

### THE 'BUILDING BRIDGES PROJECT' UNITING DIVIDED COMMUNITIES THROUGH TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES' PEACE-BUILDING EFFORTS IN ZIMBABWE

*From the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results at the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)*



Case Study  
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#### SYNOPSIS

Many African communities are divided by disagreement and competition over scarce resources and these conflicts and divisions generate political violence rather than negotiated settlements. African countries such as Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe have experienced conflicts with various degrees of intensity. These conflicts are inimical to development and achievement of desired development results. The Management for Development Framework requires the use of relevant information for achieving development results.

The objective of the case study is to show that peace-building through conflict transformation improves the skills and capacities of traditional authorities working in customary justice systems. The study draws from the Zimbabwe experience.

**The key findings** are that customary authorities attested to the enhancement of their conflict analysis, negotiation, mediation and resolution skills. They compared the approaches taught to those used in the formal judicial system and judged the formal justice system to be adversarial. The communities further benefitted from friendly competitive interaction through sports, music and other recreational activities, creating bases for future co-operation of individuals and communities.

**The key lessons** learned indicate that institutions and activities for conflict transformation and peace-building enhance leadership, negotiation and judicial skills that benefit individuals and their societies. Gender relations were also enhanced through co-operation and efforts by both men and women to elect women as community leaders.

It also emerged that state and local authorities can partner with community-based organisations and non-governmental organisations to utilise conflict transformation and peace-building initiatives in divided communities. This is intended to unite communities for their social and economic benefits as well as help achieve desired development results in Africa by enhancing the social, economic and political inclusion of women.

**The main recommendation:** Government with support of development partners should support development of capacity around conflict transformation and peace-building. This is critical in insulating communities from violence and building up individual, community, social, economic and political capital for sustainable development.

## 1. Introduction

According to Lederach (2003:14), conflict transformation as a process of envisioning and responding to the ebb and flow of social conflict, is an adequate way to respond to real life problems in human relationships. It offers opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interactions and social structures. Thus, Lederach (ibid) suggests that conflict transformation must address the underlying causes of conflict which normally comprise misunderstandings in attitudes, perceptions, orientations and responses. To transform conflict, common goals between all the parties to the conflict need to be identified and embraced. This process can be facilitated by a mediator who is acceptable to the conflicting parties and who can facilitate and sustain communication between the parties, enhancing the development of trust between them (ibid).

According to Miall (2004:4) conflict transformation is a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict. Thus, conflict transformation is a process that analyses different factors that promote peace-building and those that ameliorate conflicts, from the period prior to the outbreak of conflict to the period when peace has been restored. Conflict transformation must, envision, respect, and harness the human and cultural resources in a given setting, for use in validating and building on people's skills and resources within their environment (Lederach 1995).

Following Lederach's (1995) view, conflict transformation seeks to establish the cause of the conflict so that workable solutions can be developed to facilitate a transition to peace. Conflict transformation utilises factors that enable parties in conflict to establish common ground rather than focusing on their differences. Conflict transformation cannot be rushed and must enable parties to find common ground as a

basis for moving forward and developing sustainable solutions to the issues that generated conflict between them. This understanding is one that informs this publication.

According to Galtung (1996) peace-building is the process of creating self-supporting structures that remove causes of wars and conflicts and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur. Galtung also argues that conflict resolution mechanisms should be built into the structures and remain present as a reservoir for the system to draw upon in the same way that a healthy body generates and develops antibodies and does not need the administration of medicine. Thus peace-building is a continuous process, necessitating the transformation and democratisation of the state and its components, especially those concerned with law and order maintenance to ensure that they are fair, honest, unbiased, effective and efficient.

### 1.1 Background

Socio-economic development is an important tool for peace building processes. Nyerere (1997) explained clearly how economic backwardness and competition for scarce resources in Burundi and Rwanda exacerbated political conflicts. However, for conflict transformation and peace-building to be successful there must be significant commitment from the communities affected by conflict. They must be willing and committed to transforming the conflict so that they can co-exist peacefully. It is therefore incumbent on the members of the communities that are affected by the conflict to develop and implement solutions to the problems such as violence, hatred, suspicion and negativity that creates a climate of conflict.

The affected communities need to be willing to transform the conflict and re-instate cordial and viable relations within their communities. If the solutions to the conflict are perceived to have been crafted from outside and foisted upon the communities in conflict, the conflict is likely to persist. Thus, peace-building also requires that the underlying causes of conflicts are addressed

and all the people and groups with a stake in building and sustaining peace in their communities have to be directly involved in peace-building. In addition, the peace that is built must be sustainable and the community and the society's members must be capable of preventing further outbreaks of violence and conflict. While external facilitation may be necessary to begin the peace-building processes, those who are affected by the conflict must drive the process and ensure that peace is sustained and turned into dividends for community members.

### 1.2 Literature review

Crenshaw et al (1994) observe that the use of violence or threat of violence as a strategy of coercion to cause fear and political intimidation, is a feature of inter and intra state conflicts in post-colonial Africa. Forest and Giroux (2011) indicate that terrorism tactics are utilised to crack down on opposition politicians and activists in many African countries. Meredith (2005) writing on Zimbabwe, points out that state-sponsored terrorism in colonial Zimbabwe and harassment of opposition politicians in post-independence Zimbabwe have been used to keep political opponents in a state of fear, demotivating them from opposing the ruling regimes. Thus, groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army, an apocalyptic Christian group, since 1987 to the early twentieth century in Uganda, used violence and threats of violence to cow the civilian population and challenge the government. The National Resistance Movement (RENAMO) in Mozambique and Al-Shabaab in Somalia and other groups have utilised violence to intimidate governments and citizens to do their bidding.

Forrest and Giroux (2011) further noted that in Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front induced fear and submission in the population by abducting children and youth and mobilising them to abduct and cut off the limbs of civilians, thereby instilling terror and increasing the number of amputees in Sierra Leone.

In Nigeria, the Niger Delta experienced environmental pollution from oil exploitation. The government neglected its duty to regulate and enforce sustainable and environmentally - friendly oil exploration and exploitation, resulting in the pollution of the Niger Delta. Ibaba (2008), describes how the continuing poverty of the native peoples of the Niger Delta, despite the discovery and exploitation of oil reserves in their area, resulted in the emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) which eventually adopted terrorist methods to protest the exploitation of oil that does not benefit the people, especially the peoples in the Niger Delta. Sampson and Onuoha (2008), describe the Nigerian government's attempts to eradicate terrorism by legislating anti-terrorism laws. Sampson and Onuoha also point out that the legislation against terrorism and the international attention given to the problem was only passed as a result of the attempt to bomb a Unites States airliner.

In many parts of Africa, groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, RENAMO in Mozambique, MEND in Nigeria, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda and Al Shabaab in Somalia, all utilise violence and terror tactics to gain attention and address what they perceive to be inequalities and unfair treatment of their groups in their own countries. Thus, intra-country violence which can progress into terrorism and violence needs to be addressed. If incipient conflicts are ignored despite evidence of violence between social and political groups, they can escalate into fully fledged violence, terrorism and protracted civil wars that draw in more participants within the countries in which the dissatisfied groups operate and possibly, outside those countries as well.

## 2. Methodology

The methodologies used to collect data for the case study comprised a series of field visits to Murehwa and Hurungwe (2014-2016) where interviews with a variety of community members comprising village heads, male and female elders,

political activists, women's groups, young men and women were conducted. In addition, observations were undertaken during community events such as sporting events, peace festivals and meetings. All these occasions provided data on the state of relations between various social, economic and political groups in Murehwa and Hurungwe.

### 3. Case study: 'Building Bridges project'

#### 3.1 Case study context

Envision Women's Trust (EWT) works with traditional leaders, local headmen, community based representatives and stakeholders to enhance peace in the communities. In Zimbabwe, rural communities in Murehwa and Hurungwe went into conflict in the wake of the contested 2008 elections that resulted in a negotiated government of national unity in 2008. Violence in rural areas which had hitherto been the bases for Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) support had broken out, resulting in over 107 murders, 137 abductions, 913 assault cases, 19 cases of disappearances and 629 of displacements and 2,532 violations of freedom of expression and association (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum, 2008:2). This was the context within which EWT, a women's non-governmental organisation, implemented a conflict transformation and peace-building project in Murehwa and Mutoko, both rural areas which had experienced political violence.

The Chiefs and/or Traditional leaders are the first line institutions that handle non-criminal cases such as domestic and land disputes, administer justice and prevent violence in rural communities. Given this first line status of Chief's courts in conflict resolution at community level, EWT targeted the Chiefs and the traditional village heads in its peace building initiatives in 2014-2016. The program works through peace committees, established by the communities and headed by the local headmen. The committees

report to the chiefs on activities implemented in communities.

The participation of youth and women is a key component of the "building bridges" activities. When conflict and violence occur, they affect men, women, youth and children differently. Women and the girl child are particularly vulnerable to sexual and other assault during conflicts. Young men are usually the perpetrators of violence, sometimes at the instigation of older people, both male and female. EWT's program was engendered to meet the needs of all the vulnerable groups in the community. Stakeholder participation was and remains an important element in the "building bridges" initiative and enhances ownership and responsibility of communities for their programs and activities.

#### 3.2 Activities Implemented in Hurungwe and Murehwa Districts

##### 3.2.1 Conflict Transformation Training

Four conflict transformation workshops for 164 village heads were conducted in Hurungwe and Murehwa. These workshops built the capacities of village heads, chiefs and other traditional leaders in conflict resolution skills and knowledge including definitions and causes of conflict, conflict analysis, mediation and negotiation. This augmented the capacities of traditional leaders in handling disputes and cases of violence at the traditional village courts.

##### 3.2.2 Training of Peace Committee Members

As a result of violence directed specifically against women, EWT facilitated the establishment of female-led peace committees in each of the Murehwa and Hurungwe districts to build the capacities of the members of the community to prevent violence. Since the peace committees are an important interface between EWT and the community, the peace committee members needed good leadership, communication and

conflict transformation skills. Accordingly, training on human and women rights and gender issues were undertaken. Thirty two peace committee members were trained.

Peace committee members were also involved in the continuous monitoring and evaluation processes in Murehwa and Hurungwe. Members of the peace committees conduct focus group discussions, interviews and distribute questionnaires during data collection from beneficiaries to assess the effectiveness and impact of the conflict transformation and peace-building project.

Through the peace committees, community members were availed training and education on conflict prevention and positive community relations whilst developing indicators to monitor the success of these peace-building initiatives.

### **3.2.3. Peace Festivals in Hurungwe District and Mbare, Harare.**

The peace committees organised community peace initiatives such as the Annual Peace Festival/Gala and identified stakeholders who could co-operate with them in peace building. Under the “Building Bridges” project EWT and partners held two Peace Festivals: one in Hurungwe District for the communities in Hurungwe and a joint festival in Mbare Inner City Suburb for Mbare, Hurungwe and Murehwa partners participating in the EWT initiatives. EWT organised mini-bus transport for Murehwa and Hurungwe participants to travel to Mbare for the joint festival that was held in Mbare. The aim of the peace festivals was to avail members of these communities some opportunities to celebrate peace within and outside their communities and facilitate positive community relations between their communities. The participants discussed their wards’ peace-building activities, shared experiences and lessons learned. They also discussed the sanitary wear project in which they are all involved. During the festivals, communities engage in song and dance and sporting activities

and invite prominent guests and community leaders to witness their festivals.

In 2014 over 500 community members attended the peace festival in Hurungwe while 350 participated in the festival held in Mbare, Harare. A soccer tournament was conducted for men while women engaged in a netball tournament in Mbare. Edward Sadomba, a prominent soccer player, was the guest of honour and presented cash prizes worth US\$300 to the top three male and female teams.

## **4. Outcomes**

### **4.1 Confidence in interaction with the state justice system**

Village heads and other community leaders are now confidently dealing with their counterparts in the state justice system. They openly described how they actually mediate and attempt to reconcile their training on the use of conflict tools from EWT’s training and how appropriate they are in dealing with conflict in their villages. They judged their training to be useful since it involves reconciling and mediating between the litigants to enable them to maintain relationships with each other in the community while in the state system there are only winners and losers when judgements are made, resulting in resentment and continuing hostility between litigants.

### **4.2 Increased respect for women and their contributions to decision-making**

Responses and feedback from the communities highlight changes that have occurred around respect of women’s contribution in decision-making processes as well as equal treatment by their male counter parts.

#### **Success story: Election of the first female councillor in Ward 27, Murehwa.**

The Murehwa community are proud because they elected the first woman councillor in Ward 27, Murehwa. In particular, the traditional leaders in Murehwa mention their pioneering

role in electing the first woman councillor in their ward.

**Success story: Election of the first female councillor in Ward 27, Murehwa.**

*The community mobilised all people so that we could elect a woman as councillor in Ward 27. This shows how much progress we have made as a community. We now recognise what a difference women can make in our council discussions. Our community is moving ahead very quickly and we have respect for women's capabilities. (Traditional Leader, Murehwa.)*

The female councillor received training through EWT on women's rights, gender and leadership issues, peace-building and social integration. She also received support from men and women in Ward 27, resulting in her election.

**Testimony from the first woman councillor elected in Ward 27, Murehwa.**

*Envision Women's Trust availed me training in leadership, gender, women's rights, leadership, peace-building and development. That training empowered me to run successfully for the position of councillor. I never would have considered standing for election as councillor if EWT had not exposed me to that training. Now, men in our community appreciate that women can make positive contributions to peace-building and development in Murehwa.*

(First female councillor, Ward 27, Murehwa.)

**4.3 Wide acceptance of the training on conflict transformation and peace-building**

There is wide acceptance of the EWT and its peace-building work by community leaders, participants and communities involved in EWT initiatives.

Community leaders who have worked with the EWT indicated that their initial perceptions about partnering with a women's group had been transformed through their working relationship

with EWT in conflict transformation and peace-building.

**4.4 Increased confidence by communities in planning and executing peace programs**

In Hurungwe, community members highlighted that because of the time EWT has spent in the district and its facilitation of the implementation of peace-building and development work, especially the way EWT insists that communities take charge of their businesses, gained confidence in planning and executing their peace programs.

**4.5 Peace maintained despite violent bye-election in neighbouring ward**

Peace was maintained in Ward 27 in Hurungwe where EWT had initiated and developed peace-building work despite an acrimonious bye-election characterised by electoral violence in a neighbouring ward in 2015.

**5. Conclusion and lessons learned**

Women's disempowerment, politically-inspired hostilities and violence can be addressed through MfDR initiatives based on the following successes registered through conflict transformation and peace-building initiatives:

Conflict transformation, peace building and a mixture of skills and capacity building, recreation and community interaction can be utilised for community building and enhancing social cohesion.

Peace-building and conflict transformation initiatives act as catalysts for gender-sensitive social transformation as indicated by the election of the first female councillor in a rural ward in Murehwa.

Conflict transformation and peace-building can present opportunities to bring state and traditional/customary justice systems closer to each other, facilitating fair and acceptable justice

delivery to poor rural communities, averting future conflicts and facilitating MfDR.

## 6. Recommendations

**6.1** There is a need to develop a database on successful conflict transformation and peace-building initiatives in Africa. Publicise, replicate and use them for learning so that future conflicts can be averted or minimised within the framework of MfDR.

**6.2** Undertake advocacy on conflict transformation that is based on skills acquisition, individual and community empowerment for desired development results.

**6.3** Develop and implement conflict transformation and peace-building through involving a diversity of people old and young, male and female, traditional and modern actors, diversifying and democratising benefits and costs of social development.

**6.4** Invest in and support conflict transformation and peace-building as a means of insulating communities from violence and building up individual, community, social, economic and political capital for sustainable development.

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