take care of their animals. Often during rebel infiltrations livestock would be either stolen or killed. Thus the peace committee became responsible for guarding the safety of the livestock of all their members and members of the population. The peace committee subsequently decided to begin a livestock project in order to finance their activities and as a means of supporting its poorer members. They purchased a few cows, a bull, and a small herd of goats. The objective was to distribute at least one female goat to peace committee members which they could breed. Each member had to then sign an agreement to pass on the first and third kid to members of their respective communities. Unfortunately many of the new born 'kids' do not survive due to illness and malnutrition, slowing down this dimension of economic development.

In 1999, the Kibimba Peace Committee put pressure on the church and the government to open a secondary school in Kibimba. The reason for this being that students who graduated from the local primary school were required to attend schools in areas not considered safe. Permission was granted and the secondary school reopened. Today it

has 200 students.

### **Current Activities**

Most of the peace committee's original activities continue to function perhaps with the exception of the theatre group which disbanded due to a lack of means of transportation. Among the current peace committee activities are the bi-monthly, monthly, and emergency meetings where members analyze the security situation, reflect on the future of their localities, and elaborate plans and projects that will promote the economic and social well-being of their communities. The peace committee continues to oversee the women's mat making project and educational program; the primary and secondary school; football practices, matches, and official competitions; and the livestock security and breeding project. The Mennonite Central Committee is currently working with the Kibimba school teachers to train them in conflict resolution skills and to develop with them a curriculum adapted for Burundi.

### **Peace Committee's Current Structure**

Today the Peace Committee of Kibimba consists of 75 persons from 8 collines and has 250 members. Each colline is represented by 6 persons (2 women, 2 Hutus, and 2 Tutsis) as well as commanders and sub-commanders of the military, church leaders, and administrative authorities. The geographical extension of its work covers a 12 Km radius around Kibimba (its organizational centre), in order to assure the security of the region. Ten individuals remain part of the organizing committee. The peace committee is represented by all levels of social and political organization, racial and gender groups.

### **Peace Committee's Work Methodology**

The organizing committee, which is at the core of the Peace Committee, consists of persons from the seven collines and representatives from the hospital, schools, church, and local administration. This committee meets every two weeks to set their monthly agenda and then once a month with the larger committee. Thus, the peace committee's 75 members meet once a month. (The peace committee has an objective for the year 2001 to decentralize. See below.) The members of the small organizing committee serve as liaisons, gathering news in order to set the monthly agenda, and later to distribute information to all peace committee members in their respective communities following the monthly meeting. Organizers walk to the surrounding communities two Saturdays per month in order to gather news and distribute the meeting summaries. In addition to the regular monthly meetings, the organizing committee can also convene emergency meetings depending on the security situation. In both regular and emergency meetings, members analyze security issues and work out plans for preventative action. In these meetings participants develop peace building initiatives, explore and plan development and income generating projects. The peace committee has become the forum by which its members share ideas and reflect on the future of their communities. A report of each meeting is produced and made available to the general public in the participating collines. The work of the Kibimba Peace Committee is carried out consciously and transparently

without ethnic, religious, or gender discrimination. Although the peace committee has been operating for over 7 years they have no office or means of transportation.

## **Impact Indicators**

### **Security**

Since the peace committee began its activities, there has been a marked improvement in the security of the region where the peace committee has an influence. In the past rebel passage

caused havoc as the military would shoot indiscriminately and vengefully not being able to distinguish the 'enemy' from the population. The population and the military became thus divided and the confrontations that ensued brought much destruction. Due to including the military in the peace committee, in the football matches and in other activities they have come to know and recognize community members. The military who once shot suspected criminals can now distinguish strangers from community members. Most notable now too is the decrease in support of rebels. Through such actions as communal meetings to share information, evacuating communities when there is a rebel passage and protecting livestock in a central enclosed area, rebel activities have virtually ceased within the area the peace committee covers. Similarly, recruitment of young boys to fight has been avoided. The youth football program has taken many young people of the streets and channeled their energies more constructively. This has led to a decrease in theft and other criminal activities.

Conflict resolution workshops and projects aimed at bringing community members together to dialogue have not only been successful in re-framing the community by organizing its members around a common interest, but have contributed to the transformation of perceptions of the different people groups. For example, young Hutu men once thought to all be rebels are otherwise perceived. Similarly, perceptions of the military have also changed. As a result of involving the military in meetings addressing security concerns and including them in the alternative dispute resolution training sessions, the Kibimba area is experiencing less military violence against the population. A recent development has been that the military have approached the peace committee asking for assistance in facilitated discussions between themselves, administration, and rebel groups. In other words, the peace committee projects designed to bring the population together have not only been successful but have diminished mutual suspicion replacing it with trust and a desire to collaborate. Relationship building enterprises and reinvesting in equal education have contributed much to the peace and security of the area surrounding Kibimba.

The Kibimba Peace Committee has also been instrumental in facilitating the return of the inhabitants of the displaced camp to their native villages. Many of the individuals and families still living in the displaced camp at Kibimba remain there for lack of resources to rebuild their homes. It is worth mentioning that many of the persons remaining in the displaced camp are widowed women and their children.

## **Community**

There has been a notable improvement in inter-ethnic relationships within the community that is evident from the level of participation in community projects. The hospital is a trusted institution which continues to offer services without ethnic discrimination. The ongoing collaboration between teachers, parents, administrators, and students in the primary school and secondary school is another testimony of the willingness for peaceful cohabitation and community development. The peace football tournaments, the women's mat making project, and the organizing of community actions in response to rebel passages, have all contributed to fostering a renewed trust and willingness to work together in the rebuilding of the community. This collaboration can be traced directly back to the ethnically mixed composition of the peace committee. Integration can also be seen in community celebrations and mixed marriages. The peace committee has been able to bring the community together around shared interests of security, and community, as well as economic development.

## **Economic Activity**

The impact indicators for economic development are probably the least clear at the moment. This is partly due to the limited financial resources that the committee has for economic development projects and also because most of its development projects are in their infancy. The women's mat making project has generated some additional income for the community, and the peace committee is able to bring in some revenue by renting out their bull. These profits serve barely to support their own functioning.

In an indirect way all of the above projects have an economic impact on the community in the sense that rebuilding and strengthening social and political institutions is basic to the economic well being of a community. For example, increased security in the Kibimba region has meant that people can cultivate their fields without fear and could open small boutiques.

## **Vision for the Future**

The Kibimba Peace Committee would like to expand their activities beyond their current realm to include a broader geographical terrain. The objective is to widen the circle of "no support" for rebel groups thereby assuring an increase the security in the region. In order to achieve this expansion the peace committee also has a future objective to decentralize their functioning. The peace committee would like to establish peace committees in the 7 surrounding collines of Kibimba. The organizing committee would then continue to meet regularly in Kibimba to plan and coordinate their activities. This would reduce the cost of holding the large meetings in one central location and it would also facilitate expanding the work of the peace committee. Given that the cost of monthly meetings which include up to 75 persons is quite costly and not time efficient,

the organizing committee hopes to extend their territory and then have their original members facilitate community dialogues in their respective collines. The monthly meetings would then gather certain representatives from each community for information sharing only.

The peace committee is also interested in continuing peace education in order to raise the awareness of the population of the region of the destructive consequences of war, to the fact that ethnicity is largely a construction, to understand and discuss the roots of conflict, and to end violence. The peace committee is currently hoping to be able to organize a three day conflict resolution workshop during which they would share information regarding the Arusha accord, it would in essence be the forum for a conflict resolution training workshop.

Peace committee members hope to bring the military and rebels together for peace talks. The military has already asked the peace committee for help in negotiating with the rebels. The peace committee believes that in order for this initiative to have a chance of being successful, they need to do separate training with each of these groups and to receive more training themselves.

As development projects have already proven to be an important tool for facilitating cooperation and creating shared interests, the peace committee would like to start more projects of this kind. Their livestock project has suffered this year due to the malnutrition of their animals and illness. The peace committee is also searching for land to cultivate. Other hopes for the future include housing reconstruction for the remainder of those living in the displaced camp.

## **Conclusion**

As the above report shows, the Kibimba Peace Committee has demonstrated remarkable initiative, courage, and resourcefulness to start and continue peace and reconciliation work, at times in extremely dangerous and challenging circumstances. Although the peace committee has received funding from The Mennonite Central Committee and Christian Aid, this funding has been limited and most of their initiatives and projects have been realized with no outside funding. The committee has shown positive organizational development and represents today a firmly established and respected community structure with a vision for the future. In order to increase the scope and impact of its activities, the peace committee is in need of additional funding.

