

Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI)

April 2017 Report

George Mason University

School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Center for Peacemaking Practice

Genocide Prevention Program



Introduction

The year 2017 started with many ambitions from the genocide prevention program and our partner the Burundi Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Network. The main focus of our activities for this year was to position the Network in a way that could promote their independence, as well as giving the Genocide Prevention Program's Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) a permanent footing in Burundi. One objective we set was to recruit and fund a permanent technical secretariat for the Network, who would monitor activities of the Network and give suggestions on the ways the Network could grow and expand, while strengthening its internal capacities.



One of the major indicators of the growth and expansion of the Network's capacities was a legal agreement of the Network signed with the Burundi Ministry of the Interior. The Network is now an officially recognized association

which can operate legally in Burundi. The agreement required a lot of efforts, and the participation of many actors, including members of the Network in Burundi. After the Network finished editing the statutes and presented all the requirements for the agreement, serious conversations have since taken place with the Ministry of Interior to grant the Network official non-profit status. It seems that we are going in the right direction and that we may be granted the official agreement soon, despite the fact it is very hard for nonprofit organizations and associations to be permitted to function these days in Burundi. The administration is amenable

because they still recognize the peace and nonviolence activities that we have been conducting in Gitega, Bujumbura, Ngozi, Karusi and Bururi are inclusive in nature, and not explicitly partisan. More importantly, the Ministry of Interior has been granting permission for us to gather people, officials, and government administrators during our events. Governors and other leaders have been attending and giving speeches to open or close our peace activities during the past three years. This is important because it publically commits local leaders to the position of promoting peace and non-violence, which can be a crucial factor for preventing local people from responding to incitements of violence.

The Bururi Event on February 16, 2017

The main activity took place in Bururi province, with carefully chosen participants to reach out a broader community and attract more people from different sectors, political orientations, backgrounds and ethnic groups. First, the group from the Bujumbura peace and nonviolence team sent representatives to join the Bururi team, as an initiative to coordinate activities and help young high school children learn how to organize such activities. The team of Bujumbura is mainly made of university students and university staff, while the group of Bururi is mainly made of high school students and some high school teachers.

In Bururi three main activities were planned, two games (basketball and volleyball), peace and non-violence training questions and answer with prizes for winners, and a social gathering which was the time for all the participant to share dinner.



Before the beginning of the games, the team from Bujumbura visited the Martyrs of Brotherhood (Les martyrs de la fraternite) memorial. The brothers of martyrs were young seminary students who were

killed during the war in 1997 when they refused to separate themselves into ethnic groups, when rebels wanted to kill Tutsi students. The team members wanted to see the pictures of those martyrs, and were greatly impacted by that visit when they learned about what happen. Their conclusion was that we need more work to raise awareness of the importance of peace and nonviolence among all the categories of Burundian people.



Basketball and Volleyball Games

Two games took place, one with men and one with women. The decision to hold more women's games was made after we realized that we favor males in organizing competitions and games. The first game opposing young male volleyball players from Bururi took place at the same time as a game with high female school students. The selection of the four teams (two in Basketball and two in volleyball) was done to increase participation. This may be the reason why the event was the most attended since we started activities in Bururi province.



Males and females, high school children, high school teachers, administrative staff, business people, and local officials all were in attendance. The playground was so full that, at some points, it was quite difficult to move around the crowds.

Question and Answers Moment



Second, the question and answer time was so amazing that all the categories of participants had their time to answer.



In the beginning, young children from elementary school were answering easy question on general knowledge about peace and nonviolent behavior. The prizes were essentially pens, copy books and umbrellas. The second group made of high school students and other non-educated people from the area had also their turns to answer to questions, more difficult and their got various prizes as well such as soaps, umbrellas, buckets

and others. This was the longest because the majority of participants were high school children. The third and last group was made of very complex questions on peace and nonviolence and those questions were asked to educators. In addition to giving the right response, the educator was required to explain to the youth the importance and relevance of peace and nonviolence in such question. The also gave advice to their students on best behavior and attitudes they should have.

Social Gathering



Third, we had social gathering to discuss in general how the event went and the way forward. As reflected in the Burundian culture, participants to the games, the question and answers as well as

the audience were invited to share meal and drink from a nearby restaurant. This practice helped the school children to open their eyes and see that there are other options than violence. They learned that even if it may be difficult to go through some tough times, it is possible to make it and have a better life.



One of the presenter, Sixte Vigny Nimuraba had a chance to share his testimony on why he decided to take the path of peace and nonviolence and how he was able to be successful in his

studies even if some situations were not easy for him. Young school children expressed how happy they were in having such opportunity to exchange on an unusual topic “Nonviolence” and pledged to do their best to be peace and nonviolence advocates in their communities. Finally all participants were pleased that the event has taken place in their province (Bururi) at least three times and that it keeps seeing the number of participants growing.

Successes of the project

There are four major successes that the project was able to achieve:

1. The Network expanded and is now covering five provinces: Bururi, Bujumbura, Gitega, Karusi and Ngozi.
2. Each of the provinces is able to organize and conduct events and invite participants and leaders on its own.
3. Local non-profit organizations and associations are increasingly joining our efforts and are demanding to get included whenever we organize events.
4. The network has a technical secretariat who is helping and advising members on improvements that needs to be done.
5. The association members have decided to contribute funds, from their own money, in order to finance the network operations. Given the poverty of Burundi, this is quite remarkable.
6. The embassy of the United States of America in Burundi is planning to attend our events and learn more about the work we do. Possibly, this can result in potential funding.
7. The network is applying for a grant that aim at helping refugees’ reintegration in Burundi. This application will soon be submitted to the U.S. Embassy Julia’s Taft Fund. The application must not be over \$25,000.

8. Finally, we can say that we have been able to secure trust from the communities to organize activities related to peace and nonviolence without any threat or wrong perception by leaders.

Challenges of the Project

Some challenges still persist despite our efforts to succeed in achieving our goals such as:

1. The high level of poverty and lack of jobs which pushes some Burundian people to seek for unsafe ways of gaining their lives. This poverty level is also a barrier that blocks members from contributing enough to be totally independent when organizing activities in their communities.
2. There are still a need of conducting more events and getting more people involved because we are covering only six provinces out of heighten.

Status of the Project and Challenges

After the two years of creation and implementation, the project is now functioning well. The concept of peace and nonviolence is no longer new; they are at the point where more associations and organizations wants to join to broaden the impact within communities. Private radio broadcastings are also in line with our goals and they support us whenever we want to advertise our activities. People who attended our events, those who participated to our games and competition keep asking when a similar gathering may be taking place so that they can invite more friends. We can now organize activities wherever we want because we are known for peace and nonviolence. Interestingly, for the moment, there are 334 likes to our facebook page, which is a major achievement.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Anonymous Family Foundation for the generous support it has been providing to George Mason University the past two years. I thank also our partner, Burundi Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Network for the efforts made, the compassion and care for the Burundian people. It was a privilege to have you all as partners and we hope we continue to work together for peace and nonviolence in Burundi and around the world.

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