

Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) August 2015 Report

George Mason University School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution Center for Peacemaking Practice Genocide Prevention Program

In May 2015, the Genocide Prevention Program from George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution received a grant from an Anonymous Family Foundation to fund Sixte Vigny Nimuraba's July 2015 travel to Burundi to conduct a genocide prevention project and nonviolence activities at a critical time in Burundi. Vigny worked in partnership with the Burundi Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Network.



The funding came in when tensions were increasing in Burundi. People were wondering whether or not president Nkurunziza would run for a third term. While the opposition and a considerable portion of his own camp CNDD-FDD had signed a petition forbidding the president to run for another term, the president along with his followers intensified the campaign to explain that the constitution allows him to run again as he was not directly elected

by the population for his first term. On the other side, the opposition argued that whether elected directly by the population or not, the president has ruled two terms, meaning ten years, and therefore is ineligible for another term. The election violence this summer was especially concerning to many because of the long-standing legacy of genocide the country has faced in the recent past, and the ongoing potential for power struggles in the country to take on an ethnically-motivated dynamic.

The April 25 announcement of president Nkurunziza's intention to run for a third term triggered a series of mass protests, and later a coup which eventually failed. Violence was used by both sides and it was reported that more than 80 people lost their lives due to this turmoil, more than 300 were injured, and thousands fled the country and are in exile in neighboring countries such as Rwanda, Tanzania and DRC. Following that controversy

over the third term, it is said that new rebel groups have been created and some members of the police and the army have escaped to join rebel groups. This is particularly troubling because over the last twenty years, cycles of genocide across this region (between Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and DRC) have been committed by rebel groups who frequently draw their support along ethnic lines, and also by government-backed troops fighting rebels.



School principals and representatives of the Ministry of Sport, Youth, and Culture, and the Ministry of Solidarity, in Gitega.

Project Rationale

In the capital city Bujumbura as well as the countryside, people are still driven by fear and even after the elections. They are still afraid for their security, and they live in fear that they will face reprisals and death for exercising their freedom of speech. Considering that nonviolence has never been considered as a priority since the Arusha Accords which were signed in 2000, Burundian people still use violent means to express their political and social frustration, and still have a hard time understanding that nonviolent means as well as collaborative problem solving can help them address their conflicts and guide them in promoting peace.



Fidelite Kamwana (left), a teacher, and Kabeni, a business man, are community leaders who support peace initiatives

The purpose of the activities funded by this grant was to contribute to the prevention of escalation towards genocide by planting the first seeds of nonviolence in Burundi and to inspire Burundian people in general and youth in particular to use of nonviolent techniques in their daily lives. It was also intended to provide participants with a sense of safety and loyalty towards each other's well-being, to create an environment where people could speak freely about their experiences and their suggestions for how to end violence.

The activities organized by GPP were intended to express the same values of tolerance, free speech and thought, and constructive collaboration that we believe are necessary in societies for people to resolve conflicts non-violently, build more durable social institutions capable of resisting violence, and ultimately preventing genocide.

We wanted to ultimately contribute to the building of a Burundian society in which people did not live in fear of being violently assaulted, “disappeared,” or killed for expressing their ideas about how to promote a more just and more peaceful society—so we conducted workshops that were specifically intended to create trust between individuals *before* the workshops took place, and we held the workshops in an environment where the young participants would feel safe.



Epipode Nsabayakare (left), Chair of the Burundi Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Network.

We also wanted the participants to be able to think freely about what kinds of actions they could take in their own communities to prevent violence. Instead of simply teaching youth about abstract theories of genocide and tolerance, we encouraged participants to analyze the conflicts in their own societies and we used the situations they raised to highlight important aspects of the social processes that underscore genocide and violence. Again, we sought to connect our means to our ends. This approach allowed students to implicitly gain the same kinds of insights that would be taught in a social scientific classroom, but to do so by looking into their own experiences and societies.

From this basis, the participants were able to discuss the dynamics of conflicts facing their communities, and think critically about ways to prevent or stop violence—practicing and employing in the workshops the very skills that are necessary for sustaining peaceful societies, such as working alongside, listening to, and collaborating with people from different groups who hold different beliefs about the nature of conflicts and have different visions about the what the future should look like.

Activities Conducted

In addition to allowing Sixte Vigny Nimuraba, a PhD student originally from Burundi, to travel back to his homeland and work with communities in general and the Burundi Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Network to promote nonviolence, the grant also sponsored nonviolence activities in two provinces of Burundi: Gitega and Bururi.



Volleyball Tournament in Gitega



Volleyball Tournament in Bururi

In Gitega, the grant contributed to major games that were organized by the Archdiocese of Gitega, opposing educators and youth from three provinces: Karusi, Mwaro and Gitega. The youth consisted of both boys and girls, ranging from 6 years of age to university students. The archdiocese supervisor was thrilled by attending the finals of the championship when three games took place in Gitega: Soccer, Basketball and Volleyball. The theme for the day was “Promoting Peace Nonviolence and reconciliation by youth and among youth through music, sport and culture: Educators, Let’s be the first promoters of peace wherever we are!” The finals took place on June 20, 2015 on the playgrounds of the 22nd Military camp of Gitega. Many students, school staff, educators and the population from the three provinces responded massively to the invitation. The main theme for the Gitega championship was “Youth, Let’s

Avoid Whatever Undermines Peace!” Note that the championship started on March 20, 2015 and ended with the finals on June 20, 2015.



(left to right) Father Vincent Bandeba, Barbatus Harushingo, and Father Jean Marie Kazitonda

The project was supported by partners such as the Ministry of Sport, Youth, and Culture and the Shinnyo-en Foudndation through its peace program and contributions from educators and schools. The planning of activities were conducted and implemented by the Archdiocese of Gitega through the education supervisor within the diocese Father Vincent Bandeba. The finals were attended by high personalities such as Barbatus HARUSHINGO, the

Assistant of the Minister of education, Moise NKUNZIMANA, the Director of Infrastructure and Equipment at the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, Anne NDAYIRORERE, the Counselor of the Minister of national solidarity and Father Jean Marie KAZITONDA, the General Secretary of the National Bureau of education in Burundi within the Catholic Church (BNEC).

The winners for that competition were LSMA de GITONGO in football (American Soccer), Lycee Notre Dame de la Sagesse in Basketball and Lycee Gitega in Volleyball. Cash prizes¹ and basket, volley and soccer balls were given to the finalists. In Bururi there was a game opposing also two teams from that province on July 12, 2015. After the game, a workshop consisting in questions and answers took place on the same playground and numerous prizes were given to the winners. All the questions asked focused on nonviolence (examples of these questions are below). Note that among the prizes were copy books, pens, nonviolence T-shirts and cell phones. Participants had to answer correctly questions that were asked in order for them to win prizes. As noted earlier, the theme for the July 12, 2015 event in Bururi province was “Promotion of Nonviolence, A Solid Pillar for Peace Consolidation in Burundi.” Bururi is one of the provinces in the countryside where protests took place during the past turmoil.

¹ The first place case prize for the Bururi volleyball tournament was 100,000 BIF, or 63 US\$; and 50,000 BIF for the second place prize. In Gitega, for each game the first winner got 300,000.00 BIF, and the second prize was 250,000.00 BIF. Balls were also given to the first and second team in all games.



The crowd gathered to watch the volleyball match in Bururi

Throughout the match, the commentator kept reminding the public that the main theme is nonviolence and therefore even the players had to be examples of nonviolence by not hurting each other. The event as well as the match was organized by Burundi Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Network members from Bururi and Bujumbura provinces. It was a great joy greeting the players before both Gitega and Bururi games and hearing the commentators keep reminding the audience that George Mason is sponsoring the events and that that university has been and will continue to promote peace and nonviolence around the world and particularly in Burundi. In addition they continuously reminded the audience the role of mutual help, mutual understanding, using Burundian proverbs such as “Ahari Amahoro umuhoro uramwa” (wherever there is



Project leader Sixte Vigny Nimuraba introduces the project in Bururi, explaining the day’s plan for the games and activities.

peace, everything else is possible). They also highlighted the fact that the same energies that were being used to play during the match are the same that are needed to build peace and security in Burundi. Two teams were competing in Bururi province “Les Eperviers” and “Tim Tim.” The winner of the match was Tim Tim. Both teams got cash prizes of about US \$60 and US \$30. The prizes for Bururi activities were lower because we did not get another partner who could contribute to the initiative, as was the case in Gitega.

For the second part of the activity, questions and answers were given and different prizes were given to winners. A large crowd was participating in answering the questions and responses activities. The questions covered a range of topics from geography, history, and social sciences. These made the participants think about their lives as well as their interactions with their neighbors and their fellow Burundians. The topic was effective, as the country is experiencing increasing violence and conflicts among political parties and communities. The following are some of the questions asked during the event:

- ✓ What are the factors that promote understanding within our communities?
- ✓ When do we see some of the problems related to misunderstanding in our communities?
- ✓ Who are the signs that show that in our country there is a lack of understanding?
- ✓ On earth, who is the first person who taught and showed an example of using nonviolence? (This question is intended to allow students to use their own specific kinds of knowledge—whether religious, historical, or cultural—to find examples of people who resolved conflicts non-violently).
- ✓ Give three names of three people from different continents who promoted nonviolence, if possible give the names of the country they come from.
- ✓ In Burundi, what does “CVR” mean, and who is leading it? (This was referring to the newly created Truth and Reconciliation Commission: TRC).

The only youth to win two prizes was a high school girl in Bururi (she won a T-shirt and cell phone). She was consistently so smart and sharp that she became a crowd favorite from the many people gathered to watch the competition and the workshops, earning a great deal of their applause.



Recommendations

Nonviolence was welcomed by both Gitega and Bururi participants and it was requested to increase such kind of activities and to extend an invitation to many other groups so that the message of nonviolence can spread across the whole country. Participants wanted to expand activities to other communities, and engage a broader cross-section of society in substantive discussions of ways to prevent violence, and ensure no future genocide can develop even while there are ongoing tensions in Burundi. For both Gitega and Bururi, it was recommended to that we provide team T-shirts and shorts so that the players can be presentable when they go to competitions, and carry the core messages of the project for peace back to their communities when they wear their T-shirts at home.

It was also requested to repeat regional events, and to seek additional funding to allow for the purchase of balls with nonviolence slogans that would be distributed to the finalists after the games as well as special T-shirts for winners. In terms of prizes for the question and answers, the audience requested the increase of number of prizes and highlighted the need for more nonviolence T-shirts to inspire those who do not attend the activities so that they can read the message from those who got those T-shirts.

More significantly, there is a need to build a broader national movement for nonviolent approaches in the face of tensions escalating. For example, we wish to organize a national nonviolence event, which would be organized and attended by members of the Burundi Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Network from all regions (Kirundo, Ngozi, Gitega, Bujumbura and Bururi). The Center for Peacemaking Practice's work on the Georgia-South Ossetian Civic Point of View Process² can ultimately serve as a model for the future of the Burundi project, catalyzing constructive confidence building workshops, sharing highly informed understandings of the conflict dynamics with advisors and decision-makers, and contributing to peace and security in Burundi and the entire region. Furthermore, we want to link regional groups across Burundi with those in the capital, preparing a strong national response for any future escalation of tensions.

There are also opportunities for this project to support the work of regional and national-level violence and atrocity prevention efforts, mainly by building social networks of individuals committed to peace, and committed to strengthening more durable social networks that are better able to resist violence. Such movements afoot across the African Great Lakes region—and, more broadly, across Central Africa—have inspired national dialogue initiatives that connect grassroots movements to regional and national

² <http://scar.gmu.edu/south-caucasus-project>

governments. We at GPP are working towards building the groundwork for a youth-driven national dialogue on peace. What makes our approach in Burundi unique is that, unlike other international NGOs and development organizations, we are creating a movement where people who are inspired to build peace seek us out and want to participate in our events and workshops. The current project has helped to sustain this effort considerably.

Finally, Burundi Peacebuilding and Nonviolence Network and George Mason University thank an Anonymous Foundation for their generosity in making all this work possible. We would welcome the opportunity to continue with future support and partnership with the Foundation.

Sixte Vigny Nimuraba, Ph.D. Candidate
Director of GPP's Violence Prevention Initiative

Douglas Irvin-Erickson, Ph.D.
Genocide Prevention Program

Susan Allen, Ph.D.
Center for Peacemaking Practice