GREWER: A Mechanism for Peace-Building in Zimbabwe

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SYNOPSIS

Election outcomes present threats to peace in Africa, as seen in recent years in Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Many African communities are divided by disagreement and competition over power, elections, and control over material resources. The resulting conflicts and divisions generate political violence unless there are mechanisms for negotiation and brokering outcomes. Many of these conflicts have gender dimensions.

Key findings: This case study shows that the Gender Responsive, Early Warning, Early Response (GREWER) mechanism can proactively prevent community conflicts, particularly those related to elections. By including a raft of authorities that command respect from communities, gendered conflicts are addressed. The GREWER project provided education and training and space for state functionaries in isolated, rural areas to collectively monitor threats to citizens' security.

Main lessons: Peace committees are effective in preventing, mitigating, or monitoring violence, as indicated by the reduction of violence in rural Murehwa and Hurungwe districts in Zimbabwe. Multi-stakeholder participation, preventive actions, and gender mainstreaming were important.

Key recommendations: There is need to encourage state and non-state actors to invest in mechanisms such as GREWER in rural and other isolated and resource-poor communities. These mechanisms are relatively inexpensive at bringing together stakeholders (traditional leaders, police, women groups, religious leaders, and so on) to enhance the safety and security of isolated communities. Equipping these actors with the required skills in conflict prevention and management at community level is equally important.

Introduction

Concerns about peace and security have dominated discourse at the United Nations, African Union, and other regional and continental organizations due to the proliferation and persistence of conflicts in Africa and elsewhere.

Focusing on the future, Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals is to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." However, election-related conflicts in countries such as Kenya, South Africa, and

Zimbabwe indicate the need for scaled-up efforts to provide sustained human security.

This case study discusses the experience of the Envision Women's Trust (EWT) in developing and implementing a GREWER mechanism to avert violence in Murehwa and Hurungwe in Zimbabwe.

The GREWER project brings together traditional chiefs (the custodians of the land), police and other civil service departments, religious leaders, and members of the community to form a mechanism that engages players on issues that could generate violence at community level before or after elections or other potential conflict circumstances.

Gender-related electoral violence in some African settings

A survey of literature on gender-related electoral violence in East and Southern Africa shows that men, women, and children are vulnerable to specific forms of election-related violence. UNICEF (2010) observed that East and Southern Africa experienced election-related civil unrest, ethnic tension, and post-election violence in Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Sexual violence such as rape was rampant in Kenya in 2007, when more than 1,000 people were killed. In Uganda, where the Lord's Resistance Army was active, UNICEF noted that children were abducted and forced to live with the Lord's Resistance Army, with boys forced to fight and girls subjected to domestic and sexual slavery.

According to Blythe (2015), in Nigeria, during the lead-up to the election in 2015, female politicians, wives, and families of male political candidates for election were subjected to hate speech, and targeted for physical violence and sexual abuse. In Nigeria in 2015, the National Democratic Institute, with the Transitional Monitoring Group, found that hate speech, with acts of gender-based violence such as threats of divorce, sexual violence, blackmail, and destruction of property, had discouraged women from participating in the elections as candidates, voters, and polling agents.

Kellow (2010) described the problems of a female Sierra Leone candidate for chieftaincy. Elizabeth Torto was barred by an all-male traditional society from standing in that election. She received death threats and her supporters were physically attacked. She was eventually evacuated to Freetown by a United Nations helicopter under a hail of stones.

Reeler (2011) reported that a survey of electoral violence by the Research and Advocacy Unit in 2011 established that 62 percent of women suffered electoral violence in Zimbabwe after the election run-off in 2008. About 3 percent of women surveyed admitted experiences of "political rape" to punish them for supporting or voting for the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change.

In 2006, 6 percent of women in the Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum and 8 percent of the National Constitutional Assembly women members said they had been subjected to politically motivated rape (NCA 2010).

The "Women of Zimbabwe Arise", a nongovernmental organization, reported that during the period from 2000 up to 2007, 23 percent of their members had received degrading and humiliating treatment by being stripped of their underwear in custody (WOZA 2008).

According to the International Peace Institute (2012), early warning and conflict prevention initiatives benefit from the involvement of the state, civil society, youth, and women in Africa. Early-warning and gender-responsive conflict prevention initiatives also help address the underlying causes of conflicts.

Odendaal and Olivier (2008) noted that in Ghana, politicized chieftaincy disputes polarized communities in northern Ghana before the elections in 2004. However, timely mediation and dialogue stabilized matters.

Issacharoff (2010), writing on Ghana, noted that in 2008 the chiefs, mostly men, played a critical role as they led District Peace Advisory Councils to broker peaceful elections after intractable chieftaincy disputes threatened the elections.

Zihlangu (2012) observed that a deadlock before the parliamentary elections in Lesotho in 2012 was diffused by the mediation of local churches, which ensured that most parties signed a pledge to conduct themselves according to the law and accept the outcome of the election.

In Senegal in 2012, the Women's Platform for Peaceful Elections set up a situation room to respond to electoral problems and avert crises that threatened the elections.

GREWER in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe in 2008, violence in rural areas that had been bases of support for the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front broke out, resulting in over 107 murders, 137 abductions, 913 assault cases, 19 disappearances, 629 displacements, and 2,532 violations of freedom of expression and association (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum 2008: 2). These atrocities informed the EWT work and resulted in the GREWER project mechanism in rural Murehwa and Hurungwe districts in Zimbabwe. In the wake of the 2008 election with its contested outcome, a Government of National Unity was formed to create an environment in which peace could be restored.

The Church and Civil Society Forum of Zimbabwe, in 2012, called for the creation of an early-warning, early-response system to increase the capacity of its stakeholders to respond to and prevent the emergence or escalation of violent conflict in Zimbabwe. However, many early warning systems lack a gender component and they seem oblivious to the gendered trends in violation of men and women, depending on their age, class, and other attributes.

Murehwa and Hurungwe are predominantly rural districts in the Mashonaland East and Mashonaland West provinces of Zimbabwe. After the Government of National Unity was formed in 2008, EWT implemented conflict transformation and peace-building initiatives in Murehwa and Hurungwe where violence had been experienced in the aftermath of the 2008 election.

After the relatively peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections in 2013, EWT scaled up its intervention by implementing a GREWER system in Murehwa and Hurungwe to preempt any recurrence of violence. This initiative was in response to a recommendation by the United Nations Security Council Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in 2011, which urged local organizations in Africa to use early-warning tools to prevent outbreaks of violence during elections, including those related to gender. This was in recognition of the fact that elections tend to spark violence that affects population groups such as youth, women, men, and people with disabilities in specific ways.

Methodology of GREWER

EWT adopted some of the tools in peace-building and reuniting divided societies, learning from experiences in peace-building in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zimbabwe to develop GREWER in rural Murehwa and Hurungwe districts. It had the following objectives:

- Build the resilience of communities in anticipating and averting violence.

- Build the capacities of community members and leadership to take more proactive roles in preventing outbreaks of violence.

- Empower stakeholders to quickly respond to and resolve conflicts when they occur.

- Involve women in constructing the mechanism.

To generate data based on experiences of villagers in the communities, EWT and communities organized five consultative meetings with the Zimbabwe Republic Police, traditional chiefs, and community representatives—males and females—and other key stakeholders in the health, education, and other sectors. The training workshops for setting and monitoring the functioning of the GREWER systems were conducted in the districts.

Among the key stakeholders attending the meetings were district administrators; officers of the Zimbabwe Republic Police from key units such as Victim Friendly Units, Public Relations Units, and Peace Units; traditional leaders; church leaders; school heads; and representatives of the

Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Development.

Outcomes and overall assessment from GREWER

EWT found positive responses to the project, with all the stakeholders at the workshops acknowledging the importance of anticipating sources and causes of conflict and preventing conflict among community members and institutions before they developed into fully fledged violence. The Zimbabwe Republic Police had been struggling to mobilize community leadership to meet and discuss how to avert all forms of violence at community level. But the leaders had often lacked transport, equipment, continuing education, and training in their rural outposts. Through this project, the Zimbabwe Republic Police can now meet stakeholders and secure information on the events that might generate tension, conflict, and violence in the Murehwa and Hurungwe project communities.

The workshops and follow-up activities with EWT in Murehwa and Hurungwe enabled these communities to collectively monitor trends and other signals and events that could precipitate outbreaks of violence. This enabled the traditional authorities, police, and other stakeholders in government departments to respond quickly to acquire information on issues that cause disquiet. This information enables the law and other functionaries—traditional and modern—to prevent violence in rural and isolated areas.

The traditional leaders in Murehwa and Hurungwe were particularly supportive of the project because it equipped them with skills and knowledge to avert conflict and violence at community level. The traditional leaders pointed out that they no longer felt isolated since they too, like other workers paid by the state, had counterparts and colleagues with whom they could share experiences on difficult issues such as those related to violence in their communities.

Through meetings between traditional leaders in Murehwa and Hurungwe, there were exchanges of advice on cases relating to domestic violence, politically motivated violence, livestock theft, and other issues affecting their work in their communities.

The leaders were particularly enthused about building up a community of peers with whom they could meet periodically through the project, to exchange experiences through training. (The long distances, poor roads, and lack of resources normally prevented them from meeting as peers and discussing issues of delivering justice in their communities.)

Traditional leaders also informed EWT that in their communities they were now able to use the conflict prevention and handling tools acquired through their training to deal with conflicts before they escalated into overt violence in their villages. A village head in Murehwa explained the difference between ruling/judging and mediating, pointing out that he now mediates and knows when to rule and/or pass judgement during his court sessions. In his view, this flexibility enables litigants to maintain cordial relationships even when their cases have not produced the outcomes they might have desired.

The chief in Hurungwe was proud of the reduction in domestic violence cases, theft, public violence, and politically motivated violence that were brought to his court for trial. He attributed this reduction to the structures set up through the peace committees in the community and the GREWER mechanism. These two systems provide timely warning of possible conflicts and mitigate those conflicts that do take place.

One male respondent in Hurungwe pointed out that the villagers from his neighborhood refused to go to a neighboring ward to intimidate members of the opposition before a constituency by-election in 2015. The respondent indicated that in the past, he would have joined in.

Females in Murehwa and Hurungwe districts indicated that the GREWER mechanism functions as a peer-influence mechanism that restrains the wayward, advises, and rightly influences people for the good of the community. Women observed that young men were more likely to be involved in political and public violence while women were more likely to be victims of gender violence. However, women noted that young, politically active women were more likely to be verbally violent against political opponents.

Overall, there is respect for and acknowledgement of the effectiveness and impact of the peace committees and the GREWER mechanism in Murehwa and Hurungwe districts. Community members now turn to peace committees to handle issues including those not related to conflict. The chief in Murehwa acknowledged the efficacy of peace committees in resolving conflicts before they degenerate into violence.

The government functionaries and traditional leaders want the project to be scaled up to involve more areas in their provinces, though EWT's limited funding largely forestalls this. EWT has funded most of the activities and is not yet able to expand the scope and reach of the project.

Conclusions and recommendations

Drawing from the findings of the GREWER project in Murehwa and Hurungwe districts, the following conclusions and recommendations have been deduced.

The GREWER and peace committees are effective because they bring together health, education, women's affairs, law enforcement, church, and traditional leaders for dialogue about means of eradicating or reducing violence in their communities. Domestic violence, violence against children in the school and family, and violence against women in the community and family are averted or reduced.

The GREWER project has brought together a diversity of state functionaries and enabled them to address diverse forms of violence and to protect all members of their communities from violence perpetrated by parents, state functionaries, and individuals in their communities.

There is need to document and develop a database and share case studies and experiences on gender-responsive early warning systems in Africa for learning and enhancing peace in African communities.

Organizations such as EWT need to continue advocating and undertaking initiatives for enhancing community cohesion, safety, and peace enhancement through timely responses to potential conflicts.

It is important to encourage state and non-state actors to invest in mechanisms such as GREWER in rural and other isolated and resource-poor communities. These mechanisms are relatively inexpensive and effective at bringing together a diversity of state and other functionaries to enhance the safety and security of isolated communities.

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Acknowledgments