

The April meeting of the Washington Network on Children in Armed Conflict focused on issues of working with youth at leadership level and the challenges that the youth face in their activities.

The presenters shared their experiences on youth involvement in post conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction. Examples were given from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Nepal.

The discussion was framed by Saji Perlis, a founding member and the Executive Director of the Center for Peace Building International and the coordinator of the Peace building and development at American University and Oscar Bloh, Liberia country director for Search For

## Discussion Points

### Some challenges

- the complex concept of youth: it is not homogenous
- issue of location: Urban youth Vs. Rural youth and their differing needs
- negative stigma/stereotyping: young people are violent
- disproportional benefits; those involved in the conflict seem to benefit more from the peace dividend (Example: DDRR)
- intergenerational tension:
  - In post conflict situations, young people tend to take a leadership role
  - Loss of respect for adults becomes widespread
  - There is a general consensus that young people play a role in conflicts and therefore, they should play a role in reconstruction too. For this and other reasons, young people tend to display a culture of entitlement; the DDRR process enforces these entitlements.

### DDRR challenges

- Most DDRR are time bound and one size fit all; lack of broad based programs
- It is seen as a linear process
- No clear communication strategy
- Process raises high expectation but program fails to meet the expectation
- No special programming for girls

### Liberian Example

FLY coordinates the youth activities and leadership in the country. During the strategic planning, it was found that

- FLY was too politicized,
- the members were divided along political lines
- was used as a political tool to mobilize and manipulate youth
- youth were vulnerable

SFCG used common ground approach to transcend the issues. It was found necessary to move from political based approach to common ground approach. Although depoliticization was important, the youth did not have people to help them to build their capacity in the process.

Although it is supervised by the Minister of Youth and Sport, by sustaining its advocacy role, it could become independent.

The strategic planning also led to the discovery that FLY was exclusively made up of elites; it was not an all encompassing organization.

### Youth Leadership

Currently there is a growing interest in youth leadership programs; what do people say about leadership?

The definition of leadership in conflict settings is not always clear

Leadership ladder: where young people come out the strongest depends on programs that target youth. The more programs that address issues of young people the more leadership role the youth take.

### Nepalese Example

What impacts do youth led organizations have?

In 2006, 1400 youth were brought from all over Nepal to address the issue of transition in Nepal. The goal was for these youth to come up with a collective idea to present to the parliament. The youth then targeted women politicians to get their message across.

As a result of youth led activities, the youth interest in political participation increased. Most run for offices and 40 of those elected to parliament were 25 years old. These social forums organized by youth led organizations led to the increasing awareness of the role of youth, their leverage and what is really at stake.

### Cambodian Example

A youth movement focusing on history writing in Cambodia: this movement is trying to address the need for writing and teaching the history of Cambodia.

As young people do not know the history of their country; the movement focused on educating them on individual level. By encouraging them to ask parents and other adults about what happened.

An organization trained the youth on how to carry on an intergenerational dialogue. The youth began the intergenerational dialogue first with family members and as they built their confidence, and developed more skills, they were encouraged to carry on the project with other adults.

Some of the challenges included:

In the beginning parents were reluctant to share stories because of fear. They were afraid of what the youth will do with the information.

### Sir Lankan Example

A group of young girls (17 year olds) were trained on the UN's Millennium Development Goals; especially on health and education. They then planned to work with local slums. They discovered the vision problem that the slum dwellers had and decided to address that particular problem.

In order to achieve this, they spoke to their parents and other professionals and convinced the adults to contribute to the solution. The young girls were successful in opening a health clinic that provided free eye exams and free eyeglasses to the needy.

This shows how if given the space, young people can make a difference. They are capable of bringing about positive change. Given the necessary skills training, they can be more effective in addressing issues that affect them and their communities.

### *Saji's Personal story*

1983 things changed in Sir Lanka; the conflict destroyed the way of life. Saji lost a friend because the friend was from a different ethnic group.

Three days later Saji was presented with the opportunity to take revenge but did not do it because of three things: values passed on to him by family such as don't kill, education, and fear. It is important to understand that both formal and informal structures are crucial in shaping the behavior of young people.

### Importance of engaging those you are trying to help

- A kid lost his parents to the 2005 Sunami and when asked what he wanted he said he wanted to stay in school. And when asked what he needs: the kid replied that I want to get my sister her notes so that she can study for her exams. He did not ask for something for himself but for his sister. The lesson is that when disaster strike, people need to be

consulted on what they want and what they need rather than deciding for them (use elicitive approaches rather than prescriptive ones).

### Discussion with participants

What is the perception of people on the ground?

- ❖ Big organizations come and take survey but no implementation of programs
- ❖ The benefit that people on the ground get is very small

### Youth in the Formal Sector

In Sierra Leone, after the conflict ended not many youth were involved in the formal sector. Youth were heavily involved in the informal sector for livelihoods. However, when confronted by authorities to pay monthly dues to carry on their activities, conflict broke out between the authorities and the youth.

The main reason appeared to be that the youth did not want to be controlled by adults anymore. They saw themselves as responsible leaders and wanted to be given a space to carry on their business. The power dynamics needed to change.

### The power dynamic in Sri Lanka:

Young people respect and do not question parents no matter what age (not appropriate to question authority)

As space is created to them youth can be successful; youth also lobby their parents and get support from them...negotiating relationships and power dynamics.

Even though the youth want to have authority and make their own decision, they will still listen to parents and other elders.

### Intergenerational concern

Young people also learn bad things from elders and are influenced by them

### Example of Intergenerational approach to peacebuilding

Using experiential training to create a better group dynamic: implemented at the first day of the two week training to set the tone for the coming days

Mindsets: young people were more open

Older people tended to have set ways and are somewhat non-compromising

Language of communication was accusatory from adults

Youth spoke of general events rather than focusing on blaming others

What can you do to motivate the youth?

- ❖ You need to be willing to do the work yourself that you want youth to do.
- ❖ Providing training not opening space to implement it is more harmful (support system needs to be long-term)
- ❖ Self sustaining programs are more useful in designing creative approaches
- ❖ Using sports or theatre to get youth involved ...using sport leaders to attract and motivate youth
- ❖ Capacity building is done by using interactive activities, which help motivate and involve the youth. Before going into big projects, it is important to build capacity so projects can be sustained.

How do you deal with inclusion approach while people are from different backgrounds?

- ❖ SFCG approach is to include youth that have the same educational background
- ❖ Creating platforms for children to talk about issues that concern them

### Liberian Example

The Children and Youth specialist held a meeting with a group of young children in their school and asked them to come up with a question that the specialist will take to Minister of Youth and Sports. The group of children were: of different ages, mixed gender, and from different schools but within a few minutes, they decided that they want the specialist to ask about the problem of sexual harassment.

However, the plan laid out by the minister did not include sexual harassment. It showed that there was no dialogue taking place. There is a gap that needs to be filled.

Indigenous approaches are being used in Colombia and other places, how can you capture that and replicate that? What roles can organizations play to promote indigenous approaches rather than always prescribing?

- ❖ One way is to use story telling approach (using indigenous knowledge)
- ❖ In deep rooted conflicts, communities are divided and the challenge is how to use story telling in a way that does not further divide these communities.
- ❖ It is important to ask locals “What can you teach us about what our role should be in your community?”

What will be useful is to:

- retrain donor organizations
- reframe questions on what projects/programs are required to address,
- rethinking success
- quick turn around of IQCs is problematic to designing appropriate programs, by reframing questions and rethinking success this can be addressed
- Important to do good baseline work

### Intra-generational vs. inter-generational

Role for organizations

- ❖ Facilitating dialogue within intra-generation is also important to define unified identity
- ❖ Facilitating peer to peer mentoring: to make it a home grown and sustainable approach
- ❖ Donors creating a space for youth run organization,

### Youth programming indicators

Overview: DM&E specialists from different organizations came together to develop youth programming indicators

The report produced is meant to be self critic of youth programming indicators, and is more educational than framework for how to do youth projects better

Challenges

Are you measuring impacts or number of participants?

What changes do you want to see?

Communication needs to be strengthened

### Program sharing

Summer professional training program at American University

Relevant course: Youth, Conflict and Peacebuilding (from June 2-6, 2008)

Instructor: Mark Hamilton with guests Michael Shipler and Randolph Carter