LEARNING TO **LIVE TOGETHER**

**USING DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING**

Rawwida Baksh and Tanyss Munro, Editors
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## Acronyms and abbreviations

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<th>Acronym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABET</td>
<td>adult basic education training</td>
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<td>ABG</td>
<td>Autonomous Bougainville Government</td>
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<td>AYF</td>
<td>Area Youth Foundation, Jamaica</td>
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<td>BICWF</td>
<td>Bougainville Inter-Church Women’s Forum</td>
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<td>BRA</td>
<td>Bougainville Revolutionary Army</td>
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<td>CAL</td>
<td>Community Action Lab, Canada</td>
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<td>COL</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Learning</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>civil society organisation</td>
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<td>DLCP</td>
<td>Distance Learning Centres Project, Solomon Islands</td>
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<td>DTR</td>
<td>Development Through Radio, Southern Africa</td>
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<td>FAMWZ</td>
<td>Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>GMMP</td>
<td>Global Media Monitoring Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>IACE</td>
<td>Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, Uganda</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>information and communication technology</td>
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<td>IPDP</td>
<td>Isabel Province Development Planning, Solomon Islands</td>
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<td>IDRC</td>
<td>International Development Research Centre, Canada</td>
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<td>LFLP</td>
<td>Learning for Life Programme, Jamaica</td>
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<td>LNWDA</td>
<td>Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency, Bougainville</td>
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<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army, Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>Ministry of Community Affairs, Solomon Islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEPAD</td>
<td>New Partnership for Africa’s Development</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organisation</td>
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<td>NUL</td>
<td>National University of Lesotho</td>
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<td>ODEL</td>
<td>open and distance e-learning</td>
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<td>ODL</td>
<td>open and distance learning</td>
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<td>PFM</td>
<td>Peace Foundation Melanesia</td>
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<td>PFnet</td>
<td>People First Network, Solomon Islands</td>
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<td>PMI</td>
<td>Peace Management Initiative, Jamaica</td>
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<td>PNG</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
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<td>RAMSI</td>
<td>Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands</td>
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<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
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<td>SEA</td>
<td>Secondary Entrance Assessment, Trinidad and Tobago</td>
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<td>TFD</td>
<td>Theatre for Development</td>
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<td>TNSM</td>
<td>Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariah-Mohammadi, Pakistan</td>
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<td>TYSP</td>
<td>Toco Youth and Sexuality Project, Trinidad and Tobago</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF  United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM  United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNODC  United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSCR  United Nations Security Council Resolution
UWI    University of the West Indies
VKS    Vanuatu Cultural Centre
WSB    Wan Smolbag Theatre, Vanuatu
VPA    Violence Prevention Alliance, Jamaica
VRI    violence-related injuries
YAA    Youth Against AIDS, South Africa
ZBC    Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZNBC   Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation
Foreword

This book is a powerful expression of a paradigm shift that is taking place in the vital enterprise of *Learning for Development* that is the basis for the work of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the title of its plan of action for 2009–2012. I first became fully aware of the contemporary evolution of thinking and practice when I welcomed delegates to COL’s 4th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Jamaica in 2006 and had to summarise the online forums that had taken place in the run-up to the conference proper.

Learning is the key to development – but learning for whom? The online discussion concluded that in development the learner is the whole community. Most of us are used to courses that lead to exams for individuals. But communities have their own identities and each has common purposes that their members can only achieve together. Learning for development must start from each community’s identity and common purpose. The old habit of a benefactor teaching a beneficiary will not foster learning for development. Helping communities to learn requires a genuine spirit of collaboration.

This emphasis on community requires distance educators to change focus. We often begin by asking: “What do we want these individuals to learn?” That is at least better than the more common starting point in conventional education: “What do I want to teach these people?” But it is still the wrong question. The real question should be: “How can we help the community articulate its own purposes for learning and then support it in achieving them?”

This book addresses that question from a worldwide perspective. A first lesson it drives home is that change takes time – especially if it requires a major change in thinking. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) began to promote community radio almost 50 years ago, yet it is only in the last decade that governments have sufficiently lost their fear of it to grant licences readily. The challenge now is for people to appropriate the medium and make it an authentic expression of their community rather than a pale reflection of commercial radio. The
contributions to this book show that working with a community medium can be a very
effective way of bringing people together around a common problem – which is per-
haps why community facilities are often early targets when conflict breaks out.

Various contributors remind us that conflict comes in many guises. The word
evokes warring in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kashmir and Sierra
Leone. Yet in all societies individuals are damaged by domestic conflicts arising from
gender-based violence; and in developing countries there are often poisonous and long-
running conflicts over land ownership and usage. Peace is not just the absence of war.

Peacebuilding, whether at the individual or community level, requires direct
contact between human beings. So what role can distance education play? Various con-
tributions, notably the description of the Wan Smolbag Theatre in Vanuatu, document
the role of local theatre in enabling people to “discuss the usually undiscussed” and
notes that whereas non-governmental organisations (NGOs) identify issues, people tell
stories. An important role of distance education, through video and audio recordings,
is to carry stories and theatre to larger audiences.

Because many poor people in rural areas are unfamiliar with traditional educa-
tion systems, they are open to learning in different ways. Distance education is readily
accepted because classrooms are not their benchmark for learning. But it must be
distance education with a difference. A new role is emerging, that of “infomediary” to
bring user-friendly and relevant information to people who need it.

Information about government and opportunities to participate in its programmes
are important in building confidence and trust, as accounts from countries as different
as Lesotho and Solomon Islands show. The term “resource-poor community” captures
the sources of dissatisfaction that lead to conflict. Lack of educational opportunities
and means of communication with the wider world are key manifestations of this.

The editors and authors are well aware that distance education and community
media cannot, by themselves, solve systemic problems such as lack of title to land,
failing agriculture, poor education and endemic corruption. However, by raising
expectations and challenging assumptions they can be catalysts that accelerate other
processes of change.

I congratulate Tanyss Munro and Rawwida Baksh for bringing together this fas-
cinatingly diverse set of testimonies that opens up a novel and vital role for open and
distance learning in building a happier world.

Sir John Daniel
President
Commonwealth of Learning
Introduction: Setting the Context

Rawwida Baksh, Tanyss Munro and Carley Robb

Open and distance learning (ODL) has been successfully employed by communities for non-formal education over the years, through the use of community radio, self-learning text, DVDs, the Internet and other mobile technology.

As the number of violent conflicts around the world escalates, peacebuilding is increasingly an important priority – particularly at the community level, where attitudes are often formed and reinforced. Communities have also become the new frontline of conflict and war, and both the perpetrators and victims of war may now be found in the same villages and neighbourhoods. In addition, urban violence is “a serious development constraint in developing countries and increasingly dominates the daily lives of citizens across the globe” (Moser, 2006).

The declaration of the International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001–2010) has propelled greater interest in efforts toward building cultures of peace. Transforming community culture to reflect peace necessitates building, strengthening and changing values based on freedom, tolerance, justice and democracy.

In 2005, Commonwealth Heads of Government affirmed the importance of countering violence and conflict through the promotion of respect and tolerance among people of different cultures, religions and races. This affirmation led to the commission of a report on issues of terrorism, extremism, conflict and violence titled Civil Paths to Peace: Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007).

The report identified four key areas for forging peace: young people, women, education and the media. In September 2008, Commonwealth Foreign Ministers met in New York to share best practices and agreed that:

- Community-level village or neighbourhood initiatives are the most effective level at which to build social cohesion;
• Community-level dialogue is most effective when facilitated by those with some knowledge of mediation and negotiation processes;
• The media, including community radio, can play a strong role in mitigating conflict; and
• Young people have an important contribution to make.

With the support of Commonwealth governments, civil society organisations and other partners, the Commonwealth of Learning has initiated Learning4Peace, a community-based ODL approach to promoting tolerance, respect and understanding. Women, young people and others work to build peaceful communities through learning and sharing skills and experiences in preventing and resolving conflict.

The purpose of this book is to bring together a range of community peacebuilding experiences from across the Commonwealth that have been applying ODL approaches. However, this is still a relatively new area and is easier said than done. Communities that have emerged from a violent past often face a situation where not only has physical infrastructure crumbled, but also the whole education system has lain dormant for years, with a generation of children having had no education. Community centres, schools and universities, which would normally provide the spaces for ODL, may have been destroyed. The exodus of teachers and community leaders may further compound the problem. In addition, those engaged in violent conflict tend to have various grievances, including marginalisation from access to education, employment, productive resources and other opportunities for social, economic and political advancement. Where the aggrieved have chosen the path of violent confrontation, they are often not yet ready to put down their arms and adopt approaches to resolving the conflict, including ODL.

Working to prevent or mitigate violence or to rebuild communities with violent histories is very difficult, often dangerous work, as it involves working in highly sensitive areas and emotions tend to be high, particularly at the community level. It is therefore of real importance to provide tools and new approaches to those who are often the most affected by violence: the socially, economically and politically marginalised including women and young people. However, because they often possess limited literacy skills or are not comfortable with formalised learning, there are considerable challenges to reaching these communities.
ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Frances Stewart, Director of the Center for Research on Inequality, Human Security, and Ethnicity (CRISE), suggests that some key underlying factors of violent conflict are: “political, economic, and social inequalities, extreme poverty, economic stagnation, poor government services, high unemployment, environmental degradation, and individual (economic) incentives to fight”. Differences in ethnicity and religion can also propel conflict. However, labelling a conflict as “ethnic” is problematic as it “diverts attention from important underlying economic and political factors” (Stewart, 2002).

While conflict is a normal, healthy part of all communities, teaching people how to deal with conflict without resorting to violence by helping them to use new approaches to overcome barriers can be effective in bringing about progressive change. In order to end and prevent future conflict, it is “essential to promote inclusive development; reduce inequalities between groups; tackle unemployment; and, via national and international control over illicit trade, reduce private incentives to fight” (ibid.).

DEFINITIONS OF PEACEBUILDING

The United Nations’ approach

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the concept of post-conflict peacebuilding to the UN in his speech titled “An Agenda for Peace” (United Nations, 1992). He stated that peacebuilding is linked to preventative diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping, and that it identifies and supports structures that will “strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (ibid.). Moreover, he defined peacebuilding as a “process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing the root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution-building, and political as well as economic transformation” (ibid.). Thus, peacebuilding refers to “rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formerly at war; and in the largest sense, addressing the deepest causes of conflict” (ibid.).

Looking at the relationship between peacebuilding and politics, the UN stated in 2000 that “effective peacebuilding is, in effect, a hybrid of political and development activities targeted at the sources of conflict” (United Nations, 2000). In 2003, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan released a Review of Technical Cooperation in the UN that called for a strategic plan to “identify the ways in which different parts of the [UN] system might properly work together to devise country specific peacebuilding strategies”. The creation of a Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding
Support Office was recommended in the 2004 report of the Secretary-General’s High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, entitled “A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility”.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) defines peace-building as a “transformative process” that strives to “establish a durable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict”, which includes but is not limited to “the reconciliation of human relationships, institution building and the promoting of inclusive and equitable social, political and economic systems” (2008). Peacebuilding is viewed as addressing both physical and structural violence and striving to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

**Theoretical approaches**

John Paul Lederach, an influential scholar in the field of peace and conflict studies, urges the need to expand current conceptions of peacebuilding. He views it as a “comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships” (1997). In addition, it involves the transformation from negative relations, behaviours, attitudes and structures to those that are positive and beneficial for the community. Peacebuilding must be undertaken through a collaborative approach, which includes the “complex and multi-dimensional nature of the human experience” and also integrates social participation (ibid.).

Johan Galtung, a scholar and activist, has written extensively on the concept of peace. His work distinguishes between negative peace and positive peace. The former is defined by the absence of violence, while the latter is the “capacity to deal with conflict non-violently and creatively” (2001). Galtung also re-defined the concepts of structural violence – as indirect violence or discrimination – and cultural violence. He states that cultural violence is any aspect of a culture “that can be used to legitimise violence in its direct or structural form”. This may include religion, art, language or ideology. Moreover, he states that symbolic violence is utilised by those in power to legitimise violence against a specific group (1990).

Galtung and Fischer introduced the concept of “ten thousand dialogues” in an article about the conflict in Northern Ireland (1998). They stated that peacebuilding processes should strive to include several perspectives, as opposed to creating one official report of a conflict. Thousands of dialogues should thus be encouraged and allowed to “blossom” (ibid.) to facilitate the reconciliation and healing process. The authors suggested that a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, similar to the South African one, could be created to address the conflict in Northern Ireland. They also proposed that the commission should hear the “personal testimonies of the many victims” and
argued that these testimonies could then be utilised as a warning and caution to future generations (ibid.).

Civil society approaches

InterChange defines peacebuilding as a “broad, comprehensive range of activities and processes at all stages of the conflict cycle” that explores the causes of conflict and conflict behaviour, and also addresses the “wounds of the past” (2008). The goal of peacebuilding here is to “promote human security and transform violent conflict toward sustainable peaceful relationships, capacities and structures” (ibid.).

In its report on gender equality and peacebuilding, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) defines peacebuilding as “those initiatives which foster and support sustainable structures and processes which strengthen the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, reoccurrence or continuation of violent conflict [and] this process typically contains both immediate and longer term objectives”. Peacebuilding is a “two-fold process requiring both the deconstruction of the structures of violence and the construction of the structures of peace” (1999: 50).

Oxfam (2008) states that the central aims and objectives of peacebuilding are to “develop trust, safety, and social cohesion within and between communities; to strengthen social and cultural capacities to resolve disputes and conflict; and to promote inter-ethnic and inter-group interaction and dialogue”.

Peacebuilding Initiative (2008) proposes that there are both tangible and intangible dimensions of peacebuilding. The tangible aspects include those that are visible and quantifiable, such as the number of weapons that have been destroyed, the number of soldiers demobilised, the number of jobs created and the number and depth of dialogues held. Intangible benefits can include “reconciliation between former antagonists, trust in public institutions” and the development of new forms of dispute resolution. The organisation contends that most international peacebuilding programmes focus predominantly on the tangible, visible and quantifiable outputs of peacebuilding, rather than the “qualitative processes of change”, which may be more difficult to observe and assess (ibid.).

WHAT IS COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING?

Oxfam’s report on peacebuilding in Afghanistan defines community peacebuilding as a participatory, bottom-up approach that is “founded on the premise that people are the best resources for building and sustaining peace” (2008). Community peacebuilding is based on the notion that the “promotion of peace must be undertaken not only at the
highest levels but also at a local level”, and must fully engage families, tribes, individuals and communities. Community peacebuilding also strives to prevent conflict and to facilitate the conditions that decrease the risks of a community experiencing violence. It attempts to facilitate the attitudes and behaviours that promote values of “peace and tolerance”, and can be achieved through mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution, civil-society involvement in peace and development and the promotion of peace education (ibid.).

Community peacebuilding is focused on restorative justice rather than retributive justice, as it seeks to “restore relationships between offenders and victims” (Oxfam, 2008: 16). Moreover, it is focused on capacity building, as it facilitates the community’s ability to address and solve conflict. This form of peacebuilding also strengthens social cohesion, and it promotes “gradual and progressive change in traditional community institutions” in order for them to become “fairer, more representative, and more constructive”. Community peacebuilding promotes “inclusive partnerships between people, institutions, and civil society”, and is a continual social progression that “adapts to local circumstances and seeks to incorporate peacebuilding values, skills, and techniques into all aspects of governance and development work” (ibid.).

**TWO EXAMPLES OF ORGANISATIONS BUILDING PEACE IN COMMUNITIES**

Co-operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) (2008) is a non-profit organisation in Afghanistan that focuses on the promotion of knowledge and increased awareness of peace, social justice and human rights. The organisation states that it strives to contribute to the creation of viable alternatives to war and violence, and that “people and culture are the best resources for building and sustaining peace”. CPAU works on community peacebuilding initiatives by providing training and coaching on “conflict resolution skills, negotiation skills, and listening skills” through its Peace Councils and locally based Peace Committees. It also provides Peace Education programmes in local schools (ibid.).

Intercomm (2009) was founded in Ireland in 1995 as a response to “grassroots community concerns about inter-community conflict and social deprivation” in North Belfast. It runs a peacebuilding programme that works with both communities and constituencies in order to “build trust and promote understanding between communities emerging from conflict and build on the values of equity, diversity and interdependence”. The organisation explains that this programme is a form of “community empowerment” that improves the peacebuilding skills of community members through workshops, seminars, skills training and field trips (ibid.).
Community peacebuilding can re-establish partnerships between people, social institutions and operational institutions and create a developmental environment (Co-operation for Peace and Unity, 2005). It also promotes human rights, can facilitate economic development and can help to prevent future violence or a resurgence of violence (ibid.).

Oxfam indicates that there have been community peacebuilding successes in many conflict and post-conflict countries, including Cambodia, Nepal and Vietnam. Its community peacebuilding programme in northern Kenya, which has focused on disputes over scarce resources since the early 1990s, has led to a “marked reduction in conflict, and more peaceful coexistence among pastoralists” (2008: 17).

A peacebuilding roundtable held by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the UN Peacebuilding Support Office and the Carnegie Corporation of New York stressed the importance of examining “soft indicators of success”. These soft elements of social cohesion and peace were defined as “trust, confidence, legitimacy and cooperation”, which need to be included when examining peacebuilding processes as “conventional evaluation mechanisms are unable to fully capture these indicators” (IDRC, 2008).

**GENDER AND PEACEBUILDING**

It has increasingly been recognised that women and men, girls and boys do not experience conflict in the same way and have different needs and priorities in its aftermath. ... [and] gender-based differences require specific responses. Women also play a crucial role in maintaining and rebuilding the social fabric during and in the aftermath of conflicts. (Baksh et al., 2005)

Karamé (2004) also makes the point that peace and war affect women and men differently, and thus conflict, peace missions and peacebuilding must be critically examined from a gender perspective. Furthermore, women are typically engaged in grassroots approaches to peacebuilding, and so their agency “often goes unnoticed” (ibid.: 7). She makes the case that there should not only be greater international demand to include women in peacebuilding processes, but also recognition of the harmful affects of excluding women from peacebuilding.

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) posits that the type of gendered approach to peacebuilding that is required is one that “addresses the nature of power relations between women and men” and strives to prevent and mitigate conflicts and facilitate recovery in societies that have faced conflict (2003: 6). A gendered approach to peacebuilding helps to illuminate the different effects of conflict on women
and men and also contributes to the knowledge and skills “required for the prevention of future violent conflicts” (2003: 26).

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has extensively studied the myriad experiences of women in conflict situations and states that widowhood and the dissolution of familial and community networks can push women to assume new roles within their family or community (2001). Widowhood can alter the “social and economic roles of women”, and although this change in women’s status may have different consequences depending on the context, it can affect their physical safety, identity and mobility (ibid.). It can also affect women’s ability to access primary goods and services that are necessary for “survival and their rights to inheritance, land and property” (ibid.: 13).

The Huairou Commission (2008), an international coalition of networks, institutions and individual professionals, focuses on grassroots women’s movements and community development. It “envisions the building of cultures of peace with the full engagement of those grassroots women who have survived violence and are re-creating their lives and communities.” The peacebuilding programme rests on the notion that the international community has been increasingly focused on establishing “cultures of peace”, and states the women are often understood to be “culture carriers” (Huairou Commission, 2008). Thus they must be included in peacebuilding processes.

In an article for UNIFEM and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, Jennifer Klot (2007) discusses the issues of democracy and good governance in relation to peacebuilding. She states that gender equality is an essential element of peacebuilding, as it brings “new degrees of democratic inclusiveness, faster and more durable economic growth, and human and social capital recovery”. She also points out that peacebuilding processes may offer the strongest opportunity to “redress gender inequities and injustices of the past while setting new precedents for the future”. She advocates that the international community should set clear priorities for gender equality within peacebuilding processes. Citing the cases of Burundi and Sierra Leone, she indicates that they have strived to promote women’s participation in governance through affirmative actions plans such as formal and informal quotas, and thus are “encouraging” examples (2007: 2).

The importance of women’s involvement in peacebuilding was recognised by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which calls for “equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security”, and emphasises “the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution".
COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES AND ODL

The experiences shared in this book provide insight into communities recovering from violent conflict and those where conflict is threatening to become violent and how ODL approaches can effectively engage these communities in peacebuilding. Working in these situations can be dangerous but this book shows how, through the courageous work of some extraordinary organisations and individuals, communities have made changes leading to positive results.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of what ODL looks like for formal and non-formal education and illustrates how it is well suited to peacebuilding work in communities. The remaining chapters are divided into geographical sections: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Canada and the Pacific.

Chapters 2 to 7 provide insights into post-conflict communities and countries in Africa and share experiences of empowering young people, women and others. Some of these experiences are from very resource-poor communities, where women were able to influence the media and get their voices and issues heard on national radio. Other chapters show how ODL is reaching very remote communities and that children have operated a radio programme leading to greater understanding among community groups.

Chapters 8 to 10 offer experiences from Asia and reveal how ancient cultural practices can be used to generate change on the one hand, but how they can also keep women marginalised in some circumstances. Radio plays an important role in these communities, and one organisation bases its peacebuilding activities on folk culture as a way to both discuss sensitive issues and reach more people.

Chapter 11 focuses on the experience of a First Nations community in Canada where the opportunity for e-learning for community members was instrumental in changing the negative patterns of behaviour in the community and facilitated positive change for young people. Chapters 12 and 13 deal with bottom-up approaches in the Caribbean where conflicts between groups and violence in communities have been turned around through the use of radio, DVDs, e-learning and other innovative distance learning approaches. The chapter on Trinidad and Tobago also explores the potential role of the school to counteract the subculture of violence among young children.

Chapters 14 to 17 focus on a wide variety of experiences in the Pacific including women-operated radio stations, empowering youth to develop ODL materials for e-learning and using ODL approaches for drama to teach learners about alternative conflict resolution approaches. One chapter illustrates clearly the importance and role of culture in building peace and explores opportunities in a resource-poor community for continuing this work using ODL.
The case studies included here offer insights into the challenges of using ODL for community peacebuilding, as well as the kinds of interventions that have worked and how they can be built upon. This book is also intended to set the stage for further work in this area and expand community learning opportunities in Commonwealth countries.

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Introduction


1.

Using Open and Distance Learning for Community Development

Tanyss Munro and Ian Pringle

There is increasing awareness, crosscutting the fields of education and development, that achieving development goals is fundamentally a question of large scale learning and, furthermore, that conventional methods are incapable of meeting the world’s education needs. (Daniel 2007)

Open and distance learning (ODL) programmes for community development have the great advantage of reaching many more people than conventional face-to-face programmes and training while also being highly contextualised. Focusing squarely on issues affecting peace in the daily lives of individuals and the communities in which they live, an ODL approach can address specific problems and challenges through learning objectives directed toward pragmatic outcomes.

This chapter looks at how ODL can be effectively applied in peacebuilding, or in meeting any development goal that involves learning, and explores some of the critical elements for effective community-based ODL programming.

Since ODL relies on technology as the vehicle for learning content, one of the main challenges in reaching people in rural, remote and resource-poor communities – where needs are often greatest and ODL is, arguably, most relevant – is the lack of infrastructure. Beyond computers and Internet connectivity, educational access barriers start at a more fundamental level with electricity and roads. Since so many education and training programmes, even in non-formal settings, depend on written
text, literacy is likewise a major obstacle. The use of appropriate technologies, ones that overcome these barriers and build on cultural elements, is essential.

Another critical success factor is incorporating culture when designing and implementing a learning programme. This is particularly valuable in peacebuilding because it can draw participants together. Drama and storytelling are important social tools for community participation and learner engagement and, as these elements are a natural component of many cultures, they can be highly effective tools for development and fit well with ODL approaches.

Other guiding principles to designing effective ODL peacebuilding programmes include relevancy, accessibility and sustainability. This chapter explores how to incorporate those principals through building cooperative partnerships and relationships across sectors – including development, education and the media – using appropriate, available technology.

WHAT IS OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING?

Open learning describes policies and practices that permit entry to learning with no barriers or minimal barriers of age, gender or time while recognising prior learning. Distance education is the delivery of learning or training to learners who are separated, mostly by time and space, from those who are teaching and training. Conceptually distinct, yet complementary, these two phenomena come together in the term open and distance learning. (COL, 2009)

ODL provides flexible learning opportunities and has been key to enabling more people to overcome barriers to access education for reasons of age, gender or physical remoteness. Open approaches can also help to scale initiatives so that curricula, teaching materials and other learning content can be freely accessed and adapted to other contexts.

Distance learning is best known in formal contexts; the successor to correspondence education, it generally leads to qualifications from colleges and universities and, more recently, secondary schools. Distance education approaches have been important in reaching adult populations with other commitments – full time jobs, families and other responsibilities where physical and time separation are mediated by some form of technology. Various media may be used to teach learners, including printed texts, radio or other audio formats, television or other video formats, the Internet, mobile devices or Web 2.0 technologies.
Historically, distance education materials tend to have been text-based where print materials are exchanged between learner and instructor/tutor by post, courier or through local distance learning centres. Much use is also made of email, chat rooms and other computer-based tools to support learners. Both synchronous and asynchronous exchanges and discussions may take place to support learning, the latter often within set limits of time (a week or two), allowing learners to contribute when it suits them given their other commitments. Discussions among learners and between learner and tutor are easily managed through email as are links to libraries and databases. Using text-based materials still presents a barrier for learners with limited experience with formal education and with limited literacy skills, however, and audio and visual media can help to overcome this.

**ODL elements in formal and non-formal education**

Sir John Daniel, President of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and a leading global figure in ODL, has described open and distance learning in terms of a student sitting on a three-legged stool:

The first leg is good study materials. Today you can use lots of media for this: audio, video, print, the Web, CDs and DVDs, the Internet and so on.

The second leg is good student support. Most students cannot succeed on independent study alone. They need support from teachers or tutors or other students. Some of this can be provided by phone, e-mail or correspondence. Sometimes students get together physically in local groups.

The third leg is good logistics. Study materials are no use unless they reach the students. (Daniels, et al., 2008)

Because ODL materials (the first leg) are developed in teams and through stages, with each group of experts being responsible for specific tasks, there are special administrative considerations that may not be obvious for the process of developing good materials, including engaging the services of media specialists, educators and instructional designers. This approach ensures high quality content that is produced in advance of a course. It takes advantage of the strengths and simultaneously overcomes the shortcomings of each part of the team. Although there are a lot of different media available, in reality formal ODL is almost entirely text-based, be it in print or online. This is a key area in which strategies for non-formal ODL need to develop.
Effective learner support (the second leg) in the ODL context normally includes learners communicating not only with one another but also with the learning materials. These are purposefully interactive, which is particularly effective in non-formal learning. Learner support traditionally involves guidance, advocacy for the learner, special needs help, study groups, buddy networks, resources and or one-to-one tutorial help. Learner support is one element that distinguishes an ODL approach from other types of community development and use of technologies. For example, training workshops, media programmes and technology centres often focus on one-way messaging and technical skills training at the expense of actual learning and application.

Logistics (the third leg) include the production and warehousing of materials, telematic networks, hiring tutors and mentors and distributing materials. In this sense, logistics are particularly challenging in remote and resource-poor environments where both infrastructure and the presence of effective local organisations are often limited.

**WHAT DOES ODL LOOK LIKE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?**

Learning can be loosely described as the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes, and is informed by feedback from the learner in order to ensure learning is taking place and to facilitate deeper understanding of concepts.

While ODL is one of the fastest growing areas of formal education, it is also gaining traction in expanding opportunities for professional training and non-formal education, particularly in relation to community development and the promotion of “innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning”; it is still in its early stages in non-formal education settings but the potential for growth and innovation in this area is considerable (Khvilon et al., 2002).

Peacebuilding initiatives through ODL using localised content can be very powerful, whether the focus is to strengthen local government or other institutions or to find ways to facilitate changes in relationships and bring factions together to initiate dialogue. Marginalised people are often excluded from decision-making in issues affecting them even at the local level due to a number of reasons including ethnicity, language, religion, class, caste and socio-economic well-being. Women are marginalised in many cultures, and youth also often find themselves lacking a say in matters that concern them. ODL can play an important role in reaching these populations with highly contextualised approaches.

In Papua New Guinea, for example, COL has partnered with the national university in the Government’s public sector reform initiative to strengthen local government officials in their capacity to carry out their responsibilities, which include engaging with the community in decision-making. Undertaking the mammoth task of training all the officials using conventional approaches would have taken decades. Using an
ODL approach, however, the Government will be able to offer them standardised, quality training with reasonable time and cost factors. Its human resource (HR) department is training provincial HR officials to provide the course to local officials in their place of work using both face-to-face and ODL methods. This new initiative is expected to evolve over time to incorporate increasingly more input from civil society and greater variety of media.

In designing programmes in ways that meaningfully and positively engage learners, it is useful for peacebuilding programmes to have a practical orientation and work with the whole group using traditional social tools such as discussion, storytelling and drama, rather than adopting a more conventional individual learner approach. In this way, learners can more easily acquire skills and knowledge while being supported by peers and can, as a group, directly apply concepts learned to difficult situations in their community.

Peacebuilding initiatives through ODL using localised content can be very powerful, whether the focus is to strengthen local government or other institutions or to find ways to facilitate changes in relationships and bring factions together to initiate dialogue.

From the simple to the high end, it is important to use technology that is readily available, economical and accessible to the learners. While the vast majority of communities in developing areas of the world lack access to the Internet, most communities have access to radio or other audio media (e.g., tape recorders). These – particularly radio – can be used to raise awareness of issues and engage many in discussion across communities, helping to transform community conflict situations. In many environments mobile telephony is growing fast. Although still in the early stages, innovative use is being made of mobile phones both for sharing learning content, albeit often in small (60 second) packages, and for interaction and learner support.

A blended ODL approach – one that combines the use of audio or audio-visual materials, print and face-to-face training – is often employed. Programmes may be designed to include some text and images, video, audio and, in some situations, access to a computer to view a disc or get online. For example, Wan Smolbag, a theatre group in Vanuatu, develops, performs, records and distributes CDs and DVDs with text materials to schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) about conflict resolution, land rights and use, gender issues, domestic violence, electoral rights and other issues. In addition to being contextualised so that it reflects the local reality, material becomes more meaningful even on the basis of learners hearing voices in their own dialect and seeing familiar faces.
Participation and engagement

Engaging learners is critical to the success of ODL, particularly as it applies to non-formal learning and community development. Participatory community approaches to education, including the promotion of voice and empowerment and interactivity among learners and teachers, lend themselves particularly well to addressing localised conflict situations where building the capacity of learners can help lead to community and societal transformation.

One major risk for non-formal education approaches is the neglect of the learning part of ODL. Using technology to transmit messages or push information does not promote learning. There are many examples of programming, intended to be educational, that does not actually focus on the learner and where there is therefore probably little or no real learning taking place.

To promote actual interactive learning, the Wan Smolbag group mentioned earlier distributes discussion guides with its DVDs that also suggest interesting activities for tutors, teachers and other facilitators to use. It then collects feedback, and follow-up studies show that the dramatisations have been effective in changing attitudes among learners.

Engaging learners is difficult, particularly when they are at a distance from one another or tutors, yet the more the learner actively participates and interacts in the learning process, the more effective the learning. In the public sector reform initiative in Papua New Guinea described above, face-to-face interaction – including in small groups – is an important part of the programme. A good ODL learning for development programme should include interactive formats in its design and real opportunities for the learner to discuss and debate issues and concepts with others.

Interaction allows learners to grasp new perceptions and viewpoints more easily – it facilitates reflection on concepts and ideas introduced based on learner’s own experiences and existing knowledge. Deeper reflection can be facilitated through posing to the learner “challenging questions, invitations to explain and argue for or against propositions, discuss and criticize, summarize arguments and propose ideas and actions” (Holmberg, 2005). This approach can provide a feedback loop to further inform content creation.

Parallel to the expansion of public and community media approaches in many parts of the world is the engagement of community-based groups – for example, women’s savings groups, producers’ cooperatives and radio listening clubs – as a means to contextualise and discuss materials. Finding mechanisms to send comments, questions and opinions to the media or other source of the materials provides a productive feedback loop and deepens learning.
Learner-generated content

In the interest of placing learners at the centre of the ODL process, enabling and empowering learners to creatively develop their own content is emerging as an effective approach. According to Tachhi and Watkins, participatory content is “created after extensive discussions, conversations and decision-making with the target community; and where community group members take on content creation responsibilities according to their capacities and interests” (2008: 1). Participatory content creation can use any media or channel from still photographs to radio to mobile handsets, and it has unique potential to engage learners and to build information and media literacy, huge assets in non-formal and other types of learning.

Learning how to use a computer, a camera or an audio recorder and how to actually craft and create content through storytelling or other formats adds new perspectives to a subject. It can also be personally empowering to learners within their communities and beyond when linked to broader networks. This process can lead to meaningful interaction between learners and one another, and between learners and the material. Learners can be taught to create content based on the realities of the situation in the community, thereby facilitating relevancy and sustainability of the learning. For instance, holding structured, focused discussion through community radio on key areas of conflict, with experts, opinion pieces, perhaps drama and music as well as opportunities for listeners to participate can be particularly effective if learners are given the opportunity to design and develop some or all of the components of the programme.

Creating content, regardless of the level of sophistication, requires more than just technical skills and facilities; it also requires access to technology that allows creativity (as simple as an audio recorder), conceptual and story-making skills, and – perhaps most importantly, especially in marginalised spaces – an empowering and enabling environment. These are significant, generally underemphasised aspects of infrastructure and capacity development in relation to ODL and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development in general.

Facilitating local solutions

A culture of dialogue between the community and donor should be established from the conceptual stages of a project. Development priorities should be analysed by both parties before deciding upon the appropriate ICT solution. Post-implementation, solutions to challenges should come from the community – not donor organizations. Communities must fully commit to using systems to do better what they are already doing for themselves. (Watkins and Tacchi, 2008: vii)
A non-formal ODL, bottom-up approach to programme design is well-suited to peacebuilding. Resolving or mitigating conflict and developing new, sustainable relationships and ways of doing things in communities is enhanced by including pragmatic materials and approaches in the design of a programme that are rooted in culture and history and therefore based on the accumulated experience of the community. This bottom-up approach to planning techniques is critical to both the effectiveness and sustainability of community-based ODL initiatives.

In Sierra Leone, COL and the Commonwealth Youth Programme are working with existing youth groups to first help them build relationships with one another through social networking platforms such as Facebook, and then to identify and prioritise themes of most importance to them in peacebuilding. This participatory approach is a time-consuming but essential element to sustainable programme design. “We have learned from our community radio experiences that in order to achieve community uptake and ownership, an ICT for development initiative should be introduced from the bottom-up or from the centre outwards, rather than from the top down.” (Watkins and Tacchi, 2008: viii). While some of the learning may involve skill-building such as developing capacity in various conflict resolution methods, it is often more about exploring and building on culturally based processes and methods that drive ultimate attitudinal and relationship changes leading to the creation of local solutions.

Partnerships and networks

In addition to the significant challenges in reaching marginalised learners in resource-poor communities that have already been noted, one of the greatest obstacles to sustaining change and reaching more learners is the lack of organisational networks and collaboration resulting in difficulties with respect to delivery mechanisms.

Establishing cooperation and partnerships between organisations is critical for success. Cooperation among education experts, groups with subject expertise and groups who deliver programmes and media outlets, for instance, can facilitate the creation of course or programme development teams. Each brings skills, knowledge and resources that help to address the logistical challenges associated with non-formal learning for development in remote and resource-poor areas.
Successful community-based ODL programmes foster win-win partnerships and can often be particularly important in the third leg of the ODL stool: good logistics to ensure learners can access programmes and materials. For example, distribution strategies may include collaboration with schools, telecentres, government agencies, NGOs, education institutions, media outlets and local clubs or groups.

Collaboration through partnerships can not only help to ensure that materials are distributed and used, they can also ensure that initiatives are more deeply embedded in the community culture, initiatives and priorities. Partners can adapt or build additional content to suit their needs. Local values and traditions are customised to fit different audiences and contexts. In this way, good partnerships can lead to relevancy beyond the life of the programme.

Balancing the need to contextualise content is the need to link community-based programmes to broader initiatives and networks. It is important to locate programmes “within broader national socio-economic policy frameworks and [involve], where possible, government agencies and local communities in the running of the programmes” (Siaciwena, 2000). Building these broader links can be key to the sustainability of a programme.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The evidence suggests that projects can be delivered cost-effectively and that they can be effective, particularly where ‘bottom up community dialogue’ leads to the successful integration of such programmes into the wider development needs of a society. (Khivon et al., 2002)

Recent experience points both to the enormous potential for ODL to inform new approaches and to the relevance of these new forms of ODL in actually addressing the world’s most pressing development needs and goals.

ODL helps to (re)focus programming on the learner and on learning and in this sense is a major asset in efforts to build the capacities of educational institutions, extensions services, government departments and civil society groups, from development NGOs to public, local and community media and technology centres.

As technologies, both new and old, penetrate more deeply in developing regions of the world, including rural, remote and resource-poor communities, the relevance of ODL as an approach to development increases, on the one hand because of the potential to take learning to much larger and wider scale, and on the other because new socio-cultural approaches to the use of technologies actually enable the type of engagement and interactivity that ODL for development demands.
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Africa
INTRODUCTION

The year 2004 marked 50 years of the transistor radio. Although the commercially dominant mainstream media took little notice of the event, the anniversary was celebrated by various institutions and organisations involved in social change. As a broadcast medium, radio has inherent advantages over print and visual-based media forms, as it is best suited to enable participation and provide opportunities for an equal exchange of ideas and information and for knowledge sharing. More importantly, radio is cost-effective, easily accessible and portable, which makes it a very popular medium. As someone aptly remarked, “radios ... do not rely on electricity or literacy. They can be used by anyone anywhere, unlike other communications media such as telephones, the Internet, television and printed media.”

As a broadcast medium, radio has inherent advantages over print and visual-based media forms as it is best suited to enable participation and provide opportunities for an equal exchange of ideas and information and for knowledge sharing.

“Community radio”, a concept popularised by the efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), introduced into several low-income regions of the world during the 1960s, has had significant success in

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1  www.plan-international.org/action/participation/radio/lifeline
tackling poverty, ill health, malnutrition and a number of other social issues. UNESCO’s community radio experiments demonstrated that involving people and local communities and creating a sense of belonging and participation could effect social change. The Bush Radio initiative in South Africa is a good example of how radio can be socially responsible.

THE BUSH RADIO INITIATIVE

According to Zane Ibrahim, its Managing Director, Bush Radio came out of a struggle against all odds – from fighting for the basic right to set up a community radio network to the broader legacy of decades of apartheid, poverty and other forms of injustice. Its civic nature and the democratic participation that it encourages can be seen in its mission statement, which says that Bush Radio aims to ensure that:

... communities who have been denied access to resources take part in producing ethical, creative and responsible radio that encourages them to communicate with each other, to take part in decisions that affect their lives, and to celebrate their own cultures. (From www.bushradio.co.za/about/about.htm)

Anyone living in the areas of broadcast coverage – mainly the Western Cape region, a historically black and poor neighbourhood – can participate. Programmes are broadcast in Xhosa, Afrikaans and English.

Radio for children and young people

The rights of children and young people to broadcast and use radio, and its important role in education, learning and literacy, are central themes of the Bush Radio initiative.\(^2\) An important contribution has been in sketching a radio manifesto – a declaration of children’s right to free expression – through the annual convention of children from various parts of the world, popularly known as “Radio Kidocracy”.\(^3\) The manifesto, which has become a central document for many radio experiments around the world, was drafted through a series of discussions, spread over three years, involving hundreds of children and young people. It articulates the basic rights of children and young people to express ideas via media, calls on professional broadcasters and media

\(^2\) Some of the ideas outlined here are discussed in Asthana, 2006.

\(^3\) The radio manifesto can be accessed at: www.worldradioforum.org/manifesto/RadioManifesto.pdf
to integrate children’s and youth perspectives in their programming, and more importantly, positions radio as the central medium for the expression of children’s voices.

Central to Bush Radio’s philosophy is the notion that children and young people ought to be equal partners in building a better world through radio. An important idea is to enable and empower children and young people by providing them opportunities for self-expression and freedom to imagine the world in their own ways. Bush Radio’s overall philosophy is articulated through the radio’s structure: institutional, policy-related, programme production and distribution (Asthana, 2006).

The main task is to enable participation of young people in various developmental topics that they want to pursue via radio. The process is entirely driven by young people with some outside professional advice and support. It is clear that participants seek to go beyond merely using media to voice their opinions. Rather, an abiding interest in radio has led to numerous children going on to pursue professional careers as civic broadcast journalists.


CREW is involved in training children in radio presentation and production skills – writing scripts, interviewing skills, and learning about technical radio equipment. The CREW project broadcasts radio programmes in three segments for different age groups: BushTots for ages 6 to 9, BushKidz for ages 10 to 12 and BushTeens for ages 13 to 18. This is an innovative programming strategy that encourages children of different age groups to produce and present programmes on their own.

To curb and reduce crime and to build opportunities for young people involved in criminal activities, Bush Radio developed a unique programme called “Township Heroes”. This uses a multi-pronged approach and involves several social actors. Rather than attacking young people who are prone to criminal activity for a variety of reasons, Bush Radio, through “Township Heroes” seeks to bring young people into dialogue with each other and the larger community. It is a socially responsible strategy not only in tackling crime, but also in discussing the underlying causes that led to it in the first place. A young person from the local townships of Cape Flats, a neighbourhood in Western Cape, is selected as a hero. S/he talks to other young people through several radio discussions and open phone line conversations about his or her life. The programming is open-ended and participatory and sensitises listeners – adults as well as young people – to the complicated nature of the issue. The dialogues between young people and also some older listeners from the community who participate in the phone-in
conversations, leads to a recognition of different points of view and understanding of
the issue. “Township Heroes” enables young people to take charge of their own lives
and the media.

The Youth Against AIDS (YAA 2000) project began by involving young people
from several regions of Cape Town. The idea was to allow young people to take owner-
ship of the issue and talk about it in ways they deemed suitable and convenient. This
made YAA 2000 go beyond generating awareness towards making social change. YAA
led to the evolution of the HIV Hop on-air campaign, developed by Madunia, an inde-
pendent social communication organisation, in close discussions with Bush Radio.
This is a creative and innovative approach that utilises rap music as a medium to com-
municate and connect with young people in providing education related to HIV and
AIDS. Although radio is an integral part of this project, the campaign is carried out
through several other media forms like print, movies, music videos, video games and
the Internet. This combination ensures that the message can be effectively commu-
nicated. More importantly, Bush Radio is aware that young people are now becoming
familiar with multiple media and that the best way to reach them is to involve all the
various media forms.

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approach that utilises rap music as a medium to communicate
and connect with youngsters in providing education related to
HIV and AIDS.

After discussions with a number of health professionals, a series of HIV and AIDS mes-
sages were crafted that were then provided to several local rap artists to write lyrics
and develop songs on the topic. Other types of expressions – poetry, graffiti and slang
humour – were also used to involve young people as partners. For Bush Radio, HIV Hop
goes beyond simply broadcasting AIDS-related messages; it is about placing the topic in
a broader social context to which young people can relate. Bush Radio states that:

We cannot look at the lack of education and not examine the complex
social hierarchy that existed during apartheid and now post-apartheid
South Africa. With the HIV Hop project Bush Radio is trying to alert
young people to some of the larger issues of culture, tradition, exist-
ing socio-economic trends and conditions – and the socialization of
men and women in South African society in an effort to encourage the
employment of critical thought when analyzing issues such as HIV
and AIDS and contextualizing them. (From www.bushradio.co.za)
Instead of taking a patronising tone, HIV Hop seeks to engage young people through entertainment. In 2004, rappers from Cape Town and Amsterdam, The Netherlands, participated in an HIV Hop concert that generated excitement among young people in both countries. Defending the use of popular entertainment for social causes, Ibrahim asserts that:

... there’s no way you can keep out the entertainment completely, because the record companies are just blasting it out, but the spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down – we let them play their music, but there’s got to be a message in there. If it’s not educational or informative, we don’t want it on Bush Radio. But if that music is going to be informative or educational, great! (in Michaud, 2003)

Other community radio programming

In addition, Bush Radio has been successful in creating and sustaining several innovative programme formats, such as Community Law, Taxi Talk and Prison Radio. Programming is structured around community concerns that are local and particular to the region of South Africa it serves. For example, the station brokered a peace agreement between the gangs that control the local taxi services after the Taxi Talk programme got the gangs talking to each other. In addition, during a crisis between the gangs, the police and the vigilante group PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs), the station hosted a debate in an attempt to bring peace to the region. Currently, several groups are using the gender programme for discussion. Bush Radio notes that reference is frequently made to what was heard on the radio at town meetings, in parliament and even on other radio stations.

Bush Radio on the Web

Some interesting developments at Bush Radio include the utilisation of new information and communication technology (ICT) in its programming. The programmes can be heard online via the Internet. In addition, in order to create a sense of participation among the young producers of the various programme genres – and the “cross pollination of creative and critical ideas” – the Bush website serves as an online facilitator for the dialogues and discussions. A more recent addition includes Bush Radio blogs, which are becoming increasingly popular not only with its primary members but also the larger community. The Bush Radio news “blogspot” offers a range of diverse perspectives and voices on topics from the local to the global (see www.
bushradionews.blogspot.com). These blogs, unlike the many commercial blogs, can be viewed as some sort of an emerging “community blog media” that are integrated with radio, and also extend radio’s potential and scope in imaginative ways. For instance, one feature provides visibility to the newsroom, the programming and the radio hosts. Interactive communication with other bloggers opens up the “spaces of dialogue” hitherto restricted to the radio medium. Another important feature of the blogs is their ability to extend the “life” of radio programmes – concerning the environment, health or poverty, for example – via the Internet.

CONCLUSIONS

Bush Radio from South Africa is a good example of creative and socially responsible radio journalism. In particular, it demonstrates that the struggle for the recognition of children’s rights through radio use has a deep impact for both the participants and larger community. Young people showed that radio could become a powerful apparatus for communicating messages and building solidarity among members of the community at the local level. Democracy and development acquire newer meanings in the hands of young people. The conversations between young participants revealed that they are not only capable of understanding complex issues, but can act on these as well. The powerful mediations via radio provide exemplary instances of democratic participation. The curiosity, creativity and motivation of the young people not only taps the potential of radio, but also shows to the adult world how to deploy radio for pursuing sensible all-round development for our collective futures.

References

3.
Doorways for Open and Distance E-learning in the Kingdom of Lesotho

*Kallie de Beer*

**OVERVIEW**

The focus of this chapter is on some possibilities for using open and distance e-learning (ODEL) for peacebuilding education in the Kingdom of Lesotho. Lesotho is a land-locked state entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. In 1868 (when it was called Basutoland), it was declared a protectorate of the British Government together with Botswana (then Bechuanaland) and Swaziland. This secured the survival of the Basotho as a political entity, though they lost a significant amount of land (Odendaal, 2000). After independence in 1966, the country was challenged by conflict involving resources, electoral systems, behaviour of the political elite, youth alienation, questioning of the legitimacy of government and incompetent management of civil/military relations (Tladi, 2009). The country’s geographic location within South Africa has also contributed to its instability, particularly during the apartheid period.

Sustainable civic education is currently necessary to assure long-lasting peace and prosperity. Post-conflict reconstruction includes the process of rebuilding the political, security, social and economic dimensions of a society emerging from conflict. It also involves addressing the root causes of the conflict and promoting social and economic justice as well as the rule of law (Murithi, 2006). ODEL could provide a means to reconcile conflicts and transform adversarial norms. The National University of Lesotho (NUL) at the town of Roma was founded on distance education, which was linked to the other protectorates of that time. Today, NUL is linked through a wider distance
education system to Maseru (the capital), Leribe and Thaba Tseka. Other opportunities for ODEL include the Meraka Institute’s Digital Doorway and the widespread coverage of radio broadcasting.

THE NATURE OF THE LESOTHO CONFLICT

During the apartheid era Lesotho became increasingly subjected to pressure because of sheltering and protecting African National Congress (ANC) activists, now in the South African Government, as well as refugees, and because it had established ties with communist governments. Both of these actions were perceived as direct political threats to the apartheid regime (Mwangi, 2007 in Mwangi, 2009). South Africa closed the border in 1986, leading to economic disruption and a subsequent coup by the military, which ran the country for the next seven years.

In 1995, the army staged another coup, removing the democratically elected leader and putting King Letsie III in his place. Three years later demonstrations and civil unrest following elections that were widely perceived as corrupt led to looting in Maseru and the closure of the Bank of Lesotho. A key feature of the crisis was “intense rivalry between élite-dominated political parties over access to state power and state resources within a worsening environment of poverty, unemployment and limited economic options” (Santho, 2000). An army mutiny meant that soldiers were unable to control the chaos, and rumours of another coup brought in troops from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to stabilise the situation.

As a member of the Southern African Custom Union (SACU), Lesotho also became increasingly economically dependent on South Africa since the latter determined the customs rates and operated the system to protect its own economic interests (Jaster, 1992; Mbeki and Nkosi, 1992; Mwangi, 2007 in Mwangi, 2009). The country is two-thirds mountainous, lacks arable land and has little mineral wealth. Its main source of income for many years was migrant labour in the South African gold mines; this has had devastating effects on the country’s social fabric, leaving rural areas with few working age men and high rates of HIV and AIDS (Odendaal, 2000). Its key asset now is water, which is pumped to South Africa. During the 1998 political unrest, South African soldiers went to “secure” the Katse Dam even though it was far from the unrest areas, killing 11 Lesotho soldiers (ibid.).

Persistent political problems that have adversely affected Lesotho’s transition toward and consolidation of democratic governance have included inter-party conflicts, born of a focus more on adversarial relationships and on personalities and power, and less on substantive policy debate; intra-party conflict leading to factionalisation and splits within established political parties, thus fostering a culture of contentious and divisive politics; tensions between traditional and elected leaders at local government
level (because elected and appointed local councils are assuming roles traditionally exercised by chiefs and because the role of the chiefs has had to be redefined); and tensions between principal chiefs and political parties in parliament, as the relationship between the two still needed creative elaboration (Mwangi, 2009).

A recent research document on the changing attitudes towards democracy in the country, however, describes a transformation of its democratic practices. It reflects on three surveys on political attitudes and values conducted in 2000, 2003 and 2005. The outcomes show that, overall, Lesotho's Government appears to be politically stable and that democracy is regarded as a worthy political dispensation. It supports civil freedom, and there is a growing feeling of trust in the public and government sectors (Afrobarometer, 2006).

**USING ODEL TO ENHANCE PEACE**

A number of ODEL initiatives have been started in the country. The University of South Africa (UNISA), the largest distance education institution in southern Africa, initiated a plan for an electronic network for the region that could be managed from Maseru. Unfortunately, this project failed due to lack of sustainable financial support (Mostert, 2009). Momentum was still ongoing when the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) e-learning project was launched in 16 African countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. However, bureaucracy in the clearance of equipment at airports caused delays in setting this up (Ochieng, 2007).

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) promotes ODEL in the country by supporting active participation from Lesotho in the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) initiative (COL, 2006). COL is also supporting numerous representatives from Lesotho to attend professional development programmes, forums and policy development initiatives.

In the context of the SADC Protocol, which has already opened academic exchange agreements, the Southern African Regional Universities Association was established in 2005. This Association as well as the Association for African Universities (AAU) reiterated their commitment to enhance peace on the continent at the 11th AAU General Conference held in Cape Town in 2005. Commitments were also made at this conference by both the former President of South Africa, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, and the Minister of National Education, Ms Naledi Pandor, to assist the networking process of the AAU within the NEPAD agreement of the African Union (AAU, 2005). The consensus is that ODEL provides the only strategy to align and support existing structures, including the African Council for Distance Education, which was formally launched in 2004.
The media and other civil society organisations have played a positive role in conflict management and democratisation, particularly during the pre- and post-election periods.

Dr. Mwangi of the NUL confirms the existence of civic education and some forms of conflict management in Lesotho: “The media and other civil society organisations have played a positive role in conflict management and democratisation particularly during the pre- and post-election periods. The country’s Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), for example, has conducted civic education programmes especially on voter education through radio, which are aimed at conflict prevention. Civil society organisations such as the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (LCN) have also conducted civic education programmes dealing with conflict management through various forums such as the electronic and print media, conferences and stakeholders workshops” (Mwangi, 2009). There was also a short-lived Partners in Conflict Lesotho Project (see box).

There have been several adult basic education training (ABET) schemes in Lesotho. ABET aims to provide writing and reading skills as well as academic language proficiency short courses at grassroots level. For example, when international concerns constructed the Katse Dam and the Malibamatso Hydro-electrical Scheme, American distance educators taught English through ABET at Thaba-Tseka and Leribe. Eventually these ABET centres were linked to the distance education programmes of the NUL at Roma and its Institute for Extra-mural Studies (IEMS) in Maseru (de Beer, 1995).

It is at the grassroots level that traditional community leaders (read decision makers) represent the ordinary citizens of most southern African societies. The local level can be analysed as a microcosm of the larger conflict, with communities often split into conflicting groups along lines of identity. There is often deep-rooted hatred and animosity in such communities, which can spill over into daily conflict. ABET programmes could be implemented to reach far-off communities with ODEL delivery systems and open education resources (OER) materials.
THE PARTNERS IN CONFLICT IN LESOTHO PROJECT

The Partners in Conflict in Lesotho Project, a sustained programme for civil society, peace and capacity building, began in 2001 as a partnership initiative between NUL’s Department of Political and Administrative Studies and the University of Maryland’s Center for International Development and Conflict Management (UMD-CIDCM), in response to a request for assistance from the Lesotho Ambassador to the United States. Primary funding through 2003 was provided by the US Government’s Education for Democracy and Development Initiative (EDDI). The Project Director, the Head of Department of Political and Administrative Studies of NUL, was supported by an interdisciplinary team of professionals representing the University Departments of Education, Law, Sociology and Political and Administrative Studies. The Project was linked to the National University Administration, various NGOs, multilateral and bilateral organisations, the Government and other political actors such as political party leaders and chiefs. During its first two years of operation it directly engaged a number of stakeholders, including different political parties represented in parliament, ministries (particularly the Ministry of Local Government) and others such as the police (Ministry of Home Affairs), local chiefs, principal chiefs, community councils, District Secretaries, various NGOs, the parliament, the media, officials of NUL and the funding agency EDDI. However, it collapsed due to a number of administrative reasons (see ACCORD, 2008).

THE DIGITAL DOORWAY OF MERAKA AND MOTATAISI

The Lesotho Government’s policy on information and communications technology (ICT) (2005) clearly states that ICTs provide ways and means to empower both women and children and furnish them with skills to become decision makers. Three years after this policy was announced, significant progress was made when the Motataisi Foundation, a non-profit public-private organisation consulted with the Meraka Institute of South Africa to extend their Digital Doorway project into Lesotho.

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The Lesotho Government’s policy on information and communication technology (ICT) (2005) clearly states that ICTs provide means and ways to empower both women and children and furnish them with skills to become decision makers.
The Meraka Institute of the Council for Science and Industrial Research (CSIR), Pretoria, is funded by the South African Department for Science and Technology and falls within the perimeter of the NEPAD e-policy of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs. Meraka’s aim is to provide education via GPRS (low cell phone frequency signals) to computers contained in robust housings (see picture). The Digital Doorway is a free-standing computer terminal that allows 24-hour access while content can be customised according to community needs. These outdoor solar-powered machines have already been distributed all over southern Africa. Although not linked to the Internet, they have immense potential for programmes that include peacekeeping or conflict resolution modules – for example, on V-Books via a CD or DVD.

After the Meraka Institute obtained funding from the Commonwealth Secretariat for the Government of Lesotho’s Education for All policy (Ntsekhe-Nzima, 2009), it launched a pilot project in collaboration with the Commonwealth Connects Programme in the little Ha Tsolo community near Maseru during 2008. The computer is installed at the gate of the Coordinator’s home. The vision is “to populate the Motataisi with content from government ministries, international best practice[s], educational and training material[s] and also providing micro-service opportunities to the community” (Ntsekhe-Nzima, 2009).

At first, questions were raised by the citizens of Lesotho – who had recently experienced the military intervention by the South African National Defence Force mentioned earlier – whether this machine was part of some obscure intelligence operation or a political ploy to buy votes. However, substantial progress was reported to the Commonwealth Secretariat on the milestones reached, as well as completion dates of Digital Doorway implementation, basic training in accessing content and the sustainability of the project (Digital Doorway, 2009). In her report presented to the Secretariat and the Meraka Institute in February 2009, the Coordinator referred, inter alia, to the following:

- That there were no other outlets to access information, especially civic information on rights and governance;
- The need for information on local government; and
- Issues about birth certificates and social services provided by the Government.

The project plans to locate the outdoor computers where they will be highly visible, while the content will be created in partnership with NUL and with the expertise of South Africa. Solar power and batteries are part of the implementation; if the site has no cellular signal, the nearest place for accessing a signal will be pinpointed for downloading purposes.
Drawbacks are that Meraka personnel are often called into Lesotho to address technical problems because of the lack of local expertise. Electricity and Internet connection are also problematic, as well as keeping the learning content relevant.

**CELL PHONES, RADIO AND MOBILE LEARNING**

Cell phone networks in Lesotho are concentrated in the bigger urban areas with their use being limited in the mountainous rural areas. Using cell phones for learning will be the way for future investment in Africa to explore wider delivery for ODEL instead of more expensive web-based teaching and learning (COL, 2009). Cell phones will soon have the processing possibilities of current desktop PCs. Equipped with powerful digital cameras and interactive features, they can display digital video and audio files. The fastest growth of cell phones in the developing world has been in sub-Saharan Africa at some 77 million. However, 90 per cent of Africans in 2006 still lacked access to a phone and 98.5 per cent were without Internet access (ICDE, 2009).

According to Mwangi (2009), “Lesotho has about 53,100 telephone lines and about 456,000 cellular mobile telephones in use. Its telephone system can be described as a rudimentary system consisting of a modest but growing number of landlines, a small microwave radio relay system and a small radiotelephone communication system. The mobile-cellular telephone system is expanding. Maseru district accounts for 71 per cent of the telephone lines, leaving the other nine districts to share the remaining 29 per cent. Public telephones are only found in urban areas, confirming that telephone communication is very limited in the rural areas. The country has several radio stations and one state-owned television station. There are about 83 Internets hosts and about 70,000 Internet users. Radio plays a key role in promoting various development initiatives. The broadcasting service covers about 75 per cent of the country with the larger percentage in the urban areas. In the last decade the Government has issued a number of radio licenses for private radio stations that have extended listeners’ choice considerably.”

For learners in remote areas of Lesotho it would be possible to upload their MP-3 players or new technology cell phones at kiosks or post offices with learning materials on civic education. This technology would also enable citizens to participate in the political process. Transparency and accountability to the rule of law could be enhanced through such an e-Government system (Government of Lesotho, 2005).

However, the digital divide is still too wide to claim any tangible successes in e-learning, particularly for conflict resolution. More research is needed on how radio, SMS texting and other electronic delivery modes could build peace by and for people in communities.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The Motataisi Foundation**

The way forward with the Meraka Institute’s Digital Doorway and the Motataisi Foundation should include collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to take civic education to the remote parts of Lesotho (Digital Doorway, 2009). Fragmented actions of Desk-South Africa and Desk-Lesotho at the Commonwealth Secretariat – in collaboration with Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) plus the US Peace Corps Lesotho and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) – have to be combined into a focused effort to involve all the relevant players, such as the Open Learning Systems Education Trust (OLSET) of South Africa. There is an excellent opportunity to partner with the Motataisi Foundation and Wireless Africa. The Executive Director of OLSET has said that he welcomes negotiations for civic education with conflict and peacekeeping modules (Naidoo, 2009).

- **Exploring other methods of content delivery**

Another method of content delivery that should not be ruled out is the use of Intelsat 10 (Baird, 2009). This satellite has a footprint across southern Africa and could be used to transmit information to key locations. With satellite decoders or receivers at specified locations such as libraries, schools or clinics, information could be distributed quickly to these venues. Because of the high prices of bandwidth and low penetration of technology into Lesotho, this could be a viable alternative.

Cell phone technology can also be used to inform participants of the dates and times of new content being made available and where. Cell phones can also be used to distribute short information snippets and to enhance the learning experience of these participants by giving them the ability to ask questions through the SMS system. Feedback can then be easily given.

- **Accreditation of peacekeeping modules**

Lack of civic education can be a contributing factor to many local conflicts. Broader conflict resolution skills are a real need to solve disputes and conflicts so that they do not result in violence and corruption, especially at grassroots levels. Unfortunately there are no accredited modules available. Consequently state subsidies cannot be claimed under the Skills Development Act in South Africa, while unaccredited qualifications elsewhere are not recognised for promotion of government officials, for example, Correctional Services staff (de Beer, Fredericks and Bohloko, 2008). Accreditation
of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Peacekeeping Operations Correspondence Instruction (POCI) for higher education institutions or vocational colleges in southern Africa is therefore a priority.

- **Best practices quality civic education content**

ODEL teaching and learning material should be unbiased without political indoctrination and should, inter alia, promote the idea that “it is incompatible differences which give rise to conflict ... it is not the objective incompatibility that is crucial but rather the perceived incompatibility” (Deutsch, 1991). Too often, conflict at the community level is precipitated by inaccurate stereotypes, and the hypothesis is that the increased knowledge resulting from increased contact between rival parties will reduce prejudice levels. This makes sense because fear is a major cause of prejudice. In the case of the other, we have “a fear of the unknown, a fear of the unfamiliar. If fear is the father of prejudice, ignorance is its grandfather” (Stephan and Stephan, 2000, p. 38, quoted in Spies, 2009).

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4.

Creating Spaces for Dialogue on Children’s Rights: “Curious Minds” from Ghana

Sanjay Asthana

INTRODUCTION

“Curious Minds”, a series of radio programmes for children and young people on Ghana’s national radio, is focused on children’s rights. The radio programmes explore a variety of educational and developmental topics pertaining to children. The initiative was started by an independent group, Women-in-Broadcasting, and over the years several organisations such as Plan Ghana and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) added their support.¹ The name was chosen to suggest the inquisitive and curious nature of children.

“Curious Minds” has provided young members with a rare opportunity to gain self-confidence and assertiveness while participating in the radio programmes. One young girl described her experience as follows:

I feared a little when I was asked to join the group. I thought it would never happen for my voice to be on radio. I won’t even see a studio, let alone be on air. Yet I started after the training as a presenter sometimes

¹ See background information on the UNICEF website: www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ghana_48419.html
feeling the butterflies in the pit of my belly. Now it is all gone. (Quoted in Obeng-Kyreh, 2008)

What this indicates is that young members become successful not only in expressing their own ideas, but in becoming full participants in community activities. Radio plays a central role in their lives. The various programmes of “Curious Minds”, broadcast in English and the local language, Ga, span several regions of Ghana. Children and young members of “Curious Minds” participate in a variety of community activities: visiting rural areas to talk about the importance of education and health, and holding discussions with local adult community leaders and governmental officials on the importance of including children’s voices in developmental activities. Kingsley Obeng-Kyreh, the show’s producer, states that children not only manage and run the day-to-day affairs of the shows but generate new ideas as well (2008).

PROGRAMME FORMAT AND CONTENT

“Curious Minds” started as a half-hour recorded programme, but later became live on air. As the children took control of the programming, they developed the content independently without any help from adult broadcasters. In a couple of years the children even extended the broadcast time to one hour and began collaborating with other local radio networks. Obeng-Kyreh (2008) asserts that “those [children] who took the lead in the group were now acting as trainers to younger members who joined. The programmes were finally extended to one hour and the group had a new programme on OBONU FM, a community station that used a local language.” This expansion of ‘Curious Minds’ also received support from UNICEF.

The radio broadcasts of “Curious Minds” are divided into several segments. Each segment has a specific format. A pilot programme called Yen Adwen, (“Our Opinion”) became popular. This led to others like the “Letters to the One Who Cares”, and “Facts Corner”. “Curious Minds” also produced a six-part radio series called “Digital Diaries” where young people talked about their own lives in the context of rights. Berenice, a young member, talked about how the advocacy of children’s rights left an indelible impression on her mind and made her a confident youngster.2

Her concern about issues of poverty, child labour, regional violence and gender discrimination comes through clearly as she takes us through the intimate workings of the day: to the local market, to the

offices of “Curious Minds”, and eventually to her first weeks at the University of Ghana in Accra.

For many audiences, listening to Berenice’s story provided hope and inspiration. In another episode of “Digital Diaries”, Jovia, a 15-year-old from a small village in northeast Ghana, talked about how his day begins and ends: working from early morning, doing household chores and trekking miles to attend school.

An interesting and innovative live programme that was presented by the children drew on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to persuade Ghana’s adults of the need to implement policies that promote children’s rights and interests. Obeng-Kyreh suggests that the children who participated in the radio programme were like little legal experts and made innovative use of radio in advocating their rights.

“Curious Minds” has steadily grown during the past ten years in terms of its members as well as the number of radio stations – with more than 200 children as active members and eight radio stations spread across Ghana.

CONCLUSION

Obeng-Kyreh (2008) points out that in Ghana radio is an effective and popular medium:

Personally, it was my argument that those who say the ICT era and the convergence criteria have made radio obsolete did not have a firm grasp of the situation in developing countries. ... Radio for developing countries still serves as a point of mobilisation for development. Apart from serving its well-known purpose of educating, informing and also entertaining its audience, radio also inspires a large segment of the populace to hold firmly to their developmental aspirations. It is not surprising in my country to still see people crowded around radio sets listening to some programmes.

An argument for the relevance of “Curious Minds” can be made in terms of the self-confidence of its young members. Having grown-up as a member of the show, Berenice has become not only conscious of her rights, but an advocate and activist as well. Another member, Samuel, a 16-year-old presenter, says that raising awareness about children’s rights is the first step in building consciousness. For him radio is a crucial medium for creating and sustaining this awareness. These are powerful examples of how radio can be effectively harnessed by children and young people in changing their lives and creating a better world. The dialogues that children and young people create
within themselves and with others around them via radio are exemplary instances of learning and non-formal education.

... radio can be effectively harnessed by children and young people in changing their lives and creating a better world. The dialogues that children and young people create within themselves and with others around them via radio are exemplary instances of learning and non-formal education.

Although the main aim of the programmes is advancing children’s rights, they have also explored an interesting set of issues from the personal to the political and social. On most occasions, child members bring creative ideas regarding their view of the world, which they then have the opportunity to express. Interestingly, the child broadcasters do not conceive of their listeners as passive receivers; rather, in an uncanny way, they seem to dissolve the perceived separation between speaker and listener, what Walter Benjamin had termed the major flaw in the makings of the institution of radio. “Curious Minds” offers the potential for creating ‘spaces for dialogue’ that give rise to empowering and enabling communication.

Reference

5.
Learning for Peace Through Community Radio in Northern Uganda: the Case of Radio Apac

Carol Azungi Dralega

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how radio in northern Uganda is being used to engage the communities that have been through war in learning for peace. For over two decades the region has undergone massive dislocation and damage. Over 500,000 people have lost their lives, over 1.6 million have been displaced from their homelands and over 80 per cent of children are orphans (Women’s Commission, 2005). Today, the region is in a fragile state of “warlessness” and communities are braving their way back to their former homes to face the massive effects and consequences of the conflict. One of the biggest casualties has been the damage to education as the school system was brought to a standstill.

According to a report by the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, “For a long time, in order to avoid abduction, about 45,000 children had to ‘night commute’ each evening, walking from their homes to centers where they sleep en masse, most often on the ground. They are cold, there are not enough latrines or water sources, and there is little light. Incidents of gender-based violence and stealing occur. In the morning, the children walk home, perhaps eat something, and then walk

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1 As opposed to peace, because the lack of war does not mean there is peace.
to school” (ibid., 2005, p. 1). The report also indicates that the illiteracy levels in the region are the highest in the country and the quality of education is wanting. However, the problem of illiteracy and a poor education system are not restricted to the northern region as the national illiteracy level still stands at 67 per cent (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2007). It is because of this situation that the Government established Universal Primary Education (UPE) and is in the processes of establishing Universal Secondary Education (USE). These developments are in line with continental developments such as the Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, adopted in Lome, Togo and in Durban, South Africa in July 2002, which committed the Union to “revitalizing and extending the provision of education, technical training and health services” (Pityana, 2004).

OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN UGANDA

In response to the call to prioritise education for a continent fraught with high illiteracy levels across all generations, the philosophy and practice of open distance learning (ODL) has now become a policy option for a growing number of African states. In Uganda, ODL is being pursued through both formal and informal channels. Formally, the first ODL institution – the Department of Distance Education – was established in 1992 under the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) at Makerere University to “develop a more flexible mode of education that caters for a variety of needs, changing circumstances and learning requirements” among other things. This programme pursues the global rationale of learning that:

- combines the world of work with learning;
- targets mature learners, i.e., those with the capacity to assess their circumstances, make life choices and be active discoverers and constructors of their own learning (in other words, they are not mere passive recipients of information, but digest, engage and reflect from their own experience and discover themselves anew);
- engages the learner in collaborative and creative interaction;
- employs very clear language and/or texts and illustrations;
- includes student support as another critical element.

The IACE programme has centres across the country in the districts of Kampala, Kabale, Gulu, Jinja, Mbale, Arua, Hoima, Fort Portal and Lira. These centres have resources that accommodate several functions ranging from teaching through repositories of

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2 Makarere University, Institute of Adult and Continuing Education brochure. Also see http://distance.mak.ac.ug.
study materials to information and communications technology (ICT) access and training. They also host face-to-face sessions, library facilities, assignment depositing and guidance and counselling.

However, the main focus of this chapter is the more informal ODL approaches, particularly through community media. For communities such as the ones targeted in this study (post-conflict areas) whose education systems have broken down, ODL can serve the needs of adult learners in particular, and community media can be a vital enabler of this kind of learning.

**Using community media for learning**

Contemporary community media fulfil (or are meant to fulfil) grassroots/rural needs for information, education and entertainment that are most often overlooked or not served by mainstream media (Wanyeki, 2000). Mainstream media – which have dominated the Ugandan and indeed the African mediascape since colonial times – have been accused of top-down, elitist and expert-generated content and have for the most part failed to bring about social change at the grassroots (Chibita 2006; Dralega 2008). Community media, on the other hand, are supposed to be owned and operated by the communities they serve and should reflect not just the voices of the people but also their culture and ideals (Jones and Lewis, 2005). Unlike commercially driven or “mass” media, they are expected to serve the specific needs, capacities and aspirations of their respective communities (Dagron, 2001). More importantly, community media are predominantly non-profit institutions (ibid.), which may contrast with the more formal institutions such as IACE that offer ODL at a fee that is too high for poor and marginalised communities such as those considered here.

Community media have an especially important role to play in communities that are in dire need of increased awareness and educative programmes about peacebuilding and community reconstruction.

Community media have an especially important role to play in communities that are in dire need of increased awareness and educative programmes about peacebuilding and community reconstruction. One of the ideals of such media that corresponds with the ODL principle of interactivity and collaborative learning is to foster participatory approaches to communication that are inclusive of the community from problem (or programme) identification, through implementation to evaluation of programmes (Jacobson and Servaes, 1999; Dralega, 2008). These participatory approaches must
include communicative spaces for dialogue and two-way flows of communication that foster win-win solutions to complex issues (Dralega, 2008). In this way, community media can make the learning challenges less steep and more at the level and capacity of local communities as they collectively forge their way towards a brighter future.

In promoting ODL, community media must therefore promote non-formal methods such as pictures, graphs and other non-textual material in addition to audio, and use local language that is appealing, understandable and relevant for the largely illiterate sections of the community. In addition, community-focused media must have gender approaches to deal with the special needs of women (Wanyeki 2000; Dralega 2007).

While partnering or collaborating with local organisations, educative programmes of local community media must reflect the cultural specificities of the communities concerned (Bessette, 2004). It is therefore through partnerships – with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local government and/or cultural leaders – together with community participation and dialogue that community media can ably promote distance learning for a given cause be it development, peacebuilding or community reconstruction.

**APAC FM 92.9 – PROMOTING LEARNING FOR PEACE**

Radio Apac was started in 2000 as a “briefcase radio” with donations from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and support from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). After a five year pilot phase, the radio station has become owned and sustained by the community. Today, it supports itself through advertisements from partner organisations that air their programmes and announcements. The station boasts of coverage in Lira, Apac, Oyam, Dokolo, Amolatar, Kaberamaido, Abim, parts of Nakasongola, Masindi, Pader and Gulu districts and has a listenership of over 3 million people.

Radio Apac has a wide range of programmes. However, it is the learning approaches within the following six educative programmes on peacebuilding and community reconstruction that are the focus in this chapter:

- **Peace and Reconciliation**, Monday–Friday, 19:30–20:00
- **Community Focus** (a community dialogue programme), Monday–Friday, 07:00–08:00
- **Plan for Reconstruction and Development Programme (PRDP)**, Saturdays, 10:00–12:00

3 More information on Radio Apac can be found at [www.interconnection.org/radioapac/home.htm](http://www.interconnection.org/radioapac/home.htm)
- *Crime Report*, Wednesdays, 10:00–11:00
- *Community Liaison Office*, Tuesdays 10:00–10:30 and Fridays 10:00–10:30 and 10:30–11:00
- *Opur Orwate* (farmers’ programme), Monday–Thursday, 16:00–16:30
- *Women’s Forum*, Monday–Friday, 17:00–18:00

All these programmes consist of participatory and discursive platforms in the form of talk shows on which guests (experts or not) are asked to express their knowledge of a given subject. Often, a presenter introduces a programme by giving details of a topic (e.g., tolerance in the community). The topic is then discussed briefly by either the reporter/moderator or the guest(s) and then listeners’ contributions are invited. Members of the public call or text questions, answers or thoughts that are aired live while other listeners are allowed to react to these call-ins.

**Examples from the programmes teaching tolerance and reconciliation**

In early 2009, a caller told the *Community Focus* programme that some thieves who had robbed a shop had been caught by villagers who intended to stone them to death. The issue was then negotiated live on air with people debating what punishment should best be administered to the culprits – some called in demanding their deaths, others rejecting mob justice, others (born-again Christians) telling them to “get saved” and others calling for swift police action, etc. The radio station’s stance was to spread tolerance and calm until the police arrived at the scene and saved the thieves’ lives by arresting them and taking them into custody. Here we see the community, through the mediation of the community radio, coming together and negotiating for peace, forgiveness and rationality in very emotionally volatile circumstances.

Another example involved rebels who had surrendered from the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). A *Community Focus* programme in 2008 discussed the issue of how to treat former rebels who had committed some of the worst atrocities in their communities for so long. Some callers and mobile phone text messages called for their execution, ostracism, punishment and other negative attitudes indicating the lack of reconciliation and forgiveness. Others offered more positive attitudes. According to Sam Atim, one of the presenters and moderators, the radio station mediates these opposing views in a bid to come to “win-win” stances. “Sometimes, like in this case a community member volunteered his skills and knowledge on the subject on radio to explain the true plight of the returnees. For instance, he argued that returnees were victims themselves as they were in most cases captured and forced to be rebels and some of them have never held a gun or killed anyone – and it is therefore wrong to generalise and stereotype. These people are traumatised and need community support and inclusion to heal.”
These debates, he says, are instrumental in bringing about community understanding and healing while helping people come to terms with the true realities of the strife.

The second approach with returnees is when the radio station invites former rebels who have surrendered and have received amnesty to speak to and invite their colleagues still in the bush to return home. One example was in 2004 when a former commander convinced 20 rebels to surrender. These obtained amnesty. Urging them to come home, the commander reassured his rebel colleagues saying, “I haven’t been killed or tortured like we hear in the bush; please come home”. In this particular case, according to Atim, in order to abandon war and seek peace it helps for the rebels to hear the voices of their colleagues, as it builds trust. In such cases, the station often invites the local authorities – the Resident District Commissioner or Chief of Police – to talk about the details of the amnesty offered by the Government to the LRA. Once again, the community radio performs a vital role as the channel that enables this important transition from war to peace in the “full presence” of the community (listeners) and local authorities as illustrated below.

![Diagram](image-url)
Atim suggests that the problem is that the reconstruction plans for the ex-rebels do not provide resettlement assistance in terms of life skills and income-generating activities for self-sustainability. In the absence of this, he says, “they are sometimes tempted to rob and they end up in jail”.

On Crime Report, the radio station sometimes hosts politicians (like the Resident District Commissioner) who speak of reconciliation and counselling, offer advice on forgiveness and understanding, exalt the benefits of forgiveness and call on people’s better angels as opposed to seeking revenge. Other times the community liaison office (police department) is invited for the call-ins to answer questions on peace and reconciliation from the audience. The liaison officer answers questions related to legal issues and offers advice on crime and punishment based on the law e.g., if you do this, by law you will be charged with that or what repercussions befall someone who seeks revenge.

Aside from the police and politicians, the radio station also has a programme for clan leaders (cultural leaders). These are normally elders who are held in high esteem and respect because they have “blood attachments” as opposed to elected leaders such as members of parliament and politicians who are “ideological brothers”. Sometimes they appear on the Liaison Programme or Crime Report. Three elders every week give “cultural” advice to their clan members on issues related to household and community peace and reconciliation. They stress the importance of harmony and tolerance in the community and the need to build good relationships with neighbours, etc., all based on cultural beliefs, values and practices.

During these programmes, listeners call in from mobile phones and also text in their contributions, which are answered by the radio guests or radio presenters. The Internet is used mostly for research and communication by the broadcasters and sometimes to receive queries on particular programmes. Each programme has an e-mail address to which concerned audience members can write.

**Use of drama as a learning tool**

In 2008, under the Women’s Forum programme hosted by Carol Auma, the radio station aired drama episodes of “The Open Cage” in the local language of the region: Luo. The six-episode series, developed in partnership with the International Women’s Tribune Centre in New York, provided information about United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security. It aimed to simplify and demystify the global policy through community radio drama while amplifying grassroots women’s voices. These programmes were developed by women themselves through participatory approaches (i.e., writing workshops, storytelling, story and focus group discussions) in which women from conflict-affected areas in Uganda drew on
real life experiences to highlight UNSCR 1325. After each episode (also aired on 15 other radio stations in east and northern Uganda), a representative from a partner women’s group came on air to highlight and discuss the issues, after which the airwaves were open to the public for debate. This was a great learning process and programme for audiences, women and media broadcasters as well as the local actors who gave the stories life.

The six-episode series … provided information about United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security. It aimed to simplify and demystify the global policy through community radio drama while amplifying grassroots women’s voices.

One of the drawbacks of this particular drama series was that few women called in and most callers were men. The reason given was that few women have telephones, and those who do are at work when the programme is aired. Those without phones have to borrow from husbands, who sometimes do not agree to lend especially “when the issues pinch them”.

Other drama episodes on peace and reconciliation include Lobo wa (“Our country”), which revolves around the importance of living together and tolerance, and Nwongo Jami goba-goba (“Obtaining things by false pretence”), which tackles corruption, wrong doing, culprits of economic crimes and how to solve related issues.

According to Atim, radio offers the best chance for ODL because it caters to the high levels of illiteracy as the messages/information are simplified and use the language of the community. In addition, the presenters have access to a wider audience as compared to text-based and mainstream media – and text-based media like newspapers may not be accessible because of illiteracy and the high costs of newspapers. The messages are also received immediately so that the communities have up-to-date information and can act accordingly.

Mixed approaches – Using graphics, texts and visuals in addition to radio

Posters are important supportive learning media for a community that has many members who cannot read or write. Visual and graphic message presentation plays a crucial role is sending the message home. Such posters, often prepared by NGOs, are put up around the community, the radio stations and the city streets and act as supplementary channels for ODL.
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Capacity deficiency to tackle the enormous dimensions of the problem

Although the radio station was doing a great job with its educative programmes on peacebuilding and community reconstruction, it faced many challenges. The biggest challenge and source of weakness was the poor capacity in terms of:

a. Funds to cater for all their programmes on reconstruction, including funds for community outreach programmes that require posters and graphics as these non-textual channels of communication are most effective for those who are illiterate.

b. Training in how to handle the multitude and complexity of the reconstruction challenges, especially how to manage a local community radio station, local development, participation and issues of post-conflict community reconstruction (this discussion is pursued below).

c. Poor machines and reporting equipment, which impede the success and scope of coverage.

Challenges in dealing with the scope of reconstruction

In relation to the point above, the radio station was “overwhelmed” by the massive list of complex issues of peacebuilding and community reconstruction, which included:

a. Land – the land issue was reported as “a timebomb” as the communities covered by the radio stations were returning home after decades of displacement and homelessness. There have been reports of land grabbing and land misappropriation that have resulted in serious family feuds and even murders. According to Atim, “The issue of land has to be handled very urgently otherwise in the next 5-10 years we will have a catastrophe in our community”. In all these wrangles, women (especially widows) and orphans lose out as they are not mentioned or included in solutions. The radio stations are often bombarded by complaints, stories, etc. on the land issue and most times they do not have the capacity and know-how to effectively handle these issues.
b. **Agriculture** – for centuries, agriculture has been the backbone of these communities as they were able to sustain their families and communities and also sell off surpluses. During the long civil strife that forced people from their farms and into camps, the agricultural base was ruined and now people depended on handouts from the United Nations and other aid agencies. There is therefore need for a renewed pedagogical approach to foster learning in sustainable agricultural production, food storage and preservation. This is something the community radio stations can be a part of through airing agricultural programmes.

c. **Education** – The radio stations were also overwhelmed by the educational deficiencies in the region. The deficiency derives from the fact that all schools follow the national curricula, which do not include anything on peacebuilding and reconstruction issues let alone on how to handle post-conflict youth-related needs (and general psychological counselling). Just like the adults, several of the children and young people (especially ex-rebels, orphans, etc.) in these communities underwent trauma and need to learn how to deal with it. The radio station lacks the capacity and know-how to handle this. Although, it collaborates with organisations such as Save the Children (hosting talk shows, for example), this is not enough.

d. **Corruption** – another challenge highlighted by the radio station was the rampant levels of corruption that hinders action for a community that needs answers. Examples included high corruption levels within the legal system, police and other bureaucratic institutions in responding to gender-based violence (in relation to UNSCR 1325), land issues and so on. Everyone demanded bribes to do their work. As a result, in cases of gender-based violence, for instance, victims (usually women) gave up seeking justice and the radio stations had no direct answers and inadequate resources for awareness programmes to educate the community on the repercussions of violence to women.

**Unreliable connections**

Another problem or challenge noted by the station was the unreliable connections to telecommunication and electricity companies. Several times, the telephone lines were
disconnected due to late payments or poor network coverage, which affected especially their participatory programmes. Poor electricity service affected the radio stations pedagogical/education programmes in two ways: for the station, although it had back-up power supplies in the form of a manual generator, rampant power shortages end up costing them dearly on power; for the audience, it means people have to trek several kilometres to charge their mobile phones, which are not just expensive (about US$1 for charging plus airtime) but also time consuming.

Other challenges

Other challenges include the low number of women reached due to their lack of time to listen to radio. Women were under-represented in terms of feedback and call-ins. One reason given for this (as mentioned above) was that many women did not own telephones; their male counterparts (husbands, brothers, etc.) did, so women had to borrow them if they really wanted to call in. Also, some people switched off the radio if the issue covered was a touchy one (UNSCR 1325) or if the speaker was a politician from an opposing political party.

WHAT NEXT? CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

Radio Apac offers interesting lessons on how community radio can play a role in helping communities reconstruct their lives after war and destruction. Some of the winning approaches include the integration of participatory approaches in the educative programmes that let people share their thoughts, experiences, frustrations and aspirations – thereby taking ownership of this effective manner of learning. Through participatory/collaborative learning, the community members are able to negotiate meaning by and for themselves because they are the ones who understand the problems best. The use of drama on radio for learning is also a valid approach to learning as drama (if acted well) can make the message loud, clear and memorable. Combined with local language coverage and the focus on special groups such as youth, women, ex-rebels, etc., this has truly made the radio station a “popular partner” (with the communities) in learning for peace.

However, the challenges noted indicate that the problem at hand is on a much bigger scale than the radio station can handle on its own. This at least was the report from the station itself: in terms of the education system, the socio-psychological ramification on the populace, the total collapse of agriculture and the high levels of corruption, etc. The north is still in dire need of a concerted effort by multiple stakeholders to tackle
the problems these communities are facing. These must move beyond peacebuilding to community reconstruction.

One of the biggest hindrances in the learning process is the massive lack of awareness about peacebuilding, gender and reconstruction that these few programmes cannot sufficiently tackle. For this the radio station requires:

  - Awareness (and funding for) programmes to improve capacity.
    For example:
    - Schools should play a direct role – or have a direct link with the community radio stations – through drama, youth talk shows and debates (which do not yet exist). This will be more effectively done in partnership with NGOs, government bodies and civil society organisations to further learning for peace and reconstruction.
    - Drama programmes need to be expanded in content and channels for dissemination. For instance, in addition to being aired on the radio, they should be shown live in communities.
    - The quality and scope of sensitisation programmes on tolerance, reconstruction, resettlement, etc. should be increased.

In relation to the above, the broadcasters need training in:

  - covering tolerance, peacebuilding and reconstruction issues;
  - ways of supporting UNSCR 1325 that highlight the importance of including women in all decision-making positions and amplifying their voices.

Radio Apac needs increased support from and collaborative work with not just NGOs working on the ground but also government institutions. This support can be channelled into the production of targeted material and increased programmes to cater to the needs of different publics – especially women and youths. For instance, as noted above, the schools in the north follow a national curriculum that has nothing on peace, war and reconstruction issues. A component on this has to be immediately developed and promoted by all – including the community media – in the form of drama, public lectures in schools, school debates, etc.
References


6.
Learning Through Radio: The Experiences of Rural Women in Zimbabwe and Zambia

Rashweat Mukundu

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the effectiveness of radio as a medium of learning for poor women in rural and farm communities in Zimbabwe and Zambia, examining the relevance, motivation, structures and outcomes of the women’s radio listening clubs organised as part of the Development Through Radio (DTR) project. The project is an attempt to use radio in a way that “bridges the gap in terms of access to media by poor rural communities, particularly women” (Matewa, 2002). It aims to create a platform that provides interaction with as well as information and knowledge to rural areas, responding to the need of all citizens in a democratic society to have access to information on which to base their decisions (Lichtenberg, 1990; Keane, 1991).

Apart from sharing information, the radio listening clubs also provide an opportunity for rural women to influence media content. The DTR project can thus be seen as an incursion or push by rural women into the normally closed “public sphere” as

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1 The information in this chapter is largely drawn from reports, experiences and discussions with media organisations involved with the DTR project in Zimbabwe and Zambia. It is a documentation of the DTR project and not a critique or detailed analysis.
constituted by the mainstream state media and the private media,² albeit at a small and localised level. This incursion is based on a desire to overturn the dominance of largely urban views and advance local concerns to national audiences. Rural women are given the opportunity to actively participate in the preparation of development-orientated programmes based on the needs, concerns and priorities of their communities.

The experiences described here show that rural women can benefit from technology (radio) mediated learning through participation. This learning is not confined to literacy but can extend to life lessons in areas such as health, farming, conflict resolution, women’s rights, political participation, influencing government, etc. The radio listening clubs are also breaking cultural barriers and advancing gender equality within social groups. The key element in the structures and effectiveness of the clubs is that women participate in identifying what they want to learn and the problems or areas of interest as well as in producing information on issues of their choice.

² See Habermas, 1989.

The DTR projects are significant because they show how the democratisation of the media and communication can help in socio-economic and political development. In societies such as Zimbabwe, which is facing political violence and economic collapse, the DTR project has helped communities come to terms with their situation as well as provided an outlet for them to talk about their fears and receive and share information on a number of social challenges. It also demonstrates the importance of two-way communication in broadcasting for development by giving a voice to the voiceless. A significant outcome has been enabling women groups in rural areas to talk about, and sometimes find solutions to, their problems. It is hoped that such examples can be replicated in other developing countries where radio remains a major and relevant medium of communication.
POLITICAL CONTEXT AND MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe did not achieve formal independence until 1980 after a protracted guerilla war waged by the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), which eventually merged and were victorious as the Patriotic Front (PF). The first free elections held just prior to independence were won by ZANU-PF, led by Robert Mugabe, who has ruled the country since then. Despite government promises of national reconciliation and democracy, ZAPU-PF was violently suppressed during the 1980s, and organised political opposition was kept to a minimum during the 1990s.

The year 2000 is generally seen as a turning point for the country’s social, economic and political situation. It marked the first defeat of ZANU-PF in a national electoral process, as the party lost a constitutional referendum. In an apparent move to regain political control, the Government embarked on an ill-conceived land reform programme,3 purportedly to address historic colonial injustices but in reality to shore up support from the majority peasant population. Land seizures were accompanied by repressive legislation undermining property rights, constraining the operations of both the private and state-owned media and generally suppressing any dissent.

Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth in 2002 following flawed presidential elections. This suspension was extended in 2003, resulting in the Government pulling out of the grouping. Australia, the European Union, New Zealand and the United States of America subsequently imposed personal or travel sanctions on President Mugabe and senior figures in his government and party.

Legislative measures to stifle opposition were also accompanied by state-sanctioned violence against dissenters. This violence in recent years has claimed an estimated 1,000 lives, mostly of opposition supporters (Crisis Coalition, 2008) and displaced over a million people. Hundreds of journalists have been arrested and harassed, printing presses and newsrooms have been bombed, newspapers have been closed, and hundreds of state media workers, who refused to toe the line, have been dismissed.4 Freedom of expression and media rights were seriously affected by legislation in the period from 2000 to 2006, and the Government continues to retain an almost complete monopoly on the flow and exchange of information.

The few independent media houses still in existence are under constant attack

3 See Chapter 7 – Eds.
from the state and receive letters of caution and reprimand over stories that authorities do not like. The prohibitive cost of newspapers has also affected access by the majority of people – the average price of a newspaper is US$1.00, which is the same as a loaf of bread. There are still rural and peri-urban areas in Zimbabwe where private newspapers are not allowed and those caught reading them are subjected to harassment. In 2002 a teacher was killed in rural Mt Darwin for reading *The Daily News* (MISA, 2003). On the other hand, the state media has remained under the tight grip of the Ministry of Information and Publicity.

The unrelenting propaganda facing Zimbabwe’s ordinary citizens (who do not have access to widespread alternative political reporting) has resulted in a society that is not only misinformed but also increasingly uninterested in participating in national elections, as people fear being caught on the wrong side of the political divide.

**Zambia**

Zambia gained its independence in 1964. In the 1980s and 1990s declining copper prices, economic mismanagement and a prolonged drought hurt the economy. Elections in 1991 brought an end to one-party rule of the Union National Independence Party (UNIP), which lost to the then newly formed and labour-backed Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). The subsequent vote in 1996 saw blatant harassment of opposition parties by the MMD, and the elections in 2001 were marked by administrative problems, with three parties filing a legal petition challenging the election of ruling party (MMD) candidate, Levy Mwanawasa. After President Mwanawasa died in 2008, a by-election saw President Rupiah Banda of the MMD come to power.

Zambia remains among those poor countries heavily affected by HIV and AIDS, and a lack of rural infrastructure and investment. However, the economy has experienced modest growth in recent years, with real GDP rising in 2005–07 by between 5–6 per cent per year. Privatisation of government-owned copper mines in the 1990s relieved the Government from covering mammoth losses generated by the industry and greatly improved the chances for copper mining to return to profitability and spur economic growth. Copper output has increased steadily since 2004 due to foreign investment and the higher price it fetches on the international market.

The Zambian media is widely classified as free although some policies, such as the Penal Code passed in the 1960s, still need reform. There are three daily newspapers and a number of weekly and monthly publications. Besides *The Post*, very few private papers are able to reach the entire country and few even publish in more than five of the country’s nine provinces. A number of privately owned newspapers have recently gone under while some have drastically reduced their daily print runs.

The liberalisation of the broadcasting industry by the Government, which started
with the enacting of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) (Licensing) Regulations in 1993 and the Telecommunication Act in 1994, has resulted in 33 community and private radio stations being established and operational in the country. It is important to note, however, that community radio has not necessarily tackled access to information challenges as most radio stations are located in urban and peri-urban areas. Although the state-owned ZNBC has been challenged by new private players, neither the ZNBC nor the new players are yet to cover all areas in terms of signal availability. Moreover, programming is largely skewed to the coverage of major political and economic events, some of which are of limited interest to communities.

RADIO LISTENING CLUBS IN ZIMBABWE AND ZAMBIA

Background and structure

The DTR project was initially formed in 1998 by the Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe (FAMWZ), in partnership with the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). At that time, it operated in five of the country’s ten provinces and was broadcast nationally three times a week. The main objective of the project was to provide grassroots communities, particularly women, with a voice and also information around developmental issues affecting them ranging from governance, health, education, self-help and economic empowerment. It also complemented civil society efforts to spread peace and gender equality messages, especially as women were still viewed as minors needing male approval (husband, father or guardian) to access identity documents, education, etc. and were also at the receiving end of much of the political and social violence.

The main objective of the project was to provide grassroots communities, particularly women, with a voice and also information around developmental issues affecting them ranging from governance, health, education, self-help and economic empowerment.

Angela Makamure, Director of FAMWZ, describes DTR as a flagship project of the organisation:

The programme actually encompasses the critical stakeholders of the organization, that is, the media (as a body), the media women (as a special group of development catalysts), women’s organizations,
grassroots communities as well as other civic society organizations especially those in the critical sectors such as HIV and AIDS, education, gender and other relevant discourses. (Makamure, 2009)

In addition to the ZBC, the DTR project in Zimbabwe has received backing from the German-based media and social donor, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the Association of Women's Clubs; and Audio Visual Services. The School of Journalism at the Harare Polytechnic also provided support to the project by designing its structures, and it uses the project as part of a learning process for its students on how to cover rural areas and also to understand developmental issues. The partnership between the ZBC and FAMWZ has entailed the former supplying the resources in terms of airtime, production of the programme, studio space and coordination of the project while the latter services the clubs and employs the coordinators. The coordinators have radio broadcasting experience and have developed a close working relationship with the ZBC producers of the programme.

The DTR Project in Zambia was started by the Panos Institute as part of its developmental communication programme and replicated the example set by FAMWZ. In the words of its former Director, Fackson Banda, Panos “viewed ‘communication’ as an important instrument in the process of sustainable development” (Banda, 2006). It saw the need to develop media that communicated conflict-solving messages as well as information on social issues affecting communities, including HIV and AIDS. Its overall strategy reflected the assumption that the rural poor are better positioned to play a meaningful role in livelihoods sustenance and interaction with policy makers if they are provided with tools that enhance two-way communication and agenda-setting by communities as well. A central objective of the DTR project, according to both FAMWZ and Panos, was to demystify as well as to democratisethe media.

A key partner in the DTR project in both Zimbabwe and Zambia has been the state-owned broadcaster where senior staff with experience in radio production work closely with FAMWZ and Panos respectively, providing technical, though not editorial, assistance. Both Governments accept radio use for development. In Zimbabwe the discussions of political issues at the grassroots level is not seen as threatening by the Mugabe government as the discussion(s), in their view, are localised and confined to so-called developmental issues. Blame for lack of government delivery can thus be placed on incompetent junior and local officials and not the senior officials.

The project in both countries is structured in such a way that the clubs record their stories and questions on tapes that are then collected by a (FAMWZ/Panos) coordinator every week and sent to the radio producers in the capital cities (Harare and Lusaka). The producers record a response from a relevant service provider or politician.
The discussion and response are then edited and broadcast as a regular programme (weekly by the ZNBC and three times a week by the ZBC, usually between 2 and 4 pm). The radio listening clubs tune into the programmes and discuss them at their weekly meetings, and then decide whether or not to pursue an issue further. The role of the coordinator is to collect the recorded tapes, listen to them and contact the relevant authorities in either the public or private sector for responses. Where it is deemed that a more comprehensive discussion is necessary, these authorities are invited to ZBC/ZNBC studios to give live responses.

As noted previously, the women are not passive but active in designing programming and influencing content. According to Banda (2006), women in the DTR project in Zambia play:

a dual role – technically producing their own programmes and socially producing their own definitions or meanings of development. The process of production does not preclude “listening”. So while “listening” is, in itself, an objective of the clubs, there is a much more involved process of programme production.

The listening clubs and the listeners

FAMWZ and Panos did not seek to establish or invent new clubs but used already existing women clubs such as those engaged in income-generating activities including gardening, sewing and baking and church groups. The coordinating organisations explain the benefits of being part of the radio listening clubs and how this would assist in what the women were already doing and also explore other areas such as challenging government officials and politicians on service provision and gender equality issues. For example, the women might question the lack of road repairs that would assist them in reaching markets. In Zimbabwe, where FAMWZ is dealing with the outcomes of social conflict, church groups were approached to identify women who needed help in, for example, accessing birth registration necessary for school enrolment for their children, often after the deaths of male family members, or dealing with police handling of either politically motivated or domestic violence cases. In Zambia, the DTR projects challenge political parties and politicians directly thus bringing women voices to the mainstream of political debate.

The clubs are made up of an average of 10–15 women, who are offered training in producing radio programmes, handling radio discussions, posing relevant questions, etc. A key motivation for women to participate is the urge to be heard on national radio as well as to get a response to questions that they have. Setting up the listening clubs has been very much a participatory process, with women’s groups that agreed to take
part selecting their team leader and choosing times and venues for training, recording and listening to the broadcast programmes. All these activities take place in the villages where the women’s groups are located. The choice of team leader is important, as this person receives more intensive training than the rest of the group in handling recorders and cassettes and in the general use of the technology as well as basic leadership skills such as managing conflict within the group, among other issues. The team leaders as well as their deputies are trained on how to manage the groups in terms of developing and recording quality programmes, not interrupting each other when talking, etc.

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Commenting on the participatory nature of the DTR project, Matewa (2002) says that this grassroots participation [of women] is what sets this project design apart and distinguishes it from other rural radio, which is in line with the agenda-setting theory of McCombs and Shaw, i.e. that the media agenda leads to the people’s agenda. This was highlighted by a Ghanaian African Communication researcher, Isaac Obeng-Quaidoo, who was part of a DTR evaluation team in 1992. He declared that in Zimbabwe the process has been reversed or turned upside down. The agenda-setting model can therefore be adapted as follow: In the DTR project it is the people’s agenda that leads the media agenda.

The women’s voices and their questions find resonance with other women in other parts of the country, who also respond. These responses are then broadcast at times agreed with the women’s radio listening clubs for them to gather and listen to the programmes.

**POSITIVE RESULTS OF THE DTR PROJECT**

In reports on the successes of the DTR project, both FAMWZ and Panos say that there has been a significant level of empowerment of the women as a result. The women and other actors interviewed report several things that have changed in their lives at three different levels – family, club and the community – as a result of the project:
For one thing, there is a general feeling of esteem that goes with being heard on radio and thereby becoming the centre of focus in the community. One respondent in Chiradzulu put it aptly: “They admire us judging by the enquiries they make about what we do. We explain to them what this is all about and they have often made complimentary remarks because this is new here in Chiradzulu.” Another put it as follows: “Indeed we have learnt a lot. One of the things is public speaking which enables us to participate in producing the radio programme”. (Banda 2006)

Listening clubs in both countries are often joined by other community members when the radio shows are being broadcast. This participation in “listening” to the programmes promotes community empowerment beyond the club membership. An important factor is that most of the broadcasting of the DTR messages takes place on days of the week that traditional leaders have set aside as non-working (or farming) days, meaning that a large audience usually listens to the programme. Such gatherings often result in a review of the programme, further questions, and community discussion on issues raised and possible solutions and actions to be taken to address problems. Post-review discussions of programmes may result in more recordings as follow up. So while the initial issues for discussion are initiated by the DTR groups and depend on pressing community issues, the follow-up recordings take on a life of their own, indicating the transfer of power in setting the agenda to the local women and communities.

According to Banda (2006), each broadcast of DTR in Zambia has the potential to reach 5,000 people in communities where the programmes are recorded and millions more nationally. At its peak FAMWZ had 45 DTR projects in Zimbabwe. The biggest club, Zvanakiresu in Mashonaland East province, had 51 members. On average each DTR project recording in that country was listened to by at least 600 people in the communities directly participating (Makamure, 2009). Listening by not only the women’s clubs but also by children, shop owners and others with radio sets took place in groups, in homes and businesses.

FAMWZ and Panos have from time to time – resources permitting – organised visits to the listening clubs by experts who address their concerns and also organised
field visits by women's groups to areas where they could get further education or awareness on a given issue. The radio listening clubs have therefore become part of a process of coordinated learning for women.

Both FAMWZ and Panos report significant empowerment of women beginning with improved communication at the household level due to the responses that women get to their questions. The listening clubs have given the members an opportunity to learn many new things, such as “staying together in a group, working hand in hand in development activities, how to run businesses and how to manage our families”, says FAMWZ Director Angela Makamure. Another benefit seems to be the fact that they have learnt how to look after the health of their families better. In a review report on this project by Panos in Zambia, one respondent in Thyolo stressed this point: “I am talking about the importance of helping girls not to drop out of school, helping my children with their education, the importance of knowing my HIV status. I wouldn’t have known all these things if it was not for the listening group” (Banda, 2006).

The DTR project in Zimbabwe has resulted in major changes to, for example, how children are given state birth certificates. Women whose husbands are deceased or divorced can now access birth certificates without having to be accompanied by a male “guardian”.

This matter was raised by women vociferously through the DTR project and resulted in a nationwide change of policy. Access to agricultural inputs etc., once a privilege of men, has also changed. Women-headed households are now also being considered in both Zambia and Zimbabwe. By targeting women, the DTR project challenged widely held beliefs in rural communities in the two countries that women were supposed to be “quiet” and stay in the home. For the first time, men began listening to what women said and acting on the agenda and issues set by women.

FAMWZ and Panos also use the project to link rural communities with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are using this unique platform to broadcast advocacy programmes on themes such as voter education, the effects of war on women and children, land rights, women’s rights, HIV/AIDS, women’s health, etc. For instance, Panos “facilitated a visit to the clubs in Eastern Province by the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) to share information about HIV and AIDS and gender empowerment” (Banda, 2006). The project also motivates them to become more assertive in the search for solutions to the problems they face. By engaging communities in the discussion of issues raised by women, the DTR clubs are strengthened, which in turn benefits the communities as a whole. Although the project is targeted at women, the women talk about issues that affect all community members.

The project has encouraged and helped rural communities to mobilise resources and knowledge to launch income-generating projects and strengthen existing ones; in some cases the clubs were able to secure funding from donor agencies. It has
encouraged women to be agents of change “and equip[ped] them with skills to help alleviate poverty, as well as to address issues such as the marginalisation of and discrimination against women” (Matewa, 2002). In Zimbabwe the project has helped in bringing and maintaining peace in violence-torn communities such as Matabeleland province, where women have been able to speak out against the politically motivated violence that rocked the area first in the 1980s and again during this past decade. Through openly talking about their fears and challenging perpetrators, women have achieved positive results.

In Zimbabwe the project has helped in bringing and maintaining peace in violence-torn communities such as Matabeleland province, where women have been able to speak out against the politically motivated violence that rocked the area first in the 1980s and again during this past decade.

The key and empowering issue is that women’s voices in Zimbabwe and Zambia are heard nationally, forcing those tasked with responding to articulate answers to questions and also give details of possible solutions. The broadcasts in some cases result in further questions, creating a cyclical process of discussion.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The positive outcomes of the DTR project have led FAMWZ and Panos to encourage other African countries to adopt the approach, and it has now been replicated in Angola, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and South Africa. Despite the clubs’ success in both Zimbabwe and Zambia, however, more needs to be done if the DTR project is to achieve its main aim of giving radio access to marginalised communities by extending the project beyond the confines of accessible rural areas. In addition, some listening clubs almost collapsed when the leader or central figure left, suggesting that all club members should be offered training on how to operate a radio set and taught basic leadership skills. Such training could be done by the coordinators during their visits to the clubs.

The DTR project has stimulated intense discussions in the clubs and the communities about social issues. The clubs’ ability to discuss and present issues clearly has been greatly appreciated by men and young people in the communities. While the project looks rudimentary, it offers a good start to engaging rural communities on other information and communication technology (ICT) gadgets such as mobile telephony, the Internet, etc. The critical point made by the DTR project is that it is possible to
overcome seemingly unchanging traditional relationships and forms of communication and create a situation where poor rural women can make their voices heard in their communities and countries. The importance of the media as an empowering tool cannot be overemphasised, hence the need to think outside the box and continue efforts to find innovative ways to bring the media to the poor, especially in developing countries.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the conflict situation in Zimbabwe with a focus on the issue of land reform. Land has been a contentious issue in the country for decades. White farmers owned most of the fertile acreage at the time of independence, and since 1980 there have been various plans to redistribute the land while providing fair compensation to landowners. The loss of a referendum by the ruling party to re-write the constitution in 2000 resulted in a backlash that had ripple effects on the economy and society at large. So-called “fast-track” land reform by the Government since 2001 has been intended to win the majority support of the populace by taking away land indiscriminately from the white commercial farmers and giving it to landless and resource- and skills-poor ruling party supporters.

Private media were muzzled and the airwaves became highly politically charged, preaching war and hatred for the country’s first real opposition party – the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) – the white population and Western nations. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were banned or strictly regulated. Aligning oneself with the opposition meant not being entitled to any social services, especially in the rural areas and the new farming areas (where opposition supporters were not allowed at all). The end result was the establishment of bands of armed and marauding youths aligned to various political leaders from the ruling party who looted and destroyed public and private property. In urban areas, the Government’s slum clean-up
campaign left thousands of people homeless and vulnerable. Thousands of children lost their rightful schooling opportunity through this action.

Party supporters and beneficiaries of the land reform programme fought one another for plots on which there was infrastructure such as farmhouses, tractors and implements as well as boreholes and paddocks for livestock. In many cases the new farmers would have nothing to start farming, and many resorted to grabbing the tools and equipment belonging to the commercial farmers. This chapter looks at one example of how conflicts were resolved on farms where the commercial farmers were left with some of the land, and the new farmers could actually be mentored and provided with resources as well as even markets for their produce. The learning methods were mainly leaflets or booklets that the farmers or development workers could lend to literate new farmers; otherwise it was hands-on and personal mentorship.

SOME SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE CONFLICT

The impact of the conflict has included needless loss of lives from murder, hunger and disease, and the institutionalisation of poverty in the sections of society not aligned to the ruling party elite. Children stopped going to school because the teachers were on the run for political reasons, or because their parents were impoverished and could not afford to pay their school fees or buy uniforms and books. This has even affected young people studying at the universities in the country – students at Africa University took legal action in April 2009 against being barred from writing examinations by the university authorities because they could not afford the fees. Some schools were even closed, to be used as bases by the ruling party youths from which they would launch their various operations.

Many children were so terrified by the violence that they refused to go to school and parents could not make them because everyone, including schoolchildren, was being forced by the unruly elements in the ruling party to chant party slogans. Failure to do so indicated that one did not attend their rallies and did not support the party of choice, punishable by a thorough beating or even burning of one’s homestead or car. The trauma resulting from this was immense.

Farm workers and all persons previously employed in agriculture were affected in one way or another. The majority lost their jobs and became destitute. Those who were educated and had passports managed to cross the borders to look for opportunities elsewhere, although many left illegally, with a sizeable number eaten by crocodiles while trying to cross the Limpopo River into South Africa.

People were distracted from their primary economic activities such as farming, service provision and manufacturing, through which they derived an honest and legitimate livelihood, to go on party errands and activities. Many people were either forced
to join the bandwagon and go into the new farms, or did so for some perceived benefit. However, they were often unsuccessful at this and had to resort to many other strategies to survive, which included preaching the party gospel to gain advantages and opportunities.

**PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL**

Danida (the Danish International Development Agency) set up Food for Work projects at the community level to rally the people around community development projects such as patching roads and preventing erosion. Other donor agencies ran rehabilitation programmes for displaced farm workers, to give them housing and food, while at the same time preaching the gospel of forgiveness.

One way forward was to put party stalwarts on plots with key infrastructure (party hierarchy was respected), emphasising the need to share whatever infrastructure was available while people developed their own plots or farms, especially as these new farmers had no resources of their own and would have had to wait for government support. For anyone to farm, they needed access roads and water and sanitation.

A typical case involved a well-known farm in Matabeleland region where a white commercial farmer had a ranch on which he kept game, beef, ostrich and pythons. His ranch was cut up into plots of approximately 100 hectares — virtually his paddock size, so each new farmer got a paddock. The white farmer lost the homestead, which included the main workshop, reservoir, borehole and cattle-handling facilities. The main road went to the centrally located farmhouse and access roads branched off this to the paddocks, which were now farm holdings belonging to different people. The community had to rely on the central plot for various services and facilities, including water for human and animal consumption, the main electricity distribution transformer, cattle-handling facilities and housing facilities (because the rest of the ranch was just bush).

There were numerous sources of conflict. For example, the farm manager released the pythons, which subsequently terrorised the area and killed the small livestock of resource-poor farmers. All livestock came to drink water from the central plot and would destroy crops and garden fences; moreover, the boundaries of the plots were ill-defined and physical fights would ensue between the new farmers over them. Some new farmers, out of the need for food, set traps on the central plot to catch wild animals that came to drink water at night, but these also killed livestock from fellow farmers resulting in fierce battles for compensation. Many of the former owner’s livestock could not be accommodated on the smaller plot and strayed onto the new farms and destroyed crops and fences. They were also slaughtered by the new farmers and by cattle rustlers. The farm workers of the former owner were labelled sell-outs and
opposition sympathisers who had sided with their white boss and were banished from the community; thus no one could come to tend to the animals. White men were not allowed in the farms because they were believed to have ulterior motives and would at times use money to turn the black farmers against each other. The central plot owner lost a number of cattle due to communicable diseases from the unvaccinated animals of other plot-holders who either could not afford the vaccines and medications or simply did not know how to rear livestock. People had been settled indiscriminately and the new farmers would at times form tribal groups that undertook various actions to the disadvantage of each other – they would even fight each other over water or the remains of the former white owner's stock feed.

As a result of these and many other problems, the whole process was plunged into chaos and conflict. The relevant Department of Lands simply could not cope with the multiplicity of problems from the thousands of new farmers who were now landlords.

Just as in any process of change, after the storming comes the norming. It so happened that I had undertaken to help a relative, the owner of the central plot, and we started a potato project that produced some results that were not expected even by the former white owner. People then realised how much they could do and how much they also lacked as well, because some of them were seeing the potato plant for the first time in their lives. From then on, the farmers would ask for advice on what they wanted to do and how they could lay out their farm. They did not even have farm plans. This became a common rallying point because the Government began giving financial assistance, but people had to have farm plans and business plans to access it. Soon word spread that advice (which was scarce because the extension officials were overloaded), and farm and business plans were available from the central plot, where we now had a hectare of hybrid tomato under drip irrigation. The whole community got tomatoes, and at times vegetable supplies, from the central plot. Meetings began to be held at the water point as people came for water or any other of their requirements, or simply to see or try to steal some tomatoes.

The people soon began to demand more information besides the face-to-face discussions, so I put together a manual on tomato/potato production that people could photocopy. I also collected various pamphlets on vegetable production and livestock rearing that people would read and discuss or simply read and pass on. As a result – and because there was now talk on the radio and television that those not utilising the land would lose it – people began to discuss productivity and compete against other villages to be united in their drive to settle and start producing. The new farmers began

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1 A group in the process of coming together is often described as going through a number of stages, including forming, storming, norming and performing.
to work cooperatively (gathering to work on each other’s fields to increase the pace of their projects), and this was the rallying point for the exchange of ideas and listening to the radio during their lunch break to hear about the progress of the land reform in other parts of the country.

Such was the new enthusiasm and fear of losing their plots that when the former white farmer, through his black farm supervisor (now forgiven because he possessed livestock production knowledge), came with a proposition to house his livestock in the farms or plots in exchange for know-how and infrastructural repairs, the idea was taken up readily by some new farmers. Others argued that similar arrangements in other parts of the country and province were reputed to have resulted in the white farmer reclaiming his farm based on the allegation that the new farmers were not productive. Soon after this, consultations were held and many new farmers who had initially opposed the idea and had few or no cattle on their plots found themselves in partnership with the same white farmer they had been fighting, although the white farm manager was not allowed back on the ranch until he had recaptured all the snakes he had released at the onset of the land reforms. The radio proved to be a strong tool in disseminating the truth, as it spelled out that some white farmers and new farmers had formed partnerships that were proving to be viable.

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The relationship was so fruitful that the people even began to be trained by the black cattlemen employed by the white farmer. I had my own period of training, though I had to walk six kilometres every three days to go and consult in implementing the livestock ideas I would photocopy at the library in the city when I took my weekly trip to town. I also went to other communities across the province and advised other new farmers on formulating agri-business plans and producing fruit and vegetables under drip irrigation. The most outstanding feature was that the new farmers and the former owner of the ranch were able to help each other, and in many instances the white farmer’s workers would call on the new farmers to help in loading their animals bound for the lucrative markets in town. The new farmers would also sometimes call on their former adversaries to help with livestock management practices. Now the community was at the performing stage of the change process.

The farmers, and some extension and independent agricultural consultants, would collect vital information from various sources, such as libraries, archives and the Internet, and then reproduce this information for handing out to the new farmers,
most of whom possessed absolutely no knowledge of agricultural production. Many had fantasies about becoming as rich as the previous commercial farmers had been on the farms and this provided a very good starting point, though the means for achieving the goals were under-capitalised. It was a steep learning curve, and those who made it can thank the former commercial farmers, extension workers and individual contractors who believed they had a moral obligation to work with and assist the new farmers despite the politics in the country (although it must be noted that for some white commercial farmers, these acts were also an opportunity to get political immunity).

**EXPERIENCES WITH RADIO, DVDS OTHER METHODS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING**

The only media that the majority of rural people are officially exposed to are the state radio and television as well as the state newspapers. For those with access who are willing to take the risk of listening, Voice of America (VOA) Studio 7 (set up by a Zimbabwean news crew that fell out with their former employer, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation), broadcasts on shortwave direct from Washington, DC, in Ndebele, Shona and English and provides national and international news. SW Radio is another private broadcaster that operates from outside the country without a license; however, it is a mouthpiece for the opposition rather than for peace and reconciliation.

At the height of the political strife, people were not allowed to read private newspapers in public; in rural areas, they risked being killed for doing so. Distribution of pamphlets and other publications for purposes of information dissemination were muzzled. Land reform slogans were constantly broadcast on radio and television, but only for the purpose of emphasising the repossession of the land by the people. Had the media been put to good use in educating the new farmers and rallying everyone around land reform and its purpose (economic empowerment), then a different story might have been written with fewer atrocities and less animosity towards the white farmers and opposition parties.

Prior to the land reform and subsequent political mayhem, Zimbabwe’s place as one of the most literate nations in the developing world was a direct result of various learning approaches adopted by the Government. For example, the activities of the ministries of women’s affairs and youth development were deliberately aimed at gender empowerment and development, with many projects being jointly funded and implemented by the Government and NGOs.

Radio listening clubs were also available in the rural areas for children, women and family listening.\(^2\) Early childhood education was enhanced by radio lessons

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\(^2\) See Chapter 6 – *Eds.*
on the former Radio 1, with an application even in the classroom by many schools. Development news for the communities and adult literacy programmes were also spread via radio.

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Many of the nation’s professionals, even some cabinet ministers and the current President, studied through distance education and therefore valued the potential of distance education. Various correspondence colleges have been involved, including Rapid Results College, Central African Correspondence College, University of South Africa, Institute of Marketing Management of South Africa, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, City Guilds of London and the University of London.

As a direct result of the collapse of the economy, study materials were often lost when packages were opened by postal employees in search of anything they could convert into cash. The transport system was also unreliable. The income to pay for the studies was also no longer available, with only the well-off in the main cities having access to cash and a coordinated delivery system.

In many rural households the schooling of boys is preferred over that of girls because of the old perception that a boy will be more successful and look after the rest of the family, while when the lobola (bride-price) for a girl has been paid by her husband-to-be, she ceases to be one of her family and will go and give all that she got from education to her husband’s family. Urban (and some rural) households have overcome this attitude and many girls have managed to get educated before and after marriage, mostly when older through the Zimbabwe Open University, which is headed by a woman. As such, many girls and women, as well as resource-poor boys in the rural communities, have managed to get an education. This is where radio, television and distance education need to play a greater role: in freeing society’s perceptions and also highlighting the biases that pervade our traditions and customs.

While the Zimbabwe Open University offers courses for university students, this is not applicable to the community-based initiatives for those in the rural areas who have not had much secondary education.

People all over the country now have mobile phones, which can easily be used to convey messages of hope, reconciliation, development and peacebuilding (although there is a history in Zimbabwe of criminals stealing oil from transformers, resulting in transformers burning out and disabling mobile phone signals). These phones played
a very important role during the last elections in March 2008. One of the conditions leading up to the elections was that the results would be counted at each polling station and posted on a notice board outside the polling room, for all to witness the transparency of the elections. As a result, the media all over the world were able to get the results first-hand from the people on the ground via texts to either their reporters or other Zimbabweans outside the country, who would then pass on the report.

People all over the country now have mobile phones, which can easily be used to convey messages of hope, reconciliation, development and peacebuilding ...

The nation had the top literacy level in Africa but seems to be moving only backwards. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is not yet legalised in the country, implying that the vast resources communities could derive from around the world cannot be utilised. University education is currently unavailable to the majority of Zimbabweans who qualify, but with Internet facilities at rural learning centres or schools, it could be available through distance education to all who aspire to be graduates.

**CONCLUSION**

From being the second most wired and connected country in Africa after South Africa, Zimbabwe now lags behind among the last five. People were and still are learning through the Internet, receiving and sending assignments, but the networks are so slow as to prevent much work being done in this way. So much more could be done through the Internet to augment the collapsed educational system, while communities could get wired and facilitate a new age in adult literacy, debates and other various initiatives to better the nation.

There has been no institutionalised intervention focused on peacebuilding in the last eleven years. The first such effort is being put into place by the new Government of National Unity, whose success critically hinges on the success of its national healing drive. However, the implementation strategy is what will determine this. If the programme is not community-based and has to be delegated by the leaders, then it is already a failure before it even starts. It must be people-driven and community-based, rather than a political process led by politicians. The role of the politicians should be to de-factionalise the population, while they leave the role of peace and community-building to those who are morally in a position to lead the process: the communities themselves.
All media (print and broadcast) has to be unified in preaching national healing and reconciliation, in much the same way as it was mobilised and used to preach the gospel of the land reform programme. People must, through the various media, learn to live and work together. Those who participated in the learning activities described in this chapter bonded for life and will treasure forever the memories of having shared a common cause. Zimbabweans are not a very difficult people to please, whether black or white. All that is needed is an opportunity to learn (because we have a reading culture in the nation) and to pursue various agro-based and industrial activities (because we are agricultural entrepreneurs and industrialists).
Asia
8.

Empowering Women as Peacemakers Through Culture in Bangladesh

*S. Senthilnathan, Rafiqul Islam Khokan and Swapan Guha*

“Where there is peace, there is culture and where there is culture, there is peace.” – Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), founder of Pax Cultura

**PEACEBUILDING AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**

Peacebuilding includes gender awareness and empowering women in political, social, economic and human rights-related areas. It involves personal and group accountability and reconciliation processes that contribute to the prevention or reduction of violence. It fosters the ability of women, men, girls and boys in their own culture(s) to promote conditions of non-violence, equality, justice and human rights for all people, to build democratic institutions and to sustain the environment (Mazurana and McKay, 1999).

Peace is the cornerstone of development, and the role of women in this process is fundamental as they constitute the majority of the population. The roles women and men play in peacebuilding may not be exactly the same, and they will vary by location and culture, but both need to be involved for peace to be lasting. A relationship-centred and process-driven peacebuilding approach requires that women and men from different ethnicities, religions and cultures in a society are included.

Through the efforts of international feminist movements and collaboration among women’s groups to globalise their agenda and promote women’s empowerment,
the importance of women’s involvement to building peaceful societies is increasingly recognised. As former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, has noted, “If women were given more opportunities to engage in conflict prevention and peace negotiations, it is likely that solutions would be more holistic and effective” (Robinson, 2008). Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security can address the impact of armed conflict on women and ensure that they are central to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

In order for societies to develop the capacity to understand and respect “the other”, an essential element of a culture of peace, women need their own media to express their views and concerns. Both mainstream (print and electronic) and alternative (folk and other traditional) media also should promote women’s concerns and interests and foster cross-gender dialogue. At multiple levels and in pragmatic ways, women’s use of media is being recognised as essential in promoting peacebuilding.

ANCIENT CULTURE AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Shared knowledge, values and beliefs over generations by a society or group of people can be considered culture. Tradition, art, laws, relationships and ways of doing things are examples of culture. In all societies, people have developed beliefs and attitudes based on their experiences and have sought to better understand their world through expression in the form of drawing, dance, music and other communication and cultural behaviour. Culture, in turn, shapes individuals in the development of beliefs and value systems.

Traditional folk media can effectively express the socio-ritual, moral and emotional needs of the language and cultural groups to which they belong. Despite the rapid diffusion of new communication technologies, folk media continue to demonstrate their value as effective vehicles for social messages for the “masses of people most deprived of specific messages” (Fernandez, 1996).

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All people around the world are experiencing cultural change today due to globalisation and mass media. While culture evolves over the course of generations in response to the changing needs of people, in times of rapid cultural change, tradition can be an important element in providing security or stability. Tradition is “the process of
transmitting age-old values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of the universal” and “is not only a repetitive behavioural pattern or some persistent symbol or motif in community culture; it is also an assertion of identity, a revival and regeneration of the life-force of the community” (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). The cultural factor that affects change is the degree to which flexibility is encouraged and approved, which is itself influenced by external forces, history and the needs of people at a specific point in time.

The traditional performing arts, with their entertainment value, use of colloquial language that people can easily understand, and familiarity to the audience, have been recognised as a potentially powerful communication tool for moral, religious and socio-political purposes from the time they originated. People can easily identify themselves in the folk art forms. The nature of traditional folk media makes the message to the audience personal, familiar and hence more credible. Folk media embrace a wide range of traditional communication channels, including storytelling, theatre, song and dance relating to people’s past, present and future, providing them with “glimpses of reality that result in education” (Daudu, 2009).

Folk media are close to the hearts of the people; so their appeal is at a personal and intimate level. Further, their familiar format and content, as also the local and colloquial dialects used, make for clarity in communication. Rapport is immediate and direct; the barriers to communication almost non-existent. Folk media are available to all and sundry, and enjoyed by persons of different age groups – all at a very low cost. (Kumar, 1994)

Because music and drama often evoke emotion, the impact of folk media on the people can be very deep. Folk art forms both preserve and disseminate the wisdom, tradition and culture of our ancestors and reflect and guide change.

FOLK MEDIA FOR DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

Folk art can serve as a form of social protest against injustice, exploitation and oppression. When the opponent is strong, anger and repression can be expressed through songs, proverbs and plays. This helps to release the inner tension caused by injustice and inspires people to unify and fight against abuse and exploitation. The significance of folk arts in both accommodating grievances and facilitating change in social and political circumstances is well-recognised by social reformers and statesmen. For example, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of post-Independence India, declared, “I am greatly interested in the development of a people’s theatre in India. I think there
is a great room for it, provided it is based on the people and their traditions. ... It is a people’s approach” (Nehru, 1943).

Folk performance is a composite art in many Asian countries including Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, fusing elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts, and religious and festival pageantry (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). In developing nations, “peasants, agricultural labourers, women, tribes, bonded labourers and other oppressed groups are rediscovering the potential of traditional arts and media as a weapon in their struggle for land, water, forest, better working and living conditions and human rights” (ibid). Theatre by, for and of the people is increasingly being used as a means of mobilising people for action in achieving peace and harmony. It can be highly effective in reaching marginalised, remote groups and others to whom the messages are targeted, and many development organisations have started to take a second look at the use of folk media to generate local participation in development projects.

THE RUPANTAR METHOD IN BANGLADESH

Bengal has a rich heritage of traditional theatre, music, art and dance. For example, Alkap is social satire and popular rural drama among the Bengal Muslims. Its themes have always been secular and social, and it has successfully enacted messages in favour of women’s emancipation and education and against the institution of dowry. Bauls are wandering minstrels who have preserved the Sahajiya tradition of mysticism in Bengal. Their music is used by politicians and development workers, especially in rural areas, as a medium to disseminate their ideas.

Rupantar, a non-governmental development organisation based in Khulna, Bangladesh, attempts to address people in rural and urban areas through incorporating folk drama and “Pot Songs” as well as popular publications (easy-to-read booklets). Other more conventional strategies including group discussions, workshops, seminars and dialogue meetings are also used for raising people’s awareness and capacity building and for strengthening the organisational activities of local government and other institutions. Rupantar’s overall goal is to strengthen poor people’s own possibilities to change their life conditions (Sida, 2007).

Some of the group’s key programmes and activities are:

- Women’s organisation building and leadership development
- Gender and development

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1 Much of the information on Rupantar can be found on the group’s website: www.rupantar.org/
- Reducing violence against women including domestic violence
- Reducing trafficking of women and children
- Protection of human rights including women's and children's rights

In the beginning, Rupantar researched the local folk culture of the Sundarbans – a relatively sparsely populated region in the south-west of Bangladesh – to find out the scope for mainstreaming this in development. The group identified a number of folk cultural media that had been used for education and communication in the past but were on the verge of disappearing. These cultural media are being developed and updated for use in communicating development messages.

The fundamental principle of Rupantar is that culture and sustainable development are closely connected. This connection is an emerging concept in the development world. The culture of a society manifests itself in many distinct ways through creative expression (history, songs, dance, music, literature, architecture, art, etc.) and community practices (traditional healing methods, traditional natural resources management, various social and religious ceremonies, etc.). Although the identity of a society is largely determined by its culture, it is difficult for any society to have a static sense of culture. Both society and culture are changing simultaneously.

Rupantar strives to connect culture and development work in at least two ways:

a. Culture is used as a means of building awareness among people, especially among illiterate people, and informing them of new ideas. It is also used to strengthen participatory processes and organisational capacity to facilitate conflict resolution and good governance.

b. The prevailing social customs, norms and beliefs that may act against gender equality can have an adverse impact on or hinder economic and social development. For sustainable development interventions, it is necessary to counter these negative forces. Traditional folk art can allow people to focus on underlying values in a non-threatening way, looking at old issues in a new light. To this end, Rupantar attempts to revive, restore and use various forms of local culture and emphasises their positive aspects to address prejudice, misinformation, myths and superstitions and in the process to unite the community and build social cohesion.
Folk drama

Rupantar refers to its theatre form as Alternative Living Theatre. It does not use decorative lights, heavy make-up, elaborate costumes, costly props or stages. It can be and is performed anywhere with long colourful scarves as the only costumes/props. The script is prepared with the performers through a participatory method. The purpose of this form of drama is education and communication; it is usually issue-based and the messages are conveyed in appealing, rhythmic forms that enable everyone to understand the theme. The issues are based on real life problems that are mitigated or overcome during the course of the performance. The Rupantar theatre teams perform shows inside and outdoors in urban and rural areas to a wide array of audiences focusing on specific development themes.

Pot Songs

For 2,000 years, the folk song has been the medium through which information has been communicated to the people in rural Bengal. The rhythms of the songs are so catchy that even today radios play the music. At one time Pot Songs were popular in all parts of the Indian sub-continent. As the song is sung, a painted picture on cloth in the form of a giant scroll depicting issues in the song is unfolded in front of the audience. Pot painters and Pot singers used to move from village to village and earn their living through this. There is no doubt that such artists were very active from the 12th and 13th century up to 1950 in Bangladesh; some of them were alive even after the country’s independence in 1971. Until its revival by Rupantar, the last evidence of the use of Pot Songs was found in the Sundarbans region.

Rupantar’s folk drama and Pot Songs are directed towards increasing people’s awareness about issues that bring about peace, harmony and prosperity and ensure citizens’ participation in development.

In 1966 Rupantar learnt about Pot Songs from a few aged cultural activists and, seeing their communicative capabilities, readily adopted them. Since that time, Rupantar has been incorporating Pot Songs with drama in its development work, which has a direct effect on audiences, facilitating deeper discussion on difficult issues and changing attitudes. The Pot Song is performed by 10 to 12 performers, with half of the performers

2 The Bengali word *pot* means a painting, canvas, painted piece of cloth or picture.
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being women. The performances are bursting with energy and highly engaging. Any of the performers – male or female – may narrate the story, sing a song, play a musical instrument, act as the chorus and dance. They are trained in such a way that every person develops the capacity to perform each task; this leads to better teamwork, and no Pot Song performance is cancelled or postponed for want of a particular performer.

Rupantar has developed close to one hundred Pot Songs on specific issues such as women’s rights, gender and development, reducing trafficking of women and children, democracy and governance, civic awareness and voter education. These have been appreciated by millions of people watching live performances and on Bangladeshi television. The Pot Songs have been quite successful in changing the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of the target groups (see box).

### THE IMPACT OF RUPANTAR’S POT SONGS

After a performance in one community about government corruption and the damage it can do, one local government official went into hiding. He feared for his life, certain that he would be stoned if the people of the community found him. As part of their development programme, Rupantar engaged this official and representatives from the community in constructive dialogue and discussion, and today that government is a good model of using participatory approaches in its decision-making.

One of the Pot Songs developed and performed widely by the artists of Rupantar is on the theme “Family Life” and has had a telling impact on many individuals. For example, in one case a woman had given birth to two daughters and her husband and his family blamed her for bringing misfortune on them. There was nothing but chaos, confusion and fault-finding in the home with the wife undergoing untold miseries. However, when the husband went to see “Family Life”, he learnt that women are not responsible for determining a child’s sex and are not inferior to men. This brought changes in his thinking and attitude and he started treating his wife with kindness and took good care of his daughters. In another case, an auto-rickshaw driver was addicted to drugs and unfaithful to his wife, whom he physically assaulted. A date was fixed for their divorce, but after the husband saw “Family Life”, he became a changed man and he and his wife now live in peace and harmony.
FOLK CULTURE AND RUPANTAR: THE WAY AHEAD

Rupantar will continue to promote Pot Songs as a development communication method and tool for use in exploring social, political, economic, environmental and educational issues. The group aspires to revive this traditional medium of ancient cultural communication by popularising it in Bangladesh and abroad.

In order to make its method of development communication more widely known and used, Rupantar has started theatre education for school children at the primary school level. This is because it has been found world-wide that people can learn, adapt and practice such skills at an early stage of life. Students are chosen and trained in these traditional media on the basis of merit from various primary schools. The children involved in the project become more able to express themselves and also develop awareness of their human and social rights.

Rupantar’s folk drama and Pot Songs are directed towards increasing people’s awareness about issues that bring about peace, harmony and prosperity and ensure citizens’ participation in development.

References

9.
Fractured Community: Prospects for Community-based Reconstruction in Kashmir

Seema Kazi

OVERVIEW

This chapter focuses on the conflict in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (hereafter referred to as Kashmir). Kashmir’s tragedy is characterised by the enforced disappearance of men, by widows, half-widows and orphans and the creation of female-headed households, by the destruction of civil society, by a pervasive mental health crisis and by the fragmentation of inter-ethnic relations and destruction of the socio-cultural fabric. This is compounded by an absence of the rule of law. There is pervasive and deep resentment against what is perceived as an illegitimate military occupation, the use of excessive force against civilians, and the denial of basic rights and freedoms. For precisely these reasons, Kashmir is a particularly challenging case for peacebuilding interventions and/or initiatives.

The work of Athwaas, a women’s initiative, is described here as an important example underlining both the need for, and significance of, community-based intervention towards rebuilding civil society and community and healing the ethnic divide created by violent conflict. In addition, the chapter looks at the use of radio to help people cope with stress and trauma. Radio remains a particularly valuable means of community and distance learning in Kashmir, where many rural areas do not have electricity, television or the Internet.
BACKGROUND

Kashmir is known for its singular beauty. Francois Bernier, the first European to set foot there in 1665 wrote: “In truth, the kingdom surpasses in beauty all that my warm imagination had anticipated” (Bernier, 1996). Kashmir’s physical beauty complements its historical and cultural importance as the confluence between the three great religious traditions and cultures of South Asia – Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam – that still co-exist today.

On the eve of India’s independence in 1947, Kashmir constituted India’s largest Princely State – i.e., a state granted some autonomy by the British Government in return for the ruler’s loyalty to the Crown. Though all Princely States theoretically reverted to sovereignty, their real choice was confined to merger with India or Pakistan. There were, however, three exceptions to this general pattern of accession and absorption: Kashmir, Junagadh and Hyderabad. Whereas Junagadh and Hyderabad had Hindu majority populations under a Muslim sovereign, Kashmir’s Muslim majority was ruled by Maharaja Hari Singh, a Hindu, who also controlled a number of other territories. Adding to Kashmir’s significance were its borders with both the newly independent states of India and Pakistan and common frontiers with China and Tibet.

The shrinking of democratic space and debate – a direct consequence of the conflict – has affected the social fabric in significant ways.

The holocaust that accompanied the partition of the subcontinent created the greatest refugee crisis of the twentieth century, with some 12.5 million people crossing between the two countries and an estimated 1 million fatalities (Talbot, 2000: 156). Kashmir too reverberated with partition’s violence and communal passion. When the expulsion or massacre of Muslims by Hindu extremists led to the invasion by several thousand Pathan tribesmen, Hari Singh acceded to India on condition that Delhi send troops to defend his territory. The understanding was that this accession was provisional and that a plebiscite would be held once law and order had been restored.

The accession was immediately challenged by Pakistan, leading to full-scale military hostilities between the two new nation-states. A ceasefire in 1949 supervised by the United Nations demarcated a Line-of-Control (LOC) with roughly two-thirds of Kashmir falling within India and approximately one-third in Pakistan. The promised plebiscite was never held and this division of Kashmir, achieved militarily by India and Pakistan, was not subject to Kashmiri affirmation. For both these reasons Kashmir is not merely an inter-state territorial dispute but is an essentially political issue.
concerning three parties: the Kashmiri people and the states of India and Pakistan. Since the demarcation of the LOC, India and Pakistan have voiced competing claims to Kashmir. Indian claims rest on the Instrument of Accession signed by the Maharaja and the holding of elections in the state; for Pakistan, the Muslim majority in the state means it should be part of that country.

Kashmir has a legally different relationship with India than other states as it is not a fully integrated province within the Indian Union. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution ratified Kashmiri autonomy and limited Indian jurisdiction over it. However, Kashmir’s autonomy was progressively and substantively eroded by successive regimes in New Delhi. Kashmiri resentment at this has been compounded by India’s subversion of the democratic process in the Valley, most notably during the 1987 state assembly elections that were widely perceived as fraudulent. In the wake of unprovoked firing by security forces on unarmed demonstrators in Srinagar in 1990, simmering discontent in the Kashmir Valley was transformed into a militant-led mass movement for independence. Pakistan’s support for a section of the secessionist movement reinforced military hostilities on the Line-of-Control, even as India’s poor record of democratic governance, its use of coercive force against civilians, and its concomitant denial of basic rights and freedoms to Kashmiris generated intersecting streams of state and societal violence and an unfolding human rights tragedy. Between 80,000–100,000 people have been killed in Kashmir since the beginning of the conflict in 1990.

A PEOPLE’S TRAGEDY

The human and social costs of the conflict in Kashmir are borne not so much by militants but by its citizens and society. The transformation of Kashmir into a war zone and the routine harassment and abuse experienced by its citizens at the hands of the keepers of “law and order” is a source of deep anger. An entire generation has been brought up in the shadow of violence and deprived of a normal social life. India’s Constitution guarantees judicially enforceable fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of speech and political affiliation and the right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention. In Kashmir, however, a ban on public gatherings, free speech, the right to be free from unlawful detention and the right to a fair trial remain suspended; no judicial reviews of such suspensions are allowed. As a human rights scholar has noted: “We cannot deny a people rights that flow out of citizenship and then expect their allegiance” (Kannabiran, 1990).

For over two decades, India’s extraordinary military presence has been synonymous with the violation of the rule of law. Since 1989, not a single member of the military has been prosecuted or convicted for a criminal offence in Kashmir (Human Rights Watch, 2006). There is persistent disregard by state authorities for the writ of
habeas corpus – an important legal provision meant to protect citizens from institutional abuse and one of the cornerstones of a democratic state – and a concomitant paralysis of Kashmir’s judiciary. Access by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to detention centres remains restricted. Requests by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Amnesty International to visit Kashmir have met with official refusal. A number of human rights defenders have been murdered by the military (Gossman, 2000) and there are several cases of non-Indians whose interest in, or engagement with, civil society and humanitarian tragedy prompted aggressive surveillance by state authorities. Kashmir’s landscape is dotted with graveyards. Thousands of men have “disappeared” with no trace of their arrest, leaving behind a landscape of widows, half-widows and orphans.

On a lesser though no less ruthless scale, anonymous violence by militants has reinforced a culture of fear and unaccountability. Among Kashmir’s multiple tragedies is the flight of the Hindu community, known as Pandits, who made up 3 per cent of the population. The killing of Pandits by militant groups during the early years of the conflict and the rise of Islamist militancy heightened fear and insecurity within that community. Their exodus gravely damaged Kashmir’s secular heritage and syncretic traditions. Members of militant groups are also guilty of killing, kidnapping and rape. Members of such groups have attempted to enforce their own interpretation of “Islamic values” such as the burqa (a long, loose garment with a veil worn by women) and a ban on abortion (Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, 1993).

Kashmir’s leading intellectuals are also among the casualties of the conflict. The killing of the intelligentsia – achieved in no small measure by both India and Pakistan – has weakened the fragile civil society and made Kashmiris lose faith in institutions and institutional process. Devoid of a political base, and accountable to none, Islamist militancy in Kashmir centres on religion and the gun – aimed not just at Indian soldiers but also members of the Hindu community and those Muslims deemed insufficiently supportive of its ideology. A ban against public gathering of more than five people has pushed politics into the mosque and foreclosed the possibility of open debate. As people seek refuge in traditional institutions such as the mosque and the family, the emphasis on religion and tradition serves to reinforce the social status quo. The shrinking of democratic space and debate – a direct consequence of the conflict – has thus affected the social fabric in significant ways.

**GENDERED VIOLENCE**

The identification of male citizens as enemies of the state translated into a chilling offensive against Kashmiri men, marking the beginning of a gendered human rights tragedy captured by a Kashmiri poet:
Srinagar was under curfew .... Son after son –
ever to return from the night of torture –
was taken away. (Ali, 2000: 4)

According to one independent estimate, approximately 30,000 men have been killed, with some 4,000 believed to have “disappeared” or held in illegal detention (APCLC, Human Rights Forum, OPDR, People’s Democratic Forum and PUDR, 2001). This has left Kashmir’s female citizens to cope with the economic, social and psychological fallout. According to the Association of the Parents of the Disappeared (APDP) there are approximately 20,000 widows in Kashmir and at least 1,000 half widows whose husbands have “disappeared” with no trace of their whereabouts or existence. Women from economically weaker backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to, and affected by, the state offensive against Kashmiri men. Facing economic hardship and a lack of social and emotional support, economically underprivileged widows lead a vulnerable and precarious existence and add to Kashmir’s growing indigent population.

For the “half-widows” the situation is no less distressing. Since their husbands have not been officially declared dead, these women are not entitled to ex-gratia payments by the state (which in any case does little to ameliorate women’s economic hardship or emotional trauma). Until 1997, half-widows could not consider remarriage due to conflicting interpretations of the mandatory period of waiting under Muslim law (Jaleel, 2002). The loss of a husband is compounded by fears regarding the loss of custody over children and/or desertion by in-laws. Women account for most of the cases of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and psychosomatic illnesses; in particular, the psychological impact of state silence and inaction regarding the “disappeared” leads to mental disorders (Bukhari, 2002).

As the political impasse between the Indian state and the people of Kashmir was transformed into an illegitimate war between the Indian military and Kashmiri citizens, the distinction between soldier and citizen, and combatant and non-combatant, ceased to exist. The counter-offensive against militancy was not confined to the streets of Srinagar but extended into domestic spaces. The home ceased to be a sanctuary, with women increasingly becoming targets of direct violence by the military. Rape by security forces is a frequent occurrence and routinely goes unpunished (Asia Watch and Physicians For Human Rights, 1993). According to a 2006 Médecins Sans Frontières report, the incidence of sexual violence against women in Kashmir is among the highest in the world. In a socio-cultural context where sexual abuse of women is tantamount to

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1 It is difficult, if not impossible to arrive at a definitive figure regarding widows and half-widows. Manchanda (2001) cites a figure of 15,000 widows and half-widows, an estimate corroborated by Butalia (2002a).
the violation of individual and family “honour”, the intended humiliation through rape and sexual abuse works with ruthless effect. Rape survivors rather than their attackers are subject to social stigma and ostracism.

The humiliation and emasculation of Kashmiri men by state forces and the loss of traditional sites of patriarchal control have combined with an aggressive and parochial Islamist militancy to generate a masculinist environment. Kashmir’s Islamist militancy perceives the struggle in social and religious rather than political terms, women being integral to its discourse and politics. In 1990, one of the smaller militant factions, the Allah Tigers, issued diktats for women to adhere to specific dress codes (the veil) and refrain from entering beauty parlours as part and parcel of an “Islamic” campaign that also targeted Srinagar’s cinema halls and video libraries (Sidhva, 1994). In the same year, leaflets were dropped over the walls of Srinagar’s Government College for Women, exhorting Muslim women to don the burqa and Hindu women to wear a bindi (ornamental mark on the forehead signifying marital status) (Mattoo, 2002:168).

Women’s reproductive freedoms were the subject of militant decree: banners and leaflets opposing sterilisation and abortion were pasted over Srinagar’s Lal Ded hospital walls during 1989–90 (Dewan, et al., 1994). Despite its lack of popular support, the Islamist campaign did not disappear. In 2000, two women were shot in a beauty parlour for wearing trousers; a year later, a 14-year-old girl was splashed with acid as she walked home from school, leaving her badly disfigured. Militant groups are also known to abduct women and hand them over to a militant leader. These abductions – locally referred to as “forced marriages” – are subject to a code of silence and fear that prevents women and people from openly condemning such abuses by militants (Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, 1993).

Female education has been negatively affected by a general destruction of the educational infrastructure, the occupation of schools by the military and the threat of sexual harassment and abuse of minor students by the military. College students narrate a similar experience; female college students are known to forego their studies and consider early marriage due to widespread sexual harassment (IPT, 1997).

THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON YOUTH

Among the worst hit by the ongoing violence are Kashmir’s children and young people. With the virtual collapse of the educational infrastructure in the state, with schools burnt down and parents killed, it is children who suffer most. Kashmir’s youth face a daunting future with unemployment, a lack of meaningful social or cultural activity, and a culture of pervasive fear and suspicion that, in turn, induces
a crippling lack of imagination and public debate. According to an Oxfam study on the influence of violence on youth in Kashmir, there are approximately 80,000 orphans as a result of the ongoing conflict (Madhosh, 2004). Militants have set fire to schools that they believed were working against their cause. More than 1,000 school buildings have been set ablaze and all sports stadiums have closed (Oberoi, 1997). According to an independent report, 262 out of a total of 583 schools in the Valley are either occupied by the military or converted into centres for interrogation and torture (IPT, 1997). The remaining schools are often closed due to outbreaks of violence (Jarudi, 2002: 24).

There is a lack of educational opportunities for young people, whose numbers outstrip the capacity of available institutions to accommodate them. The University of Kashmir, established in 1948 and by 1988 known as one of the best universities was unable to function in the nineties. It now offers only a few professional courses and these are usually available to only a very small number of students. Intellectuals, including journalists and faculty at the university, are wary and scared of speaking openly, especially against the militants and the army. Specific comment has had on occasion serious, even fatal consequences (Chenoy, 2000). Free expression is not possible. Student unions in colleges or the University are regarded as subversive and there is no student participation or involvement in decision-making at any level. The military remains stationed inside the University, the Regional Engineering College, and most degree colleges in rural districts.

The conflict has reinforced traditional mores, especially in terms of social interaction between young men and women. Creeping Islamisation has strengthened conventional ideas regarding the segregation of women, separate education for women, and ideas regarding purdah (veil). There are virtually no avenues of cultural interaction for young people. Political repression and a stifling social environment has had a negative influence on young men who are particularly prone to mental disorders. “A major and growing problem for young people is substance abuse ... attributed to the disruption in social life, a lack of entertainment, lack of employment, stressful lives and an incapacity to give vent to their feelings” (Kashani, Kanth and Fazli, 2003: 27). An Oxfam study on the influence of violence on youth in Kashmir quotes a female graduate student of the University of Kashmir, Srinagar, who voiced the broken dreams and stolen future of Kashmir’s youth:

> During this turmoil, we have suffered a lot. ... After all this what did we get? Bloodshed, death tolls ... unemployment ... roads full of bunkers ... and above all blind future. Also the restrictions imposed mainly on women are killing. ... People are heading towards collective insanity. ... Due to [our] miserable experiences, we have become dead souls. We
have lost our childhood, youth and future. Sometimes, I wish I could
... die soon. (Ibid: 60)

ATHWAAS: WOMEN BUILDING CONSTITUENCIES OF PEACE

The departure of Kashmir’s Pandits, mentioned earlier, has strained relations between Hindus and Muslims. Muslims tend to perceive the exodus as a state-backed conspiracy to discredit their struggle against the Indian state. While there is some truth in this claim, Pandits were also being killed by militant groups and they hold the Muslims responsible for their enforced exile.

Perhaps because of their own marginal location and consciousness within Kashmir’s multiple and intersecting tragedies, Kashmiri Pandit and Muslim women initiated modest, albeit significant, attempts at peace and reconciliation. A motivating factor was the mutual acknowledgement that the conflict was not merely a political problem but a human tragedy whose casualties included members from both communities that gravely threatened the trust and values of co-existence basic to the survival and continuity of any community. An initiative named “Athwaas” (meaning “handshake” in the Kashmiri language) took shape in 2001. Members of Athwaas comprised women drawn from Hindu, Muslim (Sunni, Shia and Ahmediya) and Sikh communities whose main aim was to acknowledge a common sense of loss and pain, and strengthen the values of coexistence and trust integral to Kashmiri society and culture. In the view of Athwaas members, any initiative for peace and reconciliation must take into account the experiences of women in order to be sustainable. Athwaas felt that its emphasis on women’s experience of armed conflict was also in keeping with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which recognises that women are an integral and crucial component in efforts towards peace and conflict resolution.

The Athwaas team of nine women had a four-pronged strategy: networking, awareness raising, reconciliation and advocacy. The Athwaas interaction is two-tiered: it takes place within the group itself as well as with identified communities. Members of the team travel together to different areas to interact with urban, village and rural communities. Since Athwaas includes members from the different ethnic communities, there is always a member with whom the people of a particular town/village can identify. They meet with people who have been affected by political violence and faced sexual assault by the military and militants. Athwaas assesses existing support mechanisms available for victims of violence and identifies areas of action for rehabilitation. Its interaction with its audience revealed that people, especially women, felt they lacked

3 The information in this section is from Basu, 2004.
agency because they identified themselves as marginalised and isolated victims of the conflict. At the same time, it also demonstrated that women’s experiences of conflict were not the same. Athwaas therefore attempted to facilitate mutual respect and understanding for divergent viewpoints.

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By engaging with women from a range of geographic locations, listening to their experiences with empathy and counselling, and emphasising the rejection of violence irrespective of the identity of the perpetrator or victim, Athwaas was fairly successful in bridging the distrust between communities. Apart from its role in healing inter-community fissures and creating constituencies for peace and reconciliation, Athwaas acts as an intermediary between local communities and the state administration in order to facilitate a response from the government to women’s needs. It also undertakes civic ventures, such as organising women writers’ meetings, and facilitates setting up of self-help groups that engage women collectively in order to transcend subjective feelings of marginalisation, isolation and victimhood. In addition, it uses computer literacy as a means to advance community education and bring young girls and boys together in a supportive and non-threatening environment to share knowledge and skills without fear of criticism or censure.

In sum, the Athwaas initiative emphasises the need for tolerance and reconciliation and the importance of bridging the distrust and suspicion engendered by violence and conflict, and promotes a shared understanding of the destructive effects of violence. To this end it advances the principles of mutual respect, tolerance and understanding that are crucial to any initiative for peace and reconciliation.

Notwithstanding its importance, however, Athwaas does not cover the entire Valley; its initiative is limited to a few geographical areas. For this reason, radio is an important alternative means of communication, information provision and learning in a context such as Kashmir.
Radio plays an important role in the lives of citizens in Kashmir, where it is a widely used and accessible means of communication, especially in far-flung rural areas. The state-run Radio Kashmir is a very popular medium of entertainment, cultural exchange and information. Citizens in remote areas can access information regarding local employment and various social welfare programmes. Radio is also an important means of communication for farmers who receive information about agricultural matters. In addition, it is used as a means to convey citizens’ grievances regarding problems such as irregular power supply, bad roads, unsafe drinking water, etc. to the concerned authorities and departments. Radio Kashmir also disseminates information regarding health by inviting doctors and specialists to talk directly about health problems and possible remedies. The University of Kashmir uses a weekly radio programme to reach out to the student community and update students about academic programmes and activities on the campus. An important and innovative use of state-run radio towards inter-community reconciliation is a phone-in programme with members of the migrant Pandit community. Each week features a member of the community whose conversation with the presenter by phone reaffirms his/her personal memories of a shared past that has been threatened by the present conflict.

As noted earlier, Kashmir’s humanitarian tragedy has triggered a mental health crisis. In a 2006 report, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) emphasised the psychiatric and psychosocial crisis and the imperative need for state agencies to address the cycle of violence and abuse that exerts a profound influence on citizens’ mental health (cited in Asia Pacific Human Rights Network, 2007). MSF provides psychosocial support and mental health counselling for patients in 11 healthcare facilities in rural areas as well as the state capital, Srinagar. To increase knowledge and comprehension of mental health, MSF operates a weekly radio programme to engage with communities in far-flung, mountainous areas and raise awareness about psychosocial problems (MSF, 2006). The programme discusses methods to help people strengthen their ways of coping with stress and tension generated by violence and trauma. According to MSF, fairly good knowledge about the programme exists at the level of the local community (ibid.). The MSF radio programme reaches out to its audience by employing a question-and-answer dialogue between an older man and a younger woman that provides information and knowledge regarding mental health problems (and MSF’s own work). The man, Mir Saab, has knowledge of mental health within a traditional framework while the woman, Yasmin, describes modern, scientific methods to cope with mental stress. Mir Saab is interested in learning more about mental health concepts.

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4 Grateful thanks to Naheed Hamdani for the information in this section.
and directs his queries to Yasmin, who then supplements her answers with relevant and culturally appropriate examples.

The use of radio by the state to reaffirm inter-ethnic tolerance and respect is an important and innovative means to bridge the divide created by the conflict in Kashmir. On the other hand, non-state agencies like MSF use radio as a tool to reach out to, and possibly heal, people facing a crisis of mental health.

However, notwithstanding the critical importance of the universal values that inform the efforts made by Athwaas, or indeed the crucial importance of radio as a means of information, learning and healing, neither intervention is a substitute for the justice and public accountability needed in Kashmir. Indeed, as long as the violence continues and its victims are denied justice, the transformative power of initiatives such as Athwaas and the potential of radio as a means of information, learning and healing, will remain limited.

References


INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations document “An Agenda for Peace”, peacebuilding consists of a wide range of activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation and societal transformation (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1992). For a developing nation such as Pakistan, there are various challenges when it comes to building lasting peace. Violence has manifested itself in the form of war with neighbouring India as well as internal ethnic and sectarian insurgencies. In addition, a fragile democracy with poor governance is marked by structural violence, further dividing Pakistani society and creating marginalised groups.

There is thus an increasing need to use innovative approaches to conflict transformation and peacebuilding. In this regard, distance learning is one area that should be explored. Globally, the link between communication technologies such as radio and conflict has sometimes been a negative one, as in the Rwandan Genocide. Still, one cannot deny the possibilities that exist, particularly in the rural context where distance learning can fill a void for both formal and informal learning situations.

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This chapter starts by discussing how peacebuilding manifests itself in Pakistan’s rural culture, with examples of indigenous approaches. It then examines the role of radio as a means of peacebuilding in the current conflict situation, where on the one hand religious fundamentalists want to confine women inside their four walls, while on the other the liberal civil society is struggling to ensure women’s empowerment. Keeping in mind that Pakistan’s illiteracy rate is high and 70 per cent of the population lives in rural areas with limited access to television, the focus is how radio as a medium can help in peacebuilding efforts by giving voice to the voiceless. A comparison is made between two radio stations: one is Uks Radio, a women’s non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Islamabad that is seeking to reverse the stereotyping of women as passive victims and sufferers through oral testimonies that reflect women’s courage, leadership and resilience from far flung, largely rural areas. The other is a radio station produced by a cleric, Maulana Fazlullah, whose sermons on “illegal” FM radio stations in and around the conflict area of Swat promote the “Talibanised” version of Islam, banning the social inclusion of women.

Some of the crucial questions that will be discussed in the chapter include: Is radio more effective in empowering those who are normally silent or in being used to curb the voices and rights of the marginalised – and which of the two has a stronger impact in Pakistan? How can traditional rural peacebuilding approaches be incorporated with current distance learning and communication techniques for sustainable peace? And what are the challenges and opportunities that exist, and what initiatives can be undertaken at state and civil society levels for the promotion of peacebuilding through radio?

RADIO AND RURAL PEACEBUILDING IN THE PAKISTANI CONTEXT

Pakistan’s media scenario is different for rural and urban areas. Factors that dominate reach and access include electrification, paved roads, literacy and affordability. Most of the rural areas are totally or partially deprived of the factors required for print media and television. Thus radio is the most affordable and widely used by this segment of the population and can have a powerful influence. It is the most effective means of communication, especially in places where there is not much electricity. All that is needed is a transistor radio and a few batteries.

Radio was a dying medium in Pakistan until 2002, when the then government decided to issue licenses for commercial FM channels. Today, 116 FM radio licenses have been issued and 93 channels have successfully gone on-air while the rest will soon start operating. There are licensed FM stations in almost all urban and some rural areas, and they have become the key means of transmission of ideas and information. They are very cheap to set up, are mobile and can usually transmit up to 80 miles. Although commercial in their nature, some FM stations do air issue-based
programmes and thus have a role to play in the development side of this medium. The reliance of rural populations on radio creates a space where practitioners can draw from various peacebuilding values, approaches and mechanisms within the rural context, and incorporate them into distance mediums for greater legitimacy and reach.

The two case studies presented in this chapter illustrate the double-edged qualities of this medium. Programme content can contribute significantly to either exacerbating tensions or reinforcing a culture of dialogue and tolerance. Through Uks’ radio programmes, it is creating awareness that many of the so-called Islamic traditions and customs are in fact a product and legacy of tribal and feudal systems still prevalent in many parts of Pakistan. In the Swat valley, on the other hand, it is fuelling conflict and stripping women of their basic human rights on the pretext of following Islamic doctrines. The two case studies have been selected as they reflect the larger issues of conflict in a religious context and a feudal setting. Both cases use parallel legal systems – one is cultural and the other is so-called Islamic.

**Questioning traditional peacebuilding systems**

The rural culture of Pakistan is communal and has for a long time emphasised building peaceful relations and reconciliation. In addition, Islam as a religion holds a central position within rural society, accompanied by a strong adherence to centuries-old traditions and customs. Both these religious and cultural values have tremendous peace content and peace potential. There is a general consensus among scholars of Islam that the religion is based on values and principles that promote peace and harmony. The very word “Islam” stems from the root *silm* which means peace. Islam emphasises forgiveness, *ijtihad* (reasoning and reflective/critical thinking), *refq wa rahma* (non-violence) *shura* (consultation), *sulh* (conciliation), *nusrat al haq* (activism and advocacy), *marof ul ihsan* (kindness), and truth-seeking in matters of disagreement and conflict. All these values are also essential elements of any secular peacebuilding exercise, and are upheld in two major indigenous peacebuilding bodies of rural Pakistan, the *jirga* and *panchyiaw* system (see box on page 106).

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1 Similar to *jirga* but prevalent in the Punjab province of Pakistan.
Dispute Resolution Through the Jirga

**Jirga** is an old custom with unmatched potential for conflict resolution in the Pukhtoon belt of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It refers to the practice used between individuals and communities, to address concerns and seek solutions acceptable to all stakeholders. It can be summarized as a strategic exchange between two or more people to address an issue through verbal communication. The exchange may or may not result in an agreement on the issue, but the process itself leads the parties, including the interveners, to maintain a certain level of formal communication, thus ensuring peace. To the common person, **Jirga** is a body comprised of local, elderly, and influential men in Pukhtoon communities who undertake dispute resolution, primarily through the process of arbitration. Compared to the judicial system of the present day governments, **Jirga** ensures a fast and cheap justice for the people. Tribal peace is the professional obligation of every elder under Pukhtoonwali. The **Jirga** is built on the rhetoric of peace and strives to always advance in the path of peace and peacebuilding. Finally, the peacebuilding characteristics of **Jirga** are frequently associated with religion. Elders draw on the teachings of Islam on peace and peacebuilding as well as their own cultural background that legitimises their professional and social roles. Relying heavily on the language of peace and peacebuilding, they frequently use religious references to convince parties to give up arms.

Source: Yousafzai and Gohar, n.d.

This system provides an existing platform that can include more participatory approaches to peacebuilding by involving various communication technologies, particularly community radio for awareness and capacity building. There is a need to examine their various decisions, how these were implemented, what their impacts were and how they can be improved. For example, radio programmes targeting rural communities can be used to discuss various **jirga** and **panchiyat** decisions and their ramifications, and to critically analyse their relation with peaceful values and principles of Islam. While some of these decisions have been criticised and discussed both nationally and internationally, there have been hardly any attempts to reach out to rural populations and educate them about the negative aspects of these mechanisms.

And these mechanisms can be very patriarchal in nature and processes. For example, in the internationally known case of Mukhtaran Mai, the traditional peacebuilding mechanism of **panchiyat** led to a decision that victimised the complainant. It ordered her to be gang raped in punishment for a crime that she had not committed, primarily because she belonged to the lowest strata of the rural setting of Meerwala-Multan.
Rural Peacebuilding in Pakistan

where the incident took place. However, through radio her voice of courage was transmitted, transforming her from a victim into an agent defining her own destiny, in an interview on the programme “Hamari Tarraqui, Hamaray Masael” (“Our development, our problems”) for Uks Radio Project-2008. Each word she spoke conveyed a message of courage, hope and forgiveness (see box).

**MUKHATRAN MAI**

“There is a saying in our native language, ‘Learn, either through education or experience’. I do not have a formal education. All I have learnt is through experience. That is why when women turn to me for help when their rights have been violated, I can understand and feel their pain. I have been through the worst of pain and humiliation, and I would never want any woman to experience anything even half that bad. There is no lack of good men in our country, but I believe that only a woman can understand and empathise with a woman. I had one horrible experience and everybody I knew suspected me of wrongdoing rather than punishing the culprits. The reaction of most of the people in my village was the same, and then I realised that it was all because they were not educated. I realised this when I interacted with educated people in urban areas who supported me as a victim of a heinous crime rather than remaining mute on the subject. This stark contrast of attitudes between educated and illiterate people gave me the idea of establishing schools in the area. It was indeed difficult since there were no schools in our village or any neighbouring one, and none of the girls in that area had ever attended a school. It is so heartening to see these girls who have reached Class 7 from nursery (kindergarten) level, it really helps to forget and forgive. I want to see these girls achieve in life what I could not and was not given any opportunity to! ... At the welfare centres, we organise programmes every month, in which all the people of the village – educated or uneducated – are invited to attend lectures and discussions about the rights and responsibilities of men and women and what rights are accorded to women in Islam. ... I believe that the reason for all negative attitudes is ignorance because even men do not know what the rights of women are, and women themselves do not understand their rights. There is a lack of awareness and education among both men and women.”

This is an example of how a radio programme can encourage women to speak up, share their thoughts and experiences, and feel empowered. In stark contrast is the radio transmission described in the next section, which urges women to stay indoors, remain uneducated and be merely agents of reproduction.
Radio spreads terror

The region of Swat in the north west – strategically situated where South Asia, China and Central Asia meet – has been prominent throughout its known history. It was the cradle of a great civilization (Gandhara), and has been invaded several times. It is often called the Switzerland of Pakistan for its natural beauty. With its peacefulness and fertile land, abundant resources such as minerals and emeralds and richness in cultural and archaeological sites, it once attracted tourists from around the world.

In 1992, Sufi Mohammad Khan established in Swat the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariah-Mohammadi (TNSM), which rose to national prominence in 1995 when Khan demanded the immediate imposition of sharia (Islamic law). Violence followed as paramilitary forces began an operation against him. Khan was put in prison in 2002 and his son-in-law, Maulana Fazalullah, took over. By 2007, Maulana had aligned himself with the hard-line Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), setting up dozens of illegal radio stations in Swat from which he preached his message of jihad (holy war).

Initially his FM broadcasts were used to keep locals up to date about daily events around the city. However, Maulana soon began to report incidents in Swat that were “un-Islamic” and he gradually gained the sympathies of the masses, who were already heavily influenced by religion. Moreover, it quickly became vital to hear the transmissions as Maulana and his militants mentioned the names of people who would be their next target if they did not stop their supposedly un-Islamic acts. Locals reportedly say that, “If your name is aired [on] any of the night’s broadcasts, it leaves you with two options, either flee away from Swat or lose your head” (Kazim, 2009). Citizens not dressed according to the prescribed Islamic dress code have been murdered and their bodies left to rot in the main town squares to instil terror in the minds of the people. A huge number of the valley’s half a million residents were forced to flee their homes.

The majority of Maulana’s listeners are women. Possibly this is because they have no other form of entertainment. Some women have also said that they listen in order to “keep our men up to date for their security” (Kazim, 2009). On the other hand, one female listener was reported as saying that, “He speaks our language and talks of our issues. It’s better to listen to him than watch irrelevant TV programs” (Ahmad, 2006). Another suggested that the radio programmes were the best way for illiterate rural women to acquire a smattering of religious knowledge: “Even a poor family can afford a radio and listen to the sermons. Speeches of knowledgeable religious scholars on FM radio have changed my life. And I have started telling other women to get their husbands to abandon their un-Islamic ways” (ibid.). It is ironic that women are the most avid listeners and ardent followers of Maulana’s teachings. The impact of his broadcasts has been worse for women and girls of the area as his sermons denounced girls’ education and his militias blew up hundreds of girls’ schools.
This case sheds light on how radio has been used to perpetuate conflict and violence. Though at the beginning the conflict was more localised, the TNSM have spread their message of terror through radio and have taken the conflict to a larger scale. There have also been reports that through these radio broadcasts, TNSM have also been able to collect money from sympathisers and have used the medium to recruit more militants, in the name of Islam.

The nightly sermons and edicts convey to the people a clear-cut message of who is in power, whose rules are to be followed and who has to be obeyed. It is a power tool that is used to promote and maximise an atmosphere of fear and the forced following of orders issued in the name of religion. The transmissions are one-sided and dictatorial.

As of this writing, there is a humanitarian crisis in Swat. The Taliban struck a deal with the government of the North West Frontier Province in February to restore peace to the area by putting it under sharia law. However, the deal collapsed in May when Taliban fighters advanced to within 62 miles of the capital, Islamabad. The Pakistan military then launched an offensive against the Taliban and has since said it has retaken large swaths of the region. The offensive has left an unknown number of people dead and driven around 2 million people from their homes.

**USING RADIO FOR PEACEBUILDING**

The people in Swat regularly tune in to FM radio. This medium should therefore be used to reach the people with programmes that spread a message of peace and harmony based on Islamic teachings and provide an alternative to the violent discourse that is being transmitted. Various peacebuilding techniques can be used by radio programmers in their transmissions. For example, they can act as a channel between parties, identify underlying interests, counter misperceptions and stereotyping, serve as an emotional outlet, encourage a balance of power, foster consensus-building and remind listeners of their common culture. Various radio programme formats such as soap operas and talk shows may be used. Because of the strong influence of religion, radio sermons/opinions should be aired of religious scholars who have denounced the violence in the area and have defined it as being against Islamic principles and values. Young people must be involved in peacebuilding activities as they tend to be more tolerant and open-minded than their elders and more inclined to learn about various communication and learning technologies.
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While indigenous platforms for peacebuilding like the *jirga* and *panchiyat* are exclusive – because access to all is not possible on the basis of gender, religion or age – through radio the exclusiveness can be broken and the participation of various stakeholders can be promoted. Issue-based radio programmes have the potential not simply to influence people’s mindsets, but also to provide a new direction to socio-political and religious discussion and debate, and to enhance the participation of listeners, including the marginalised – especially women. Although the impact may be small at first, in the course of time such transmissions may help to build the practice and culture of peace and tolerance within society as a whole.

A media landscape that promotes such a culture, as well as transparency, accountability, participation and development, cannot exist without support from various state and non-state actors. To have a vibrant media for peacebuilding not only depends on sensitive and rights-based content; it also requires the involvement of local and national agencies that could be commercial, non-commercial, public or community. Pakistan has so far been unresponsive to the need for community radios, and no licenses have been issued to NGOs and CSOs who want to run these. Such organisations cannot afford to run commercial radio stations. The biggest factor responsible for the reluctance to issue licenses for community radios is said to be the control of content. Since these organisations are law-abiding, they have accepted the refusal of the state and as an alternative are using FM channels for taking forward their development messages. The irony is that Radio Swat, a totally illegal FM radio station, has been operating freely and continues to spread hatred and fear.

On the other hand, Uks radio programmes use a participatory approach by including the voices and opinions of the people. They also try to equip communities with information on how to bring forward their own ideas about development – economic, emotional and moral. The question remains, however, as to what such issue-based programmes achieve. Are they helpful in changing people’s mindsets or directing them towards gender justice? It is true that these programmes are an attempt to have a positive impact on listeners, but will these eventually result in peace rather than violent conflict?

There is greater need for regulation and monitoring on Government’s part to see how various communication media are used, particularly in rural areas where the lack of varied sources of information intensifies their impact. Commitment is required at
policy level to ensure that no communication medium is used for hate speech and to promote violence and conflict. PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) should have specific policy interventions, through the regulatory system, to stop all illegal transmissions and instead promote a community-based broadcasting sector that can take forward development concerns, including those of peacebuilding.

References


Healing Communal Scars in India

In 2002, the worst Hindu-Muslim communal riots since partition took place in Gujarat, India. Many Muslims at the receiving end of the violence were from the poorest sections of society and have yet to receive adequate compensation. Tensions between the two groups continue to simmer.

One of several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are involved in peacebuilding and reconciliation is Samerth, based in Ahmedabad. Samerth works in the slums to provide livelihood opportunities for women and educational programmes for children and young people. One entry point for mobilising women from both communities has been setting up Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which combine access to low-cost savings with a process of empowerment and development and also make loans available to riot-affected families. Involvement in the groups has begun to rebuild trust among the women and greater integration between the Hindu and Muslim communities.

Samerth has also devised peace modules to tackle the effects of violence on children. It began by running playgroups in relief camps and then started programmes in pre-schools within the communities. The schools' initial hesitation at discussing these issues was overcome by inviting eminent personalities as observers, which helped to create an environment of trust.

A few thousand children – with a fair representation from both the Muslim and Hindu communities – now participate in the “peace classes” held in both government and private schools. These tackle biases and encourage a feeling of goodwill and mutual understanding. Quizzes, games, stories and exercises help children to focus on topics of peace, non-violence, unity in diversity and social harmony in a creative and fun way. Schools have also been encouraged to form Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) as forums to discuss issues related to harmony and peaceful co-existence.

In order to help dispel divisive myths and stereotypes, Samerth has also widely disseminated – among children, teachers and parents – the Gujarati translation of a study on multicultural traditions that it conducted in association with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. This emphasises that both communities in the region had coexisted for centuries and had carried out livelihood activities together, particularly in rural areas. These translated booklets are proving effective in building a general appreciation of how both cultures have influenced each other and how reinforcing diversity is a precondition for human existence and an effective democracy.

Caribbean & Canada
Engaging Canadian First Nations Youth in E-learning for Peace

Wendy Drummond and Gregory Cran

OVERVIEW

Yekooche First Nation is an aboriginal community in Canada that has been working towards finalising a land claims and self-government treaty with the federal and provincial governments. In preparing for the responsibilities that flow with self-government, Chief and Council decided to seek assistance from Gregory Cran, a professor at Royal Roads University who had previously worked with them as a treaty negotiator. This is a story about a partnership that formed between a university and an aboriginal community to create a learning environment that would help its members learn about governance through the use of technology. It is also a story about how the learning environment helped to overcome the long-standing conflict patterns within this small remote village.

The chapter describes the background, benefits and challenges of establishing the “neutral, shared” learning space – the community access lab – and the lessons learned along the way. Different approaches and engagement strategies are described through the stories of three young people whose learning evolved out of their individual interest in exploring their curiosity through the interaction and mentorship that the lab provided. It offers the observations and data collected over the last two years by Wendy Drummond, who worked as the project coordinator, facilitator and researcher, in full participation with Yekooche members.
BACKGROUND

Yekooche First Nation is a community of approximately 120 people, located about 85 km northwest of Fort St. James, in the westernmost Province of British Columbia. The community is remote, accessible only by logging road, and since 2000 it has been pursuing a land claims and self-government treaty with the provincial and federal governments. In August 2005, Yekooche reached an agreement-in-principle and is now in the final stages of treaty negotiation.

In the fall of 2005, Yekooche First Nation asked Royal Roads University and the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation to assist them in developing an approach to community-based training that would enable members to assume self-government responsibilities once the treaty was ratified. In May 2006, a project team travelled to the village to examine its existing technical resources. The purpose was to assess performance of the technology, gather opinions on its use and gain insight as to concerns, challenges and potential conflicts that could arise as a result of access to or use of technology.

One of the challenges in implementing an effective learning and training strategy is the barriers and potential conflicts that may prevent access to and use of community-based training. In Yekooche, though the technology exists and high-speed connectivity is wired to each home, lack of experience in its use, minimal computer literacy and the costs of hardware and using the household connection prohibited in-home use. Community access was limited to the children attending school, creating a sense of exclusion and disconnect among community members, families, youth and Elders. In addition to the above, there were also concerns for site security of a community-accessible space and conflicting community ideals and perceptions around how the technology should be used (Drummond, 2006). Discussions with Yekooche members and community professionals indicated the existence of inter- and intra-family conflicts, as well as injustices and perceived injustices between families. In short, there was minimal positive interaction between families and violence was commonplace throughout the village. Vandalism was an ongoing problem, evidenced by broken windows in people's homes and damage to the school and resource centre. The project had the potential to create further barriers for learning, leaving some to question who was attending and participating, who was benefiting and who was not. Moreover, community members' bias around "external intervention" by outsiders and perceived agendas (as in treaty support) were also potential barriers in creating an effective learning and training strategy.

A number of collaborative strategies were identified to manage the potential conflicts and to mitigate barriers to learning. The key was to link technical and Internet learning to the ability and benefit of the community and show that it would enable
them to develop the necessary skills for governance readiness. Transference of skills would promote positive interaction with a common vision and provide sustainability of the learning using the technical infrastructure that already existed.

THE COMMUNITY ACCESS LAB

Following the project team’s visit, a recommendation was made to Chief and Council to develop a “shared, neutral learning space” – which became known as the community access lab (CAL) – for training, mentoring and e-learning support. A “neutral” space was critical to reinforce the idea of it “belonging to all” and ensure that it did not become territorial to the different families, as had happened with the school. The focus of the lab was to assist community members to:

- enhance computer literacy skills and abilities;
- learn governance skills through applied governance training;
- obtain training and support for sustaining the technical and administrative infrastructure; and
- mitigate conflict by promoting cooperation and interdependent relationships within the community.

In addition, the lab was seen as a way to enable band members to stay in the community while they were learning, insuring that community vision, cultural values, existing support systems and a sense of place were maintained.

Setup of the lab

After months of planning, a six-seat technology lab was delivered and installed in a small, unoccupied residence in the centre of the village. Engaging the community in the setup and operation was emphasised in the hope of creating a sense of ownership, care, responsibility and security for the newly acquired assets. Community members were encouraged to participate by developing the floor plan and assembling the equipment. With guidance and support, computers were unpacked, assembled and positioned. The technician, along with several community members, worked over the next couple of days to complete the tasks of wiring and configuring the lab, making it ready for use.

Due to budget considerations, the coordinator’s time in Yekooche was to be two weeks of every month. This rotation in and out of the community created its own

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1 The establishment of the CAL in September 2006 was the first phase of a three-phase project initiated between Yekooche First Nation and Royal Roads University.
challenges, including concerns about the security of the lab. Before leaving the village, the coordinator gathered the group who had helped with setting it up and shared their discomfort in having to lock the door and leave with the key. After the role and responsibility of the coordinator had been explained, the group was asked if anyone was willing to be trained and assume responsibility for the lab in the coordinator’s absence. At the time no one was comfortable with this role. It took until October 2007 for two members to step forward and assume responsibility for keeping the lab open, supporting those using it and ensuring that the equipment was functioning and the place itself was kept clean.

The initial engagement

A goal of the “neutral, shared learning space” was to provide community members with the opportunity to explore the use of technology for their learning purposes. Ideally, learning itself should lead to increased capacity for self-governance for the individual and the community. Additionally, by incorporating the cluster-learning\(^2\) approach, a model used by the Yekooche Public Works team, it was hoped that the lab would encourage cooperative and interdependent relationships through group projects. The hypothesis was that having individuals from each of the families working on projects together would mitigate potential conflicts among the families and create a greater sense of attachment and engagement to capacity development and governance.

The project coordinator had extensive experience in technical and employment-readiness training with youth and adults. She felt that the diversity of her training experience would enable her to apply a number of approaches and strategies and was confident that at least one would be successful. Initially, an introductory computer literacy course was developed to provide new users with basic training on the most current equipment, popular business applications and safe use of the Internet as a resource tool. It was intended that this would provide a base of employment and technical skills to prepare individuals for engaging in online learning and employment-readiness training.

The opening of the lab generated curiosity about the use of the space, the technology itself and the Internet. However, attempts to organise structured class times to cover the course content generated little follow-through by the participants. An introductory computer course was offered with classes at various times of the day and evening, with mornings and weekends defined as open sessions, in an attempt to find a fit with the community’s lifestyles and routines.

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\(^2\) The concept of a group of individuals interested in a common learning objective and who learn collaboratively through sharing of ideas, experiences and skills.
Though there was growing interest, commitment to a specific time for “a class” was elusive, and the drop-in hours filled up quickly with children, youth and adults. Resources were limited with only six computers; therefore it was not possible to both offer a class and operate as a drop-in centre at the same time. However, eliminating the drop-in function for those not interested in a class meant that the equipment would often go unused.

The next tactic was to try and engage individuals in one-on-one training, allowing for a self-paced approach that would guide them through the technology certificate. This removed the necessity of participants arriving at a set time and would accommodate the “ebb and flow” of community events that take priority over the day-to-day activity. Again, there was general interest but the continuity of learning could not be sustained. Furthermore, the requirement that the coordinator rotate two weeks in and out of the community created its own setbacks to the progression of the learning, and whatever gains were made would be lost during her absence.

The lab increasingly became a drop-in centre for those who wanted to check their email, surf the net or listen to music. Attempts to engage those who came in often drove them ‘politely’ out of the door, stating that they had other things to do and besides, there was nothing for them to use the training for. The remoteness of Yekooche and lack of economic and employment opportunities provided no incentive to take training for employment readiness.

The coordinator understood that what was being offered was neither relevant nor purposeful to sustain the community’s interest long enough for them to connect to the learning. Chief and Council were asked for advice on how or whether to continue. Their response was to be patient and to continue to maintain a welcoming space and people would come. They shared that the community only needed time to accept the lab’s presence.

The two-week rotation in and out of the community continued. However, the coordinator stopped asking direct questions about “learning” of the youth and the adults who came by and instead started watching and listening to how they used the technology, the Internet and the sites they frequented and what captured their interest. Close attention was paid to how they interacted with each other, what they were sharing and what got them excited.

As the coordinator continued to return to the village, a relationship of trust began to emerge. Her role evolved to become a resource to assist, not to direct. She became “a tool”, just like the mouse and the keyboard, which allowed people to explore the opportunities that interested them. She was no longer an instructor but rather an animator and facilitator, helping them to explore their curiosity about the technology as part of their learning. She stopped pushing what had always worked in her past training experiences and threw out “familiar approaches”. Instead, she watched, listened
and adapted the flow of the lab to the needs of those who attended. With this change of approach and the subsequent change in the ‘atmosphere’ of the lab, attendance steadily rose from about five participants on a good day to about fifteen to twenty daily, and occasionally there were up to thirty or more participants, with members from each of the families regularly attending as the project progressed.

To meet the new demand, the hours were increased to seven days a week during the two weeks the coordinator was there. New challenges now presented themselves in managing the resources, the volume of participants and the chaos that arose when there was a greater demand for the computers than availability. It was a good “problem” to have and exciting to see the enthusiasm, but the lab was rapidly earning the reputation of being a drop-in/day-care centre rather than the centre of learning for which it was intended. The new challenge was how to maintain the neutral shared environment, re-establish the “learning” component and find ways to manage expectations and perceptions around the lab’s evolving use. “Deinstitutionalised” and “reciprocal” learning became key in describing the project as the participants (along with the coordinator) discovered their interests and a growing sense of passion about what they were learning.

As the lab began enjoying increased regular attendance, the participants were no longer bombarded with questions regarding the direction their “learning” might go; instead, there were conversations about what most interested them in using the technology. Some explored music and video sites, many spent their time communicating with others through email, online chat and social networking sites, and for some it was all about finding and playing online games. Whatever their focus or interest, this created a positive experience and new perspective on “learning”. Through time, trust and conversations, participants began to think about how they might use the technology beyond the passive role of “audience” and to actively explore other possibilities, based on what had meaning for and relevance to them.

**Applied-skills project-based training**

A new and individualised approach to capacity building began to emerge, rooted in the lessons learned during the first few months, which focused on “goals” participants identified. The coordinator’s role was to assist them in shaping the learning outcomes around their goals, turning their interest in activities into a project. The goals were not necessarily centred in technology, but the technology was a draw and a tool that connected the participants to their project. Some wanted to learn about music and video production; others wanted the skills to manage and administer a business, to communicate and interact with family and friends or to revisit art, traditional skills, crafts and stories.
Once participants had identified a project, the learning process began, supported each step of the way by acknowledging the progress made (however small). Even setbacks and challenges were celebrated for the lessons gained as they moved forward. When they realised that their goals were achievable, participants seemed to stay engaged as their desire to know and do more pushed their skill development further.

Through this supported learning and their own successful completion of small steps, participants acquired greater confidence in their abilities and a desire and willingness to share with and mentor those who had similar interests, even with members of families where historical conflict existed. Their excitement, commitment and successes aroused others’ curiosity and encouraged them to begin projects of their own. With continued positive exposure to multiple projects ongoing at any given time, group and community projects began to take shape within families, and collaboration between families on projects emerged as well.

**PARTICIPANTS’ STORIES**

Many stories have emerged from the young people’s exploration of their “curiosity” in the lab. Their positive experiences, which might not have been as compelling if undertaken in the privacy and “isolation” of their home or through a structured class environment, were the impetus driving the project. Often, the lab would be a “chaotic mix” of socialising, networking, music and video expression, meal preparation and learning. It became a gathering place, and inspiring ideas, exploration, and elements of learning emerged from the mix. The following are three stories that demonstrate how the approach brought about a willingness to engage by the members of the community and the impact this had on community engagement overall.

**Raphael**

Raphael, in his early twenties, visited the lab on a number of occasions. He said that he wanted to go back to school and finish his Grade 12 one day and needed to find a way to make some money to be able to do this. However, he had limited reading skills and couldn’t spell or write, and he was sceptical about tackling literacy and his ability to learn. He was also known in the community for having a difficult attitude and
a troubled history, and had had little success in school or other programmes. When approached about taking a course or to explore ways that would assist him with writing and reading, he would smile and leave. Finding a respectful and relevant approach for him was important. This turned out to be through his passion for rap music and the idea of performing in rap competitions, or “rap battles” as the industry calls them. It soon became apparent that he had knowledge, enthusiasm and a keen interest in producing his own music, telling his community’s story – both the positive and the negative – and eventually creating his own CD/video. When it was suggested that he might consider using this interest and goal as a learning project, he initially exclaimed, “Where’s the learning in that?” He then learned that he was going to have to teach the coordinator about rap, rap battles and creating the music as this was an unfamiliar area for her and she would need this information to assist him with the tools to fulfil his goal. His curiosity was piqued, and his engagement in learning that was meaningful and relevant to him began.

Raphael was interested in creating his own music, publishing to the online environment, visiting and eventually working in a recording studio, hosting a freestyle rap competition within the community and earning enough money from these efforts to enable him to create a better lifestyle for himself and his family. He had rarely used a computer, but he was curious about the technology and about the potential project ahead of him and he had the imagination, desire and drive to make something happen.

In the beginning Raphael had been coming to the lab a few times a week. However, his attendance at the lab soon increased to the point that he would be waiting at the door when it opened and would be the last to leave at closing, ten hours later, 6-7 days a week. Over a period of about two months, he spent hours recording, refining, re-recording and compiling two CDs that contained eleven songs each. He became very comfortable with the use of the hardware, the sophisticated recording software and using the Internet to research “beats” or sounds for making his music. Each time he achieved a benchmark in his goals, it became the start of the next level of learning. He constantly pushed the boundaries by reshaping and refining what he wanted to do with the music and attempted to read the technical manual and research the Internet for more options.

Raphael realised that although freestyle had been his method of expression, it had its limits in finding the words to express the stories he wanted to share. He wanted to be able to write his own lyrics and to expand his vocabulary to better tell his story. Literacy had become meaningful and relevant to him, and over the next few months he tackled the challenge of learning to write words that he wanted to use in his music. He carried a notebook with him everywhere he went, jotting down words that he felt would fit in his songs and stories. For the words that he wasn’t sure how to spell, he’d ask someone to spell them out.
All this did not happen in isolation. Each day he would take his place in the corner of the lab and focus on his project in the midst of all the other activities going on around him. His focus, his commitment and the results were observed by others, especially the companions with whom he would normally have hung out. They would come to check out where he was and what he was doing and began asking how they could begin a similar project. Initially he referred them to the coordinator for assistance, but she redirected them back to him as he had been “the teacher” and knew best the process, challenges and necessary commitment. With each individual he assisted, his confidence grew and he reinforced his own skills and understanding. He had made his project look easy, but his peers realised that it wasn’t and soon he gained their acknowledgement and that of the community for his accomplishment. His relationship with others began to change as he was no longer seen as someone to avoid but someone who was succeeding in his dreams, a positive impact not only on himself but to all youth in the community.

With the introduction of more sophisticated software and audio recording equipment, including a MIDI keyboard, Raphael continued to develop both his music and his skills. He created his own original beats and tackled the challenge of writing the lyrics to a song that he dedicated to the children of the community, sharing the challenges of growing up. With each step of his accomplishments he moved further away from his previous life-style patterns and embraced a different sense of who he was and where he wanted to go. Through his willingness to engage in a learning project that was meaningful to him, he not only developed new skills and a greater sense of well-being but also demonstrated the positive impact of this engagement to others in a constructive way.

**Mitchell**

Another young person who frequented the lab, Mitchell, demonstrated a keen interest in video and music clips that he could access online, though he was initially reluctant to commit to a “learning project”. With highly intuitive technical skills and a creative touch, he developed a series of video shorts from webcam shots, mined from the hard drives of the lab’s computers. He then added music that enhanced the stories that the cam shots “told”. His creative work and ease with the technology identified him to others in the lab and community as a person who could provide assistance with projects. He began to spend more and more time in the lab, and as new media equipment was introduced he would tackle the challenge of learning how to use it and hone the skills

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3 Raphael’s song/video posted on YouTube as of April 2009 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1UodbOCZsM
he was discovering in creating his stories. He progressed from the collection of web-cam shots to digital cameras to a prosumer video camera and professional multi-media editing software.

From the video shorts that portrayed the essence of the spirit of the lab, Mitchell’s video projects advanced to capturing seasonal family events that provided images of fish camp and the skinning of a moose. The stories inspired others who became interested in learning how to use the equipment, and he demonstrated its use and careful handling to them. He stepped into the role of taking responsibility for the camera and ensuring that it was maintained and managed in a respectful way.

It was important to cultivate Mitchell’s interest by creating new and intriguing “next steps” through the introduction of more sophisticated software and equipment. These incremental challenges that he took on helped to build his confidence and skills and supported his consideration of a new role in the lab. When funding became available to hire two Youth in Technology Interns, he successfully applied. He is now one of three employees who provide management and technical support, including keeping the lab operational when the coordinator is not in the community. Mitchell’s willingness to take on this responsibility and to mentor family, friends and peers in the spirit of neutrality of the learning space has established a respected position for him in his community. He has become a positive role model in pursuing his own learning and in stepping away from the traditional conflict patterns that were deeply rooted between families and demonstrating that one can move positively beyond them. Mitchell is currently going into his second year of providing technical support – including the support and maintenance of a 13-seat lab and multi-media and recording equipment – and is co-producing a video documentary on the lab.

**Jodie**

Jodie, a young mother of three, has also made a role for herself and her interests and skills in the lab, and was another of the successful applicant to the Youth in Technology Intern positions. She took on the responsibility and the training for the administrative and supporting technical roles in the lab and has become active in establishing guidelines for management, maintenance and providing software support and document services to other professionals in the community. In addition, she has been instrumental in creating a welcoming space through initiating food preparation and keeping the space clean and tidy. Her interest in graphics and online communications drew her to managing the *Yekooche Dust'lus Newsletter*, and she has enrolled in online courses to complete her Grade 12 and to become IC3⁴ Certified. She has also received training to

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⁴ Introductory level IT Industry recognised certification.
support the First Voices Yekooche Language Project that has recently begun.

Jodie’s participation in the lab and her return to pursuing Grade 12 have been a catalyst for others to engage in setting goals to complete high school, as well as to open up considerations for applied learning in bookkeeping, communications, administration and other employment-ready skills. She and her partner are now both employed and pursuing their education as they work towards their vision of providing a healthy home and community for their children.

**Other projects**

Many stories similar to these have evolved out of individuals’ desires to explore their curiosity and the social interaction and mentorship that the lab provides. Recently, the rejuvenation of the traditional skill of beading and regalia costume creation inclusive of all ages has led to the exploration of designs, patterns and traditions and encouraged the sharing of stories and history again. From this inspiration, other cultural projects are now taking shape, and with the beginning of the First Voices Language archive there is a bridging of the generations taking place within the lab, with the youth and Elders engaged in projects together.

Over this past year and a half, it has been repeatedly observed that an individual’s curiosity evolves into engagement in projects that s/he finds relevant and meaningful. This type of motivation builds confidence and leads to a willingness to learn new skills, both necessary and ancillary to the fulfilment of the project. Further to this, the inspiration that is generated through these successes broadens the cycle of personal engagement and spreads to the greater circle of participants, creating opportunities to share skills, experiences and outcomes.

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Additionally, the social inclusion and mentorship in the lab has created another level of success in these group-related projects through expanded partnerships and opportunities. The lab now works with the local school district and the EBUS Academy, an online programme for those who wish to complete high school. The project started with a few individuals; with support, encouragement and recognition of their efforts, there are now 20 Yekooche youth and adults registered in courses ranging from career
planning and communications to math and accounting. This level of participation in adult education opens up new possibilities in Yekooche.

Access to online programmes has increased the options, hope and capacity of interested individuals and has helped to resolve the challenge of living and learning in a remote location. As each individual’s project reaches benchmarks, it is important to continue to identify “next steps” to sustain motivation, encourage healthy challenges and celebrate the success of achievement, all of which drive the learning forward.

**SOME BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT**

The lab has become a “place of possibilities” that enables new skills and knowledge to emerge when learning is seen as relevant to the participants.

The creation of internships enabled two members to learn about technology and administration, which helped build confidence and a willingness to take on the responsibility for “ownership and governance”. Their modelling of courage in stepping up to this challenge was acknowledged and supported by the community and demonstrated to others the need to trust in themselves and the opportunities that are growing within their community. This is integral to the community’s growth towards self-government as it builds capacity and confidence to take on new roles of responsibility and governance that have a positive impact on conflict.

The lab has created a trusted, safe, welcoming and inclusive social environment where exploring curiosity and learning is valued. The multitude of learning activities, the preparation of meals, the gathering and socialising, however, occasionally creates moments of chaos. But in the chaos, the energy inspires more curiosity and more creativity that begins the circle of engagement once again; an energy that would not be generated if accessing the technology or the learning opportunities happened in isolation.

The draw of the technology coming from the lab rather than from member’s respective homes has provided an opportunity to create relationships that break down conflict patterns ingrained in community life. Additionally, the RCMP, Chief and Council and community members have noted a positive difference in behaviours among the young people. They observed that there has been less vandalism, violence and other forms of crime occurring. They also noted a greater willingness to interact with each other, where language was more respectful and where a greater interest was shown in community activities.
The lab has become an integral part of community life, where what participants learn about technology one day encourages them to investigate and learn about their past the next, and where working with each other has encouraged interdependent relationships to form.

THE CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In order to fully appreciate the outcomes of the project, it is important to acknowledge that there have been a number of challenges, although they in no way diminish the successes.

For example, questions arose about the funding and whether other programmes or services were being “sacrificed” for the lab. What were the costs and the value of the resources and services that were being offered? What were the reasons why more funds were being spent on the lab than elsewhere in the community? And would it continue or would it end? In other words, where did the money come from and was it sustainable? Communicating often and openly is imperative to heading off misunderstandings and to setting expectations about the project outcomes. Setting up an Advisory Group is another potential solution to the communication challenge by creating a conduit to the community and Chief and Council.

Another challenge is the devastating influences of drug and alcohol abuse and social unwellness that derailed the focus of many of the young people and adults from time to time, some temporarily while others have not yet found their way back. While the availability of a place and opportunity for learning is a very positive influence, it is not a solution in itself. It can only provide an alternative way for them to use their time and to learn about the impact of the abuse. To be part of a solution it must be supported not only by the professional services – health, drug and alcohol counselling, and social development – but also by the want and the desire of the members and by the community as a whole.

Finally, the challenge in moving this project forward is to find individuals who have an investment in the activities in the lab and wish to take a role in shaping its direction and future. As the life cycle of the lab progresses, there is a need for the space and the learning approach to adapt to what works best for the community and the
participants. The issue for the community is that they do not fall back into assuming that an external perception of “what’s best” for the lab is necessarily correct. It is critically important that they assume responsibility for overseeing the space, including the insight and input of everyone from the youth to the Elders in how it should be managed, maintained and operated.

Support through encouragement, acknowledgment and celebration is critical to maintaining the energy and outcomes of all learning, and it becomes even more so as individuals begin to re-engage in their personal learning journey. Support and encouragement from all members of the community, especially the Elders, Chief and Council and professional staff goes a long way to stimulate participation in the learning and in activities. Nothing inspired the activities in the lab more than when one of the Elders or their Chief would come in and move among the learners, acknowledging what they were doing or working on and celebrating their efforts and successes. This demonstrates that the community values their accomplishments and models what is possible to others.

Additionally, inclusiveness in community planning and projects provides a sense of place and belonging. It brings relevance to their engagement and ownership in governance of their lives and their community, creating new patterns of positive choices that replace previously embedded patterns of frustration, violence and conflict.

Reference

12.

Towards Peace in Jamaica: Learning to Build Community

Horace Levy, Rosamund Brown, mervin Jarman and Elizabeth Mary Ward

INTRODUCTION

The murder scene in Jamaica is grim. With 1,674 murders among 2.6 million people, the rate in 2005 was 64/100,000, the highest on the planet. After a dip and a rebound in the following two years, 2008 was only marginally different – 1,611 – a social epidemic out of control, building up over years. Sensationalist coverage by print and electronic media has undoubtedly contributed to its spread. University of the West Indies (UWI) criminologist Anthony Harriott (2008) calls it a “sub-culture” of violence on the rise.

For its part, the Government has been unable to expand its under-sized police force of 8,000 – which takes the rap (blame), nonetheless, for something that is far bigger than them – and has proposed instead harsher police and judicial measures; but under severe criticism from human rights and legal fraternity groups this move has momentarily stalled. Meanwhile, civil society peacebuilders have been claiming with significant data some success for their innovative methods in the inner city. A growing desire for peace is in fact detectable. It is seriously threatened, however, by the failure of the politicians to respond to the calls of civil society for increased social interventions as well as for an end to debilitating political partisanship. There is also the massive roadblock to social expenditure that is created by the huge and only partially tackled debt gripping the country, worsened now by global crisis.
STARTING THE LEARNING PROCESS: DIALOGUE, CONVERSATIONS

Talking and listening, dialogue and learning – these have been the core of the work of the Peace Management Initiative (PMI). Established by the Ministry of National Security in January 2002, this state/civil society alliance of a dozen churchmen, academics and politicians (in non-partisan mode) was charged with defusing and heading off community violence. Volunteer members of the PMI, mostly from civil society, and a handful of staff go in where shooting and killing occur, engage the gangs in a conversation and persuade them to sit down across from their rivals and iron out counter accusations. Much venting takes place, many angry words are spoken, but speakers listen and hear; and it works, as a starting point.

Once the “soldiers” agree to “hold it down”, to a cease-fire, to begin to let go past hurts and deep distrust in the interest of moving on – since they do want peace – other steps can then be taken. There are the children – and the adults – traumatised by a sudden, violent death, to be counselled. There are the ideas for income-earning projects and the longings for evenings of entertainment and corner league football to be brought forward and addressed (to the limited extent allowed by the PMI’s meagre resources), so that work and income and “nice times” can replace petty theft and idleness, tense, sleepless nights and indiscriminate killing. Of course, there are “violations”; old wounds don’t easily mend. Fresh starts are needed; never, though, from the first starting point.

Gradually, therefore, peace is being learned, an appreciation of its value is distinctly taking shape in the inner city, and every stakeholder is in a learning mode. From the PMI and the young people, to the police and the general public, all are learning. The PMI has come to esteem the inestimable role of counselling, which a member of its field staff initiated on her own, creating on a shoe-string an auxiliary team of professional counsellors, psychologists and pastors. It has come to see the necessity of its sustained presence, coupled with social development measures, if a cease-fire in a community is to be lasting, and it has come to push harder for the needed resources. The police, some at least, have learned that many of the trouble-makers are delinquents who can be turned around without having to go to prison. They have come to value the role of the PMI in that process. They are learning what “community policing” requires of them and thus gaining the trust and respect that the criminal conduct of some of their members had lost them. They are trying to remove corrupt members from their midst. Most crucially, community youth are starting to be less quick to
jump to reprisal: they are learning to give the police a chance to apprehend those who “violate” a peace and they are admitting them to their “peace councils”.

**BUILDING COMMUNITY: THE BUILDING BLOCKS**

From the broad range of measures employed in the learning, it is the non-formal, open and distance channels, some using the very latest in modern technology, that we want to highlight here.

**Theatre**

The very first building block was cultural – theatre in education – on the Mountain View corridor, Jamaicans being very fond of music, song, dance and the stage.

Mountain View Avenue had been plagued for several years by extreme violence; in one instance, three members of the security forces trapped at a roadblock were shot dead. As the major route between the upper residential sections of Kingston and the International Norman Manley Airport, Mountain View was a place of fear for much of the city. Then ten homicides there in the space of four weeks after local government elections in 2003 led to a PMI intervention. The PMI met lines firmly drawn and the area extremely tense.

Yet within three and a half months over a thousand Mountain View people were at an intersection, blocked off with police permission, to mingle, compete in games, sell and buy porridge, peanuts and drinks, and take part in and enjoy a stage show, where before the borders between the seven community fragments had been sealed and defended by guns. What made the change? In addition to the PMI’s week after week mediation sessions, it was the work of the Area Youth Foundation (AYF) (see box on page 132).

**Radio**

While mainstream media defends its right to broadcast titillating content in defence of bigger profits, the social conditions of ordinary citizens go unnoticed, except for the salacious headlines. Development is by-passed. It is within this environment that ROOTS FM came to be. The name was chosen by Kingston inner city communities to represent what they wanted their station to do – get to the root of the matter in a manner that reflects the roots and culture of the people. Its commitment is to using the airwaves to allow the community to get to know itself through shared experiences. Tune in for 15 minutes and you’ll hear somebody’s story, somebody else’s advice and most likely somebody praying for somebody else. The objective is to break down the
The Area Youth Foundation (AYF) was engaged by the PMI to work in Mountain View. As a group of inner city youth reflecting on their own experience in songs and short plays under the expert guidance of three committed artistes, the AYF is unique and unmatchable. Its performances before audiences at home and abroad as well as its own inner city people have unforgettable impact. AYF had come into existence six years before out of producing Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka’s *Area Boy*.

AYF began with a month-long training programme, which had to be done outside the community – there was no neutral spot – of 28 participants from the five sections offering candidates. The training involved the raising of consciousness through discussion about life and the inner city experience of violence, of hardship, of police brutality, interspersed with the creation of songs and skits – to the sound and the beat from a keyboard and a drum – that caught and expressed thoughts and feeling about their experience. It was a period of lively, provocative interaction between participants and the trainers and among the participants themselves.

Trainees were then commissioned to organise, with AYF help, “peace boats” in their areas, a local production to which, together with a cooked meal, members of other areas were invited. Thus began, very slowly at first, the cross-border movements. This was followed by the AYF organising and coaching the best talent across the sections toward the final stage-show, which also invited a few professional artists. When by police orders the show closed at 10 pm, most people only reluctantly drifted away – Jamaican practice dictates much later closing hours!

Homicides were down the following 15 months to two. However, they climbed back in national election year 2007, under extreme political partisanship, to 24 – for a population of only about 13,000, a terrible ratio of close to 400/100,000.

Invisible barriers that prevent residents from working together towards a shared vision in the interest of the majority.

As ROOTS FM continues to think up creative ways to encourage and empower its listeners, a brainstorming session is happening in the front office of the modest space the station occupies upstairs in a rustic zinc-roofed building. It sits in the midst of a large children’s home, a ceramic studio and a chapel, an oasis in the inner city: Mustard Seed Communities, home to a caring ministry that supports abandoned
disabled children, community support activities and the outreach radio station. The team members all live in the community and understand first-hand the complexities of community reporting. Over the last 10 years the station has learnt that repeatedly reporting stories of crime does not solve the problem. In fact, word on the street has it that young people were reveling in listening to media reports of their own crimes and the aftermath of stricken fear they evoke. The reports encouraged their behaviour.

The objective [of ROOTS FM] is to break down the invisible barriers that prevent residents from working together towards a shared vision in the interest of the majority.

The discussion is now animated as talk gets around to positive things happening in some quarters. What about the single mother who decided to start parenting projects as a solution to the crime problem? What about the young people on the dumps who were setting up a business collecting scrap metal? Remember the resolve of the youths in the feared Maxfield community after one of their own brought home an unlikely gold medal from the Olympics in Beijing? Clearly the communities were not helpless victims. The team was finding examples of communities coming up with their own ideas for starting peace processes and some were having measurable successes.

Good practices were being created. One team member proposed using each good practice as a model that could be tried by other communities facing similar circumstances. The idea begins to gel. What if the station went into each community and talked to the residents to find out which individuals, agencies and clubs were carrying out activities that were platforms for maintaining stability? Somebody else suggests that those active residents and groups identified should be brought together to form a live on-air panel discussion in the studio to discuss how they were organising themselves, the processes and challenges. Another idea was to host the programmes in the actual communities. In the end the group agrees to incorporate all the ideas.

Testing a radio “intervention” with the community is always an awakening. Once the group has gathered, the feedback from the process can be profound in its simplicity. Like the idea that everyone participating in the programme should start an off-air networking support group to check-in and encourage each other not to give up in the face of enormous challenges. This suggestion came from a community activist who had achieved much success in calming nerves and building a positive social movement for youths in the Mountain View community. The idea found favour. It would strengthen the kinship and enable a supportive environment where people would communicate with and nurture each other. With acceptance among the community groups, most of which would be participating in the making of the programme, the ROOTS
team felt empowered to move along with designing the shape and content of the show. Community visits were to be scheduled so that the team could get a first-hand idea of what was happening on the ground. Communities would be selected based on what was heard about and seen on visits or based on direct requests from communities that had a story to tell. Partnerships would be sought with various agencies including government, development and social action organisations like the Social Development Commission, Kingston and St Andrew Action Forum and PMI, as well as local community groups.

The name was settled on fairly quickly: “Mek We Talk (Jamaican patois for Let’s Talk) – Communities Sustaining Peace”. The planning process identified that five core persons were necessary to carry out the process, each with a clearly defined role. One team member was selected to do research and prepare rich background information on the history of the community, its focal points, outstanding features, historic characters and accomplishments over the decades. Another would coordinate the broadcast, select the participants, prepare a running order, and maintain a database for follow-up programmes and monitoring. Three others would complete the team, one to set up the technical requirements and record the programme for archival purposes, another to monitor the broadcast and prepare community news stories for airing after the broadcast, and the third to host the show. In building-in a monitoring and evaluation tool to measure the success of the programmes, the station decided that follow-up community broadcasts should be held two months after the studio discussion, this time from the hub of activity in the heart of the community. The indicator would be the residents’ spontaneous response to the current atmosphere and developments since the time of the first airing.

The effect of the first programme was powerful. Arlene Bailey, a woman from the politicised garrison community of Fletcher’s Land, was telling the listeners how she heard that her lover of fifteen years and the father of her son had been murdered in a shoot-out. It was one of those poignant radio moments that made a lasting impression on all who listened that Wednesday morning. Listeners were touched by the heart-rending pain in the story and applauded Arlene’s resolve to use this devastating experience to identify a way of addressing the community’s most pressing problem. Good parenting, she declared, was the only way out of crime and violence. After mobilising modest institutional resources, Arlene set about training parents in the community, working simultaneously with the Kingston and St. Andrew Action Forum’s “Get the Guns off the Street” campaign and the Women’s Resource and Outreach Centre. Workshops were held for two hours weekly over six weeks, eventually training 40 parents in Fletcher’s Land.

Since the programme, Arlene has trained many more beyond the borders of her own community in areas in sharp, bloody political conflict with her own. When asked
Towards Peace in Jamaica: Learning to Build Community

if her work is disabled by political border wars she says that it is important to start making the linkages in times of peace. “You can’t go in when there is war, you have to make contacts in good times, go in and talk with them and use drama to get their attention. Jamaican people like when you act out things, so we get Sistren Theatre Collective to role-play situations like what to do when your son or your brother is a gunman. Then we get into how we talk to each other and the children.” The phone calls after the programme were constant. Different communities wanted a telephone number for Arlene, to hear more and get help with dealing with young people in their communities.

The series began airing in September 2008, and the station has been able to sustain the initiative in 2009 through the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which linked the development nature of the broadcasts into its governance objectives. Twenty programmes have been aired highlighting 15 communities. This time the scene is set on a busy corner on Maxfield Avenue. The colourful ROOTS banner and reggae music indicate that the community radio station is setting up for an outside broadcast. About 30 residents are gathered for the activity with another 15 sitting on the periphery. Two months have passed since the first in-studio panel discussion. The station is now back to check up on developments since the first programme. The Ramsey Road Progressive Youth Club, which was formed after community resident Shelly Ann Frazier brought home the 100 metres gold medal in the 2008 Olympics, is gathering momentum in the area. Since the last conversation they have written up a business proposal for the start of a chicken farm, and a pastor in the area is assisting in sourcing funding. These are mostly male youth who have been unable to find employment in many years. They say the challenges are tough but the peace in being maintained and recreational activities are taking the youths’ minds off violence. A middle-aged woman in a wheelchair wends her way to the microphone to talk about her group, the Over 60s Comfort Programme, which organises food, recreational and income-generating food service activities for seniors. Yvonne proudly lists the head start the group has made.

But not all the initiatives have had a successful ending. The scrap metal project on the dump has all but dried up as the worldwide demand for metal has fallen. So far the activity has not been replaced, but fortunately the youths have not chosen violent alternatives out of the problem. “Mek We Talk – Communities Sustaining Peace” is one example of how alternative media like ROOTS FM can support developmental activities that bring peace to communities. The cross community network work group that sprang from the programme also continues, and the evidence of strengthening supportive relationships is apparent.
Community dances and reggae shows

In December 2004, the local arm of the international group, Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) was launched by two doctors in the Ministry of Health. Violence, they clearly saw, was a health matter, given its impact on the health services. That the solution did not solely lie within the health sector was also evident, and today the alliance is based at the Centre for Public Safety and Justice, UWI, Mona Campus. The VPA provides an opportunity for organisations from all sectors of society to unite around a shared approach to violence prevention. It maximises the impact of violence prevention initiatives by promoting the use of best practices through the collection, analysis and broad dissemination of available data, channelling resources into initiatives that exhibit best (proven) practices while lobbying for systematic change at policy level.

The alliance uses culturally appropriate communication messages and strategies to target high-risk groups. Peacebuilding messages are customised to audiences in different settings including dancehall, communities and schools.

The dancehall intervention, led by producer Dimario and promoter Stampede, supported the peace campaign dubbed “No Violence, One Love” with an extension “Violence is Preventable, Stop Now” within the dancehall settings. The aim of the campaign was to infiltrate community dances as well as national reggae shows to promote positive messages on violence prevention. Music is the lifeblood of young people in Jamaica, with approximately 112 sound systems and 724 selectors involved in the live dance music scene, and a circulating population of about 347,000 patrons weekly. There are approximately 10 dances per week and 8-10 clubs. The effort promoted violence prevention and other healthy lifestyle messages through dancehall events via the selectors and, for sound systems, via disc jockeys.

Along with the promotion of positive messages, a partnership with several performing artists had resulted in the production of video clips and a CD with the compilation of endorsements by the artists, positive messages and socially conscious lyrics to be used with promotional and other print materials for the campaign.

This effort represented a multiple agency/interest group intervention including the Health Lifestyle programme of the Ministry of Health, PMI and communication specialists. Data on knowledge and attitudes were collected from these events using healthy lifestyle scorecards. Inputs were made at multiple levels. Shows received extensive media coverage, and with the readiness of the entertainment industry the message was provided to difficult-to-reach target groups within the wider audience. Where support was received from the ground with support from sponsors and regulatory bodies,

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1 “Selectors” in reggae choose and play the tracks, while the disk jockeys rap over the music.
the greatest impact was seen in the removal of violent lyrics and overt sexuality from the music. Much work sustained over time remains to be done to see wholesome music become the norm.

**Computers: the Learning for Life Programme**

For a community to be peaceful, “corner youths” (i.e., unemployed youth who hang out on corners) have to be supported. Full participation of many young males in community life has been hampered by the chronic problem of their high levels of illiteracy – an estimated one-third of those leaving primary school according to a May 2008 editorial in the newspaper *The Jamaica Gleaner*. Illiterate youth were twice as likely to have taken part in fights, belonged to a gang or carried a weapon to school in the past month (Fox and Gordon-Strachan, 2007; Wilks et al., 2007). For out-of-school youth 15–19 years, the VPA initiated a Learning for Life Programme (LFLP) using a software program to provide a computerised solution to violence-torn communities where facilities such as a community centre, printery or non-governmental organisation (NGO) office had computers.

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For out-of-school youth 15–19 years, the [Violence Prevention Alliance] VPA initiated a Learning for Life Programme (LFLP) using a software program to provide a computerised solution to violence-torn communities.

LFLP targeted unattached corner youth aged with the aim of capturing their attention and interest and assisting them to become functionally literate and numerate. Training has been provided in communities where the high-risk corner youths live, often isolated by warring gangs and a lack of bus fares. Hope Worldwide (an NGO) houses the server site that hosts the computer program, which offers access 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Each community (alternative learning site) is linked to the system by a DSL line provided by Cable and Wireless Ltd. Currently this central server site feeds the programme to distant work stations in various locations in five parishes via the Internet.

The programme offers individualised training, with students progressing at their own pace to master foundation reading skills (see box). Information is captured at the student level by classroom, and centre reports are available to special educators and administrators at remote locations. By continuously adapting and adjusting to students’ needs in real time, the programme is able to use the results of ongoing assessment to modify the training programme to meet individual student needs.
SUCCESS THROUGH THE LFLP: A TESTIMONIAL

Timothy was born and raised in the inner city. His education stopped at age 15 when he failed the grade nine achievement test as his literacy level was too low. It was then also discovered that he had not been registered at birth – a government requirement for entering high school.

Timothy started the LFLP in 2006 but was not enthusiastic due to his inability to read. On finding that the programme was computerised, however, he became excited. Once he began interacting with the programme, the trainers noted that his violent temper was being curbed. As Timothy reported, “The programme helped me to be more patient.” He completed 75 per cent of the programme and is now able to read fluently. In 2007, at age 17, he sat the HEART/NTA English entrance test and passed 34 out of 50 questions. The following month he sat a reading test on a construction site where he is now employed.

The minimum requirement for a remote community site is four to five computer workstations, with a DSL line, a centre manager/facilitator, and one on-call technical person (with computer skills).

The Lifeskills component of LFLP saw the participants of the programme engaged in a series of half-day workshops on conflict management, life skills training, small business loans, job placement opportunities and vocational and skills training. They were also given basic job-seeking skills such as job applications/interview training and work ethics. Assistance was provided in obtaining basic documents such as birth certificates and TRNs (Taxpayer Registration Numbers). A mentorship programme is to be added when the project is launched by a church group, with influential persons such as coaches to encourage and provide support to participants. Sport activities will be organised to attract and retain participants as well as provide structured supervised alternative to high-risk behaviours.

Individual participants have started to regularise their lives by seeking out their birth certificates, TRNs, National Insurance Scheme (NIS) numbers, etc. Some have gained entry into the National Youth Service Programme as they have now been able to pass the entry level test, while others have gained employment and – depending on the flexibility of their work hours – continue to be involved in the programme.

The Container Project

Palmer’s Cross in Clarendon parish is where street dreams and heroes like Dawg Heart, Bull, Bukie, Sandokan, Natty and Bubba used to live, a place where dons (gang leaders)
were born. Once upon a time, they ran the community, criminals who protected the area from outsiders who sought to control their territory. Under the dons’ rule in the 1970s and 1980s, Palmer’s Cross remained untouched, held together by strong community protectors. Although criminals themselves, these dons outsourced their criminal services to other parts of the island and so, by extension, the community became known as one not to be tangled with. The residents of Palmer’s Cross were safe.

However, sometime in the mid-1990s things took a different turn; the elder dons were dying, some had left the community and a new generation of thugs was in charge. They had learnt the ropes well, but performed their roles with different intent. In a situation of little resources and no outlets for their energies, they turned inwards. In the late 1990s this was Palmer’s Cross – a place of reprisal shootings, houses shot up, houses burnt down, deserted roads – just like scenes from an old Western movie. But what was the killing about? Well, somebody disrespected somebody and the friends of the “disrespectee” had to kill the “disrespector” for the disrespect shown. Soon, the friends of the friends became involved and hundreds of lives were lost in the process.

Right down the middle of Palmer’s Cross, Palmer’s Cross Main Road to be exact, there lies an imaginary dividing line, visible only to those who live in the community. On either side of this line, meaning on opposite sides of the road, rivals gangs inhabit the lanes. It has been like this for years. Youths who were 12 and 13 years old in 2003, who had never lived a day outside the community, didn’t know what it was like to walk across the street as it would have meant sure and certain death.

This was the year Mervin Jarman, son of the community, decided to come back home. He had left for London in the 1990s in the hopes of rewriting his story. There he collaborated with Graham Harwood and Richard Pierre-Davis to create a mongrel collective, “the avant-garde of digitally engaging street culture world wide”. Together they travelled to all corners of the globe introducing the concept of digital arts in the streets. A boy who had been written off by one of his ninth grade teachers as just another ganja (marijuana) smoking good-for-nothing, had found a way to culturally interpret emerging ICT technology to create another dimension in the worldwide digital arts industry. After spending four years planning and saving in order to explore a Palmer’s Cross solution, Jarman returned home to start the mission of “repatriating technology”. The community he found was vastly worse than the one from which he had escaped. He was in the middle of a community at war with itself. But he had maintained ties there. At 41, he was known and respected by the youths as an “elder”, unattached to any of the feuding gangs. So in 2003, hope came to Palmer’s Cross in a bright yellow container.

The Container Project is a 40-foot shipping receptacle that’s hard to miss as it sits next to the once dreaded Web Lane, just off the Palmer’s Cross Main Road, on a two-acre family property that Jarman provided for the project. Back when the project was set up, computer technology was something that happened “in town”, and only people
with money could get access, or so was the perception. In other words, this was not something that had any business in their village. Not until the building started going up did the young people in the area have any idea what was taking place. Eventually over 100 youths, mostly unemployed, had made their way to the site to offer voluntary labour in building this new community venture. Jarman, ignoring the previously drawn borderlines, invited youths from across the road to come over and be a part of the development. Tentatively, more and more youths began to cross the main road and on to Web Lane. Over time, the divisions were erased from the minds of the community. People started talking to each other again.

This unstructured, unannounced, informal approach to team building enabled an environment of trust among the youths. They formed a common bond around the shared desire to create something better for themselves. A new spirit of energy pervaded the air; even at 2.00 am, the once eerie silence of Palmer’s Cross was replaced by sounds of dancehall music and young people in animated discussion. There was nowhere else to go, nothing else to do and this was as close to family as some of the youths would ever get. These were the same ones who had previously made different and often unsavoury choices in how to spend their spare time. The first phase of peace had started even before the physical project was completed.

The Container Project is now a fully established multimedia centre with 10 functioning workstations, video and still photography equipment, audio recording components and printers. The container itself was donated by Jamaica Producers Group in the United Kingdom, and with determination, a vivid imagination and some trash technology, the space was retrofitted as a community technology hub. Most of the youth that come in are interested in learning more about music production and, because the primary focus of the Container is to use technology to channel talents into income-generating initiatives, participants are encouraged to pursue their interests. After six years in operation, over 300 young people from the community have completed courses accredited by the HEART Trust, the premier skills training certification body in the island. Many of these go on to become computer trainers, and the centre is now recognised as an authorised training location in Jamaica that benefits hundreds of people beyond Palmer’s Cross.

But in Easter 2006, the almost fairy tale took a devastating turn. Haskel, one of the founding members of the project who was being groomed for leadership by Jarman, was murdered, the accidental victim of crossfire. Haskel had done his time in prison, cleaned up his act, got a job and was turning his life around, making positive leaps forward. His murder was a huge blow to the process and a new wave of gang war began. The stories made national news; Palmer’s Cross was back in the headlines again. All this occurred during one of Jarman’s frequent sojourns overseas, where he spent extended periods lecturing in digital arts. By now the youths were trained and a core
team was in charge of running the project. However, in his absence, in the midst of the escalation of violence, the Jamaica Public Service erroneously determined that the Container was benefiting from illegal power connections. The life-stream of the project was cut off and the community went into a state of hysteria. Not knowing the actual situation, the residents determined that if the violence could shut down the Container, then the community was next. It took one full year for the situation to be sorted out, and for the Public Service Company to take responsibility for the faulty accusation. Jarman returned home on the eve of a gruesome double murder and has spent the last two years in efforts to sustain the project and contribute to a reduction in the violence.

Jarman’s presence restored the confidence of the youths to keep studying and finding ways of earning from their new-found skills. When the project started, Ricardo Lettman was one of those on the corner doing nothing, even though he had tried everything. “I was writing songs and that didn’t work, I tried being a tradesman, that didn’t work. But I could use the computers to advance my knowledge in business skills”. A founding member, Ricardo is now a group leader and teaches Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) classes an hour away in Kingston, the capital city. Later this year he intends to introduce CXC and additional HEART-certified classes at the Container. Additionally, he has started up a greenhouse in the community and is looking forward to continuing his poetry. In 2007, Ricardo presented his work at the Calabash International Literary Festival to good reviews. He says that the Project has made him who he is and that if it had not existed between 2005 and 2007 there would have been many more casualties.

Carlton Benjamin is on his way to the studio to do some voice work. He has a big show coming up in the tourist town of Negril. He is a graduate of Vere Technical High School, well known for the internationally famous athletes it has produced. Carlton is absorbed by music; he writes songs and produces rhythms as if his life depends on it. In 2002 after leaving school, he could find nothing to do. Another of the youths who volunteered during the assembly of the Container, he became a master of the digital production software and subsequently a trainer. Now he travels all over the island participating in training workshops including those at penal institutions and those organised by private sector and state companies. His earning capacity is now far different than it looked four years ago.
In 2008, The Container won the Stockholm Challenge Award for the best worldwide ICT project in education. In the same year mervin Jarman received Jamaica’s National Badge of Honour for “meritorious work in the enhancement and upliftment of street youths and adults in information technology”. Now, the first generation of Container graduates are making their mark in sustaining the organisation. Jarman is an advocate for the importance of culture in learning. He believes that the success of the nation is grounded in viable education where young people are able to interpret knowledge as a tool for the sustenance of life. The project has shown those with artistic skills how to translate these into music production, posters, brochures, newsletters, programmes, video packages; other have become trainers. All of them have improved their earning potential.

Palmer’s Cross has been relatively stable since late 2007. Spontaneous attacks still occur as unreformed gang members are sometimes mysteriously shot down. But there is still much hope in the bright yellow container. In 2008, with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Jarman created a mini-container in a garbage bin. Known as the ¡Street Lab, the garbage bin on wheels contains a radio and television transmitter with the capacity to broadcast within a two-mile radius and five laptop computers. In September 2008 the bin was demonstrated in the Fletcher’s Land and Tower Hill communities, two tense areas in the urban inner cities of Kingston, and also at the UWI. The objective of the mobile lab is primarily to be a behaviour change unit. It is based on the concept that community interventions should go to the people, instead of waiting for them to come into a particular space, therefore allowing for the direct enhancement of personal development capacities. The ¡Street Lab reproduces the services of the Container. The vision is to have a bin in each community as a multimedia income-generating resource, owned by the people. Participants would receive training at the Container and go back into their community, using the bins to train other youth, and start a new cycle of learning and earning.

**Murals and photography**

VPA-sponsored murals painted by local artists can be found on a dozen inner city walls. With forward-looking images they complement – and offer an alternative vision to – the commonly seen memorial paintings with which community youth remember their fallen comrades.

Photography is another medium employed, with some success, to reach inner city youth. Photographs taken by 20 inner-city youths aged 14–17 who participated in a “To shoot or not to shoot—Click is the answer!” Digital Photo Workshop were showcased at an exhibition September 2008. The workshop was a project of the VPA with
Towards Peace in Jamaica: Learning to Build Community

the sponsorship of Super Plus Food Stores and a dozen other firms. The youth had the tutelage of experienced and qualified photographers and visual artists. Some had attended previous workshops, so that the curriculum was expanded to another level to include aspects of photo editing, animation, layout and design, and exposure to careers in photography. Sessions in life skills were a vital component. The photographs exhibited showed the high levels achieved by the participants, and the proceeds of the sales went to their school expenses. The aim was to empower young people, opening up opportunities to them, as well as to showcase in a positive way, in the subject of many of the photos, their violence-torn communities.

Other peace initiatives

There are a number of other initiatives that can only be mentioned briefly here. For example, there is now an annual Peace Day in the Peace Month of March, a calendar fixture for many organisations, schools, agencies and communities and with a high level of media coverage. In 2008 an estimated 4,500 persons marched across the city from three different starting points and 5,000 were present at the closing rally.

A regional conference on control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their impact on children was organised by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and supported by UNDP and VPA. UNICEF also sponsored the visit of Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier from Sierra Leone, whose inspirational addresses highlighted the plight of child soldiers and the need for prevention programmes as well as for programmes to assist in their rehabilitation.

In collaboration with PALS (Peace and Love in Society), 4H, Ministry of Education and Food for the Poor, schools were given packets of callaloo (a local version of spinach) seeds and invited to participate in the programme Callaloo for Peace. At the National 4H achievement day, awards sponsored by Food for the Poor were given to the top three schools and to winners of a callaloo cook-off held as part of the achievement day activities at a big agricultural show at Denbigh. The leaders of 4H have now decided to make the programme an annual event to strengthen peacebuilding efforts.

One of PMI’s fresh moves was the formal peace agreement signed in two communities in mid-2008 by warring groups under the eyes of the media with the participation of the police. The public signing was a great idea that actually came from one of the community gang leaders. Formality and publicity, by involving both the local community and the wider society, put greater demand on the gangs to take their commitment seriously and adhere to it, as well as offering some hope to the Jamaican public.

Despite this positive move, the print media criticised the agreements because gun surrender was not included and accused the police of weakening their obligation to go after wrongdoers. However, the gun surrender issue is a non-starter as anyone familiar
with the Jamaican inner city situation knows: guns are not going to be turned in or buried until the police can assure their owners of protection from rivals (which they cannot); moreover, the gun is central to the concept of masculinity in Jamaican ghetto culture. The criticism also ignored the prohibition in the agreement on exhibiting firearms and on celebrating big events (burials, “sessions”) with volleys of gunshots. Ignored, too, were peace agreements elsewhere, for example in Ireland, where gun surrender took place only seven years later. The second charge was also completely baseless: senior police officers at the signing made this abundantly clear, as have subsequent arrests and prosecutions.

In the meantime, in spite of blips and “violations”, the two peace agreements have opened the door for a range of other initiatives and shown a hopeful measure of success, with a drop in homicides and shooting episodes of 75 per cent in the older August Town case over the first six months compared to the previous six.

**RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATION**

While the peace-making and the community-building have been going forward, the VPA, the PMI and academics have been collecting and studying the data on crime and the peace process and getting the information and their analysis out to the various stakeholders so as to help policy and praxis get it right, “investigating the more ‘pedestrian’ how-to matters” (Harriot, 2008: 73).

**Injury Surveillance System and Crime Observatory**

A public health approach was used by the VPA to guide the development of community interventions. This approach is based on four steps: defining the problem; identifying the risk and protective factors; evaluating the intervention(s); and implementing promising programmes on a wide scale. As part of defining the problem, data on violence-related injuries (VRI) were collected from hospitals island-wide that provided a risk profile of those affected by violence. The system was called the Jamaica Injury Surveillance System (JISS) (Ward et al., 2002).

The JISS data, augmented by data collected on injuries from routine surveys, health centres and the sentinel surveillance system, give a measure of the magnitude of the impact of injuries on the health services. These data, in conjunction with police data and community-based surveys, can be used to complete the risk profiles for different types of injuries. The JISS data can be generated at the parish, regional and national level to form the basis for the design and monitoring of prevention programmes.

At the national level, the data were shared with the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the Ministries of National Security and Justice and other governmental and non-
governmental agencies and served to support policy and legislative control measures as well as to evaluate the impact of intervention programmes. Mapping the location of VRIs saw the development of Health Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which then developed into Crime GIS and laid the foundation for mapping data for the Crime Observatory.

The Crime Observatory has been established in one Police Division (Kingston Western) consisting of 10 or more communities. Within the Observatory, surveillance and homicide data have been used to target interventions at a community level with the aim of reducing the impact of crime and violence. The initiative analysed VRI surveillance, and homicide data using GIS. This spatial analysis coupled with asset mapping was used to identify hot spots for targeted community interventions. Crime Observatory face-to-face meetings brought together an inter-sectoral working group for information sharing and coordination of interventions to tackle the problems identified. Wider dissemination of data, analysis and information is done through the Crime Observatory newsletter, the web www.vpajamaica.com, and soon-to-come community billboards and community forums. Bulletin boards are in the process of being erected in August Town, for example, that will post maps showing both assets and the location of incidents of violence as these change over time.

For the police and communities the Crime Observatory is an ongoing mechanism supporting improved police/community relationships. This use of technology to share information will assist both community people and the police to see their situation graphically, which should help to reduce violence.

**PMI OUTCOMES**

As the table on the next page shows, in six of the seven communities listed to which the PMI paid sustained attention, the reduction in homicides has been considerable. This is brought home by comparing the homicide aggregate in 2005 with that of 2008 – 84 to 38, which also reveals the significant contribution made to the national homicide rate by community gangs, especially when one takes into account that only seven of the over 50 communities in the city are counted here. What the table cannot capture is the end of corner feuding with its nightly exchanges of gunshot, regular killings and outpourings of grief, a profoundly different climate for the communities.
## RESULTS OF PMI INTERVENTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
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<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Duhaney Park</strong> section (pop. est. 2,100)</td>
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<td>Average 2 per year</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dunkirk, Franklyn Twn</strong> (pop. 12,900)</td>
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<td>51</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jones Town &amp; Torrington Pk</strong> (pop. 10,200)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22 but only 2 after July</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Majestic Gardens</strong> (pop. 1,567)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mountain View</strong> (pop. est. 10,000)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rock Hall</strong> (pop. est. 1,000)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Woodford Park</strong> (pop. 2,750)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. Population figures are from the 2001 Census unless estimates are indicated.  
2. Gray colour in a box indicates that the PMI was active in the community represented by that row, for at least a part of the year of that column.

In viewing these statistics it should be borne in mind that two murders in a population of 2,000 (a section of Duhaney Park), has a huge psychological and emotional impact. Perhaps this can be brought home – for those who have never been through the experience – by recognising that it works out to the huge rate of 100/100,000; the 10 homicides in Majestic Gardens, population 1,567, to approximately 600/100,000. These are wartime and devastating rates for any community.

As this brief overview indicates, every avenue in and out of the book is being tried, and tried with toil and commitment. Tackling something of the serious depth of a culture of violence requires no less – it is a life-and-death matter, we well appreciate. Still, we are not alone. Sharing with and learning from the many others around the planet facing similar situations has to be the way forward.
References


Youth Violence and Innovative Approaches to Peacebuilding Education in Trinidad and Tobago

Rowena Kalloo

OVERVIEW

While the twin-island state, Trinidad and Tobago is recognised for the peaceful co-existence of its ethnically diverse population, in the last decade Trinidad (more so than Tobago) has experienced an unprecedented surge in crime and violence in which the demographics of offenders are skewed by race, gender and socioeconomic status. Parallel with the increase in crime and violence has been an equally disturbing increase in school violence and delinquency.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the demographics of the country and the high levels of violence in society, following which it looks at the situation in schools, highlighting factors underpinning youth disenfranchisement. The chapter then focuses on three approaches to peacebuilding education currently being undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago. First it describes the state’s Peace Promotion Programme, which aims to create a national culture of peace. Next it examines how the iEARN teachers’ forum is enabling teachers to use distance education tools to challenge traditional cultural approaches to teaching and managing. Finally, it assesses a grassroots, community-based initiative by the Toco Foundation that targets parents and youth health and sexuality. The chapter ends with lessons learned based on an analysis of these projects.
THE JUXTAPOSITION OF WEALTH AND VIOLENCE

Trinidad and Tobago is a republic located at the southern end of the Caribbean archipelago, with a population of 1.3 million (40,000 in Tobago). The country is ethnically diverse and includes East Indians (41 per cent), Africans (40 per cent), Chinese, Syrians and Europeans who have coexisted over the centuries without open hostility. Indeed, ethnic and religious celebrations are observed by the country at large. An oil-rich territory, Trinidad and Tobago has one of the highest GDP per capita in the Caribbean: US$28,400 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009). It is the proud home of the steelpan and calypso as well as several renowned Olympic gold medallists, scholars and beauty queens. Trinbagonians boast their own unique brand of Carnival, which has spawned festivals across the developed world from London to Toronto.

With its buoyant economy, the country has set its sights on developed world status by 2020. It has placed a high priority on education and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and allocated 4.2 per cent of GDP in 2002–05 towards the development of the education sector (UNDP, 2008). It has been able to afford free primary, secondary and tertiary education for all its citizens, and in 2006 expanded its tertiary offerings with the establishment of the University of Trinidad and Tobago. According to the 2007 PAHO country report, Trinidad and Tobago had a 99 per cent literacy rate in 2003, with no significant gender differential.

Paradoxically, despite the impressive developmental statistics, increased wealth has not brought increased peace to these islands. Trinidad and Tobago now has the dubious reputation of being one of the most violent states in the Caribbean (Baldeo-singh and Dassrath, 2009). The seriousness of the situation is highlighted by the fact that Trinidad, with half the population of Jamaica and twice its GDP, had a reported homicide rate of 42/100,000 in 2008 while Jamaica had just over 60/100,000, (Latin American Monitor, 2009).

Violent crime is also distinguished by the prevalence of young, male perpetrators from Afro-Trinidadian, low socioeconomic backgrounds and from urban, densely populated and underserved communities (Baldeo-singh and Dassrath, 2009). The demography of violent crime is skewed by age, race, ethnicity, geography and class, a demographic that the Report on Crime, Violence, and Development has found consistent across the Caribbean (UNODC, 2007). The increase in homicides is also linked to an increase in the availability and use of firearms, which began in Trinidad and Tobago in 2000. Prior to 2000, less than one-third of all homicides were due to firearms, but by May 2006 this had risen to 74 per cent (ibid). The increase in violent crime has seen a parallel increase

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1 Trinidad and Tobago achieved universal secondary education in 2000, at which time there were 483 primary schools and 221 secondary schools (PAHO, 2007).
in gang formation and gang criminality. Citing the Women’s Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD), the UNODC report describes the young men who take part in these gangs as “disadvantaged, disenfranchised, dispossessed, [and] influenced by a constructed stereotype of masculinity which embraces violence” (ibid: 136).

**SCHOOLING: OPPORTUNITY VS. DISENFRANCHISEMENT**

In parallel with the increasing criminal activity has been a disturbing increase in the levels of school violence and delinquency. This increase has occurred despite the continued expansion of secondary and tertiary education and the high literacy and employment rate.

In 2004/2005 a compilation of secondary school suspensions in the 2nd term listed the main reasons as: possession of marijuana, assault, robbery, breaking classes, possession of weapons, fighting (with and without a weapon), extortion, disrespect to authority, destruction of school property, gambling (playing cards for money), sexual misconduct and other miscellaneous offences (MoE/DERE, 2004). These incidents are characteristic of the secondary school rather than the primary school, and of schools in Trinidad rather than Tobago. Violent offences are more pervasive among students in the low socioeconomic, low educational attainment bracket, with the most violent offences being perpetrated by boys. The demographics of school violence and delinquency, not surprisingly, reflect the demographics of youth violence in the country generally.

However, the number of students’ suspended is small relative to the secondary school population. In 2003 there were just 113 suspensions and in 2004/05 a total of 85, out of a population of 105,000 students. The quality of school life and the potential of schools to create cultures of peace might more objectively be reflected in empirical studies of what goes on in schools. Two such key studies are “Benchmarking Violence and Delinquency in the Secondary School: Towards a Culture of Peace and Civility”, conducted by a team of researchers under Professor Ramesh Deosaran at the request of the Ministry of Education (Deosaran, 2004), and “Juvenile Delinquency in Junior Secondary Schools: The Hidden School Curriculum”, conducted under Dr. Daphne Phillip for the Unit for Social Problem Analysis and Policy at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Trinidad and Tobago (Phillips, 2008). The studies raise questions about the quality of school culture, its organisational structures, the quality of relationships between and among young people and their teachers, and the relationship between school, the family and the community.

The Deosaran report is not the first report on school violence in Trinidad and Tobago, but it provides the most quantitative description of secondary school violence and delinquency in the last decade. It collected data from 1,800 students across 10 secondary schools in 2002/03 and used a wide range of tools including document
reviews, observations, and interviews and consultations with students, teachers, officials, administrators and parents. It lists 21 different types of behaviours considered as delinquency. These range from disruptive classroom behaviours, petty theft, loitering after school, bullying, use of drugs and alcohol, truancy, and physical and verbal aggression. The report also points to multiple issues at the root of school violence and delinquency: poverty and family structure, disenfranchised communities, structural inequities in the education system, inadequate pedagogies that fail to address adolescent developmental needs, school culture and organisation, and organisational weaknesses of the Junior Secondary shift system.

The report of Dr. Phillips targeted the school lives of the early adolescent working-class student in 2007. Her sample consisted of 14 Junior Secondary schools, with one Third Form class (approximately 30 students) chosen from each school. The researchers sought students’ perception of the causes and consequences of violence among them. The young people, who ranged from 13–16 years, zeroed in on their home life as one of the major precursors to school violence. They identified physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect by parents and low levels of household income as potent stressors that they suggested predisposed them to delinquent behaviours. They also suggested that their actions satisfied emotional and psychological needs; involvement in gangs served as protection, for revenge and for belonging – to “fit in”. Inappropriate sexual behaviours created status and were also part of money-seeking behaviours, as were bullying and gambling (Phillips, 2008). The research highlights the intersection of gender, poverty, community, family and school in shaping the quality and outcomes of children’s lives.

Structural inequities are hinged to the stratified secondary school system, a legacy of colonial education. Children are placed at secondary school depending on their performance in the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA), equivalent to the now defunct British 11+ examination. Denominational state-assisted schools, particularly the well established all-male and all-female schools, have retained a high status in the local population and are labelled “prestige” schools. While all academically able students, regardless of class, have the opportunity to win places at these schools, a larger percentage of middle and upper middle class children score in the top 10 percentile range accepted. The next level of schools is the 5-7 year government schools, which are co-educational but also attract middle income, high achievers as they offer only about 20–30 per cent of school places. The majority of students – mostly low-income students, perceived as weak academically – attend the Junior Secondary and Senior Comprehensive schools. Thus secondary schools are clearly demarcated by

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2 The former are three-year schools operating on a shift system and the latter are two-year, all-day schools.
sex, religion, class, academic achievement and to some extent race. Academic under-performance is associated with violence and delinquency in the school system (Deosaran, 2004; Phillips, 2008).

Within the last year, the Government has converted all Junior Secondary and Senior Comprehensive schools into 5- or 7-year full day schools. However, as scores on the SEA continue to be the factor determining student placement, it is debatable whether such a change will affect the demographics and politics of the secondary school system. Moreover, while it is at the secondary school level that school failure, apathy and violence are most overt, psychosocial theory locates the inception of these problems at the primary ages, during the crucial development of “industry” (Newman and Newman, 1999). This is a fundamental factor in the development of positive attitudes to work in the adult years. Failure to develop industry results in feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy that predispose children to experience “learned helplessness” – a belief that one’s efforts have little to do with success or failure, and that the outcomes of attempting tasks are out of one’s control (ibid). In addition, high-stakes testing provides a context in which children’s right to such basic developmental needs as relaxation, enjoyment of learning, authentic and interesting tasks and an outlet for individual creativity can easily become negated (Kalloo, 2008). Because the legitimacy of the SEA is unquestioned, failure to attain the examination standard becomes constructed as due to the ineptitude of the child.

Data derived from an ethnographic study of a primary classroom (ibid.), suggest that attitudes and orientation to school are being shaped at primary level even if students’ voices are silenced. The nature of rules and how they are implemented are important in how students orient themselves to rules and to authority. Autocratic structures in the school do not allow students most affected by rules to internalise the “civic” attitudes that the Deosaran report condemns as sorely lacking at the secondary schools, nor do they create the kinds of deep respect and bonding that are necessary for shaping children’s orientation to schools.

The cultural belief systems and organisational structures that focus on academic outcomes as the major component of schooling discourage schools from utilising children’s own capacities in developing authentic initiatives for creating peace. Moreover, the actions of teachers and children are shaped by the organisational, political and cultural structures in which schools are located. Peacebuilding education must recognise
the effect of these systems, a factor reiterated in the many reports previously cited. In this regard, while holistically addressing the weaknesses of secondary schooling is important, re-conceptualising the curriculum at the primary level is equally critical, while at the same time providing supporting resources and physical infrastructure.

**THREE APPROACHES TO PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION**

This section explores three different peace education approaches in Trinidad and Tobago: undertaken by the Government; through distance learning; and in the community.

**Peace Promotion Programme**

Education is not just the acquisition of knowledge, but also comprises learning to know, learning to be, learning to do, and learning to live together. (UNESCO, 2007: 7)

The above statement, by the UNESCO Deputy Assistant Director General for Education in the Opening Statement of the Report of the Expert Meeting on stopping school violence, is a reminder of the critical role that schooling plays in the overall development of the child, and that violence prevention cannot be only reactive but must have an essential pro-active component.

... violence prevention cannot be only reactive but must have an essential pro-active component.

It is with such a holistic understanding of students’ needs that the Peace Promotion Programme of the Ministry of Education addresses the problem of violence and delinquency in schools. The Programme states that its long-term goal and mission is “to create a culture of peace in the individual, the home, the school and the community” (MoE, 2009). The programme, which targets teachers, students, parents and communities, began in 2002. The interventions that took place between 2003 and 2006 included:

- Knowledge and skills training – conflict resolution, classroom management (alternatives to corporal punishment), anger management, parent education;
- Introduction of disciplinary measures – out of school suspension, mock trials, mentoring;
- Civic education – driver responsibility education, pre-Carnival
Youth Violence and Innovative Approaches to Peacebuilding Education in Trinidad and Tobago

preparation, “Pillars of Respect” programme;
• Structural and organisational interventions – school safety officers, student councils, homework centres;
• Curriculum restructuring – skill-based alternative education.

In this phase, just two of the 15 interventions listed were targeted at the primary level: the Pillars of Respect programme, and a programme in classroom management and understanding anger and stress that targeted 4,000 primary school teachers. The programme’s second phase will involve integrating interventions into the secondary school curriculum, a process of reconstruction of the curriculum to emphasise life skills, and training for civic life and democracy, as well as initial teacher training.

The Ministry of Education explicitly asks teachers to desist from using corporal punishment as a form of discipline. Women Working for Social Progress (Workingwomen), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), ran an intensive public education and advocacy campaign in 1999 aimed at abolishing corporal punishment in schools. In 2000 the state supported a proposal to change those aspects of the Children’s Act that permit corporal punishment as “reasonable” punishment. However, the ambivalence and political sensitivity about this issue is apparent in the failure of the Government to proclaim the Bill into law at the same time as the Peace Promotion Programme supported one-day workshops on alternative, non-violent forms of discipline. Ironically also, the Deosaran Report, while addressing the many deep-seated issues underlying student indiscipline, recommended that re-introducing corporal punishment in schools should be seriously considered (Deosaran, 2004).

The Deosaran Report and its recommendations are the baseline study for the Peace Promotion Programme’s research component, and assessment is said to be ongoing through questionnaires, via feedback from Principals’ symposia and through comparative school studies. There has also been significant re-organisation of some elements of the educational system, including the conversion of all new sector schools into full day 5- or 7-year secondary schools mentioned earlier, a re-organisation of the secondary school curriculum, and the development of free Early Childhood Centres that will lead to early childhood education soon being available to all children.

The multi-disciplinary approach to peace promotion is one of the strengths of this programme, as is its almost exclusive use of expert NGOs as project facilitators. A 2008 evaluation by UNESCO states that the main strength of the programme is “the effectiveness of its interactive approach to behaviour and attitude modification among students” as well as the “intense collaboration and consultation” among its many stakeholders. The main challenge has been described as the need to get stakeholders to realise that there is no “quick fix” to a problem that has a long history in the national education system.
While the classroom management/alternative to corporal punishment workshops carried out under the Peace Promotion Programme use a methodology that challenges teachers to think about and explore their belief systems, they are one-off, one-day workshops and therefore limited in their capacity to address deep-seated, culturally determined values. Indeed, feedback from teachers in the workshops that I facilitated suggested that this was one of their major drawbacks.

Helping teachers to restructure their approaches to classroom practice, so that relationships with their students would model the antecedents for peaceful relationships, requires a supportive environment that is sustained over the course of teachers’ professional development.

Helping teachers to restructure their approaches to classroom practice, so that relationships with their students would model the antecedents for peaceful relationships, requires a supportive environment that is sustained over the course of teachers’ professional development. For in-service teachers, such an environment should be facilitated by continuous professional development, normally provided by the school administrator. However, the busy schedules of schools, as well as a lack of professional expertise locally, can make it difficult to create such sustainability.

An alternative pathway that has been under-utilised to date is through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The increasing access to the Internet and the development of collaborative technologies via Web 2.0 have the advantage of providing teachers with a worldwide community of student-centred professionals who can provide the kind of non-judgemental, collegial spaces in which teachers feel safe to engage in critical examination of their practice.

iEARN is one of several organisations that promote ICT collaborative project work. The acronym stands for the International Education and Resource Network. It is a forum of teachers and classrooms linked to each other through the Internet. The teachers are involved in student-centred projects grounded in a constructivist philosophy. The goal of each project is not just to develop knowledge, critical thinking and problem-solving skills but to “prepare students to be motivated and active participants in their world” (Gragert, 2001). The forum has been in operation for 21 years and now

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3 Other organisations include Global SchoolNet Foundation, Oracle Education Foundation’s Think.com, ePals, Global Education Collaborative and KidLink (Gragert, 2001).
boasts over 2 million students in 35,000 schools in 125 countries (Gragert, personal communication, April 2009). Through these projects students share information on a wide range of topics from constructing solar cookers, ending gun violence, democracy in schools, historical places of importance and just exchanging messages of friendship as in the Teddy Bear project.

Gragert notes that one of the central ideas of the forum is that teachers and students working together across the globe can “maximize the potential to enhance the quality of life on the planet” (2001: 3). He cites research from the University of California noting the low rate of implementation of innovation, and argues that the high success rate of iEARN is due to the immediate and meaningful supportive communities to which teachers have access (ibid.).

Consciousness-raising is more than the transmission of philosophical and socio-psychological theories, as important as these are. iEARN provides authentic examples of democratic, student-centred approaches to learning and teaching, and a community that can articulate the practical challenges and successes of such approaches from every corner of the world. The projects can be integrated across subject areas and grade levels. Most importantly, it is teachers and students who decide which projects they want to be part of, or whether they would prefer to develop their own project. Projects are therefore firmly grounded in the specific needs and context of the classroom, and ownership and control of the project are in the hands of teachers and students. Several teacher educators across the Caribbean have been trained in the use of the forum through the OAS Teacher Education Hemispheric project. Teacher educators are critically positioned to instigate change as they have direct first access to newly qualified teachers, as well as access to in-service teachers in their professional outreach initiatives.

Though the use of ICTs requires some level of expertise, the Government has a comprehensive policy on integrating technology into the school system and has already begun to do so. As such, the basic technological resources for introducing teachers to collaborative forums have already been established.

The empowering effect of these projects even in low resource situations is revealed through the sustainability and rapid growth of the network, as well as from the testimonies of teachers who have worked with iEARN and witnessed the transformation of their students and their schools. If building peace is about creating spaces for social justice, then iEARN projects have that potential.
Empowering communities, building peace: the work of the Toco Foundation

If you give young people opportunity they will have peace, if not you will have war. (M. Als, Toco Foundation)

While community and family linkages to the school are acknowledged as important in the Peace Promotion Programme, the community is crucial to the work of the Toco Foundation. Its interventions are generated and implemented by the community for the community.

There is no doubt that this has a powerful effect on participants. Michael Als, the Projects Director, is clear that the main impact is the empowering effect on members of the community. He says that “People did not know that they already knew these things halfway ...” (telephone interview, 19 April 2009). He recognised that people saw they could do big things – develop a radio station, build centres, be responsible for an entire complex project from planning to implementation.

The Toco Foundation targets the rural communities along the north-east coast of Trinidad. The brainchild of members of the Toco community, it came out of discussions at the village council on issues of development and the problems of the community. These discussions led to the initiation of a few projects that the community felt were most needed: animal husbandry, biodiversity and conservation, and agri-processing for women. It is to these initial steps, grounded in people’s participation, that Als attributes the Foundation’s continued success.

The Foundation hosts a wide variety of programmes, including agro-tourism, a Young Farmers’ Project, community radio (Radio Toco 106.7 FM), a conservation programme for the protection of wildlife (in particular the leatherback turtles that lay their eggs in the area), a computer training/distance learning/multi-media centre and a social service delivery unit. There is a parenting project called Inreach: Re-engineering Parenting Programme, while The Gatekeepers is a project specifically focused on developing male responsibility.

Young people are integral participants in the Toco Foundation. Not only are they recipients of the services but they are facilitators of many projects. The projects of the social services delivery unit target some of the difficult social issues that confront young people: HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness, family relationships, and the social and psychological development of young men.

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4 www.tocofoundation.org
Youth Violence and Innovative Approaches to Peacebuilding Education in Trinidad and Tobago

The Toco Youth and Sexuality Project (TYSP)

The HIV/AIDS project was subsequently broadened to include youth health and sexuality as the Toco Youth and Sexuality Project (TYSP). This began as a joint venture between the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) and the Toco Foundation. It brought together the expertise of CAREC’s Dr Uli Wagner with the knowledge and skills of the community. Training was targeted at peer facilitators/peer workers. They reach out to youth in schools, churches and communities, and in so doing create a social environment that enables young people to develop an informed, healthy and responsible sexual lifestyle, including having the capacity to protect themselves from undesired outcomes of sexual activities. Team members were trained in counselling and attended a number of peer education programmes.

This project is unique in its ability to negotiate with adults to allow their children and youth access to information normally considered taboo in the society. There is no doubt that lack of open discussion with young people and misinformation surrounding issues of sexuality are key factors underpinning the extremely high rate of HIV infections among Caribbean youth. Als suggests that success in this area was linked to the commitment to present the adult community with facts and knowledge about youth sexuality – information such as statistics on HIV/AIDS rates of infection and levels of youth sexual activity. This factual data, he believes, allowed normally conservative adults to look past the cultural barriers that make sharing information about sexuality a taboo subject.

The project, which began in 1997 with just six persons conducting educational activities, is now servicing the majority of schools in the Toco area (11 out of 16 schools – 3 high schools and 8 primary schools), and has raised a high level of awareness in young people aged 8–25 in 13 rural villages along that coast. The north-east coast has one of the lowest rates of HIV infection in the country. In 2001, the project received the Commonwealth Award of Excellence in the field of HIV/AIDS advocacy and education for young people from a field of 70 projects throughout the Commonwealth.

Interventions with families in the home

The In-reach Parenting Programme is another innovative project targeting the antecedents to peace. This project provides highly trained facilitators with access to the homes of families, bringing solutions where there seem to be none. It began by engaging the expertise of a Dutch parenting group, which was a sponsor of the programme, and local social workers and parenting groups. Counsellors came from the villages, including relatives of the target families. They were subject to rigorous training utilising local and foreign expertise, and also took part in a one-year course in counselling
at the UWI. Requests for counselling have to come from the families themselves. In small villages such as those that are part of the Toco Foundation, confidentiality is very difficult to maintain and trust is an issue. However, the fact that the project made confidentiality a mandate and did not tolerate even the slightest infringement on families’ right to privacy facilitated the building of trust and made it work. Als noted that the success of the programme is evaluated by the number of persons who leave it. Of 100 families, 40 so far have voluntarily exited the project because they now have the confidence and skills to manage the complex dynamics of their family situation.

The family intervention is multi-focused, from developing pre-school skills, facilitating bonding between parents and children and communities, to organising food supplies. It is supported by the radio programme “Focus on the Family”, which is aired on the award-winning Radio Toco. “Focus on the Family” has high listenership, with community members calling for increased duration and regularity of the programme.

A holistic approach

Although it is the social services programme that has the most direct impact on young people, the holistic approach to community development reflects an ecosystem perspective that the *World Report on Violence and Health* has described as crucial to decreasing youth violence (Krug et al., 2002). In its short existence the Toco Foundation has managed to maintain an ecological and holistic approach, targeting the individual, relationships (family and peer groups), community including links to the local schools, as well as addressing social problems of poverty and lack of information. Indeed the Projects Director noted that it is the second largest employer in the area after the Government. He also observed that, based on a review of criminal statistics, the north-east coastline has one of the lowest levels of youth anti-social behaviour in the country, a fact that he attributes to the work of the Foundation.

**LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE PROJECTS**

There are several lessons that can be learnt about an open education approach to peacebuilding from the operations of the Toco Foundation and iEARN:

1. **Ground projects in the needs of the community**: The Foundation’s Projects Director observed that not all initiatives have been successful, and those that have failed have always been the ones where it reneged on getting community input. When the community is part and parcel of the “what and how” of the project, it not only builds a sense of ownership but also targets the most essential
needs of the community. An example is Radio Toco, which has been mandated by community members to air a high level of local music and to focus on developmental news rather than the ills of the society or the world. In so doing it has become one of the most successful independent rural radio stations in the Commonwealth. To ground projects in the community, organisers have to believe that people have the answers and the capacity to make important decisions about themselves, once given the tools. The iEARN programme’s success is also linked to its grounding in the needs of the school community. It provides a telecollaborative forum, but it is teachers and students who make the decisions about how they wish to use this.

2. **Build expert capacity**: The Toco Foundation is based on partnerships that share expertise. Projects that involve such sensitive and culturally taboo subjects as sexuality or family conflicts can only be successful if facilitators are highly trained, and the Foundation has been stringent in this area. The iEARN telecollaborative project is also a capacity-building forum. Training of trainers ensures that people entering the programme have the basic skills and confidence to motivate others, while participants learn as they take part in the projects. In both iEARN and the Foundation, experiential and theoretical learning support each other.

3. **Provide a sound knowledge base**: The youth and sexuality project would not have been possible if it had not provided young people with sound and factual knowledge from which they could make choices. Similarly, the ability of community members to be discerning about their needs is premised on providing them with authentic data that will enable them to reassess what is possible and dare to challenge tradition.

4. **Have a proactive approach**: “Take in front before in front take us” is how the Foundation describes the way it began its work on youth and HIV/AIDS – anticipating the importance of an issue, grasping
at opportunities and not waiting for issues to become intractable. The distance education multi-media project is another proactive approach, providing training to hundreds of people in computer literacy and so opening up opportunities for numerous personal and community initiatives. The Projects Director discerned that young people take to this training “like ducks to water” and can become proficient within a very short period.

5. **Commit to high standards and capacity building:** The Foundation has a commitment to training that is on-going and rigorous, ensuring professional delivery and high chances of positive outcomes.

6. **Ensure confidentiality:** This is a critical component for projects such as those carried out by the Toco Foundation, working within very small communities and doing projects that must delve into the private and intimate affairs of families.

7. **Emphasise good management, accountability and evaluation:** Despite its grassroots nature, the Foundation has a clear management structure and accountability procedures. Its ability to raise funds from local and foreign donors is testimony to the efficiency of these structures. Equally important is the fact that evaluation is built into each project. According to Als, evaluation provides the groundwork for moving forward as it allows the projects to evolve and members to learn from their mistakes.

8. **Engage youth:** Young people are the main facilitators and recipients of all projects. Peer educators were renamed peer workers to emphasise mutuality rather than a top-down relationship between facilitators and participants. Youth are given leadership roles in directing their development. This provides the self-esteem, leadership skills and empowerment necessary to create the skills and knowledge that are the precursors to peace.

9. **Take a holistic approach:** The work of the Foundation targets all aspects of community life – from the biodiversity of its beautiful coastal environment, to its families, economy and youth. As has been highlighted previously, this approach is the foundation of addressing community violence and creating the conditions for peaceful and sustainable relationships.
10. **Build in sustainability, flexibility and support:** Both the iEARN forum and the work of the Toco Foundation have built-in mechanisms for flexibility and sustainability, which is a function of the open and/or distance modes of the innovations. Both modes mean that participants are not bound to one physical location to access skills and knowledge. Education reaches people where they are, at times that can be adjusted to individuals’ schedules and in ways that participants can transform. Both projects have built into them easily accessible and sustainable mechanisms of support. Sustainability is a critical factor in addressing deep-seated values and attitudes, in building trust amongst community members for innovation and in developing complex and authentic knowledge and skills.

Sustainability is a critical factor in addressing deep-seated values and attitudes, in building trust amongst community members for innovation and in developing complex and authentic knowledge and skills.

The potential of the people-centred innovations described in this chapter are best captured by Nelson Mandela in the “Foreword” to the *World Report on Violence and Health*. He observes that the twentieth century has left humanity with a legacy of mass destruction, but a less visible yet even more widespread form of violence is the day-to-day individual suffering of so many young people, women and families (Mandela in Krug et al., 2002). The projects described are focused on addressing just this type of violence, and the conditions that are precursors to such violence. Mandela closes his section by stating:

> We owe our children – the most vulnerable citizens in any society – a life free from violence and fear. In order to ensure this, we must be tireless in our efforts not only to attain peace, justice and prosperity for countries, but also for communities and members of the same family. We must address the roots of violence. Only then will we transform the past century’s legacy from a crushing burden into a cautionary lesson. (ibid.)

The Toco Foundation and iEARN can be seen as examples of the efforts of ordinary people – teachers, children, young people, grassroots communities – to create a legacy of peace and social justice for this and future generations.
References


Pacific
INTRODUCTION

Despite numerous commitments to enable women’s participation into all processes of peacebuilding – conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation – including United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security, women remain on the periphery of decision-making processes and continue to be under-represented for their innovation and contribution as peacebuilders and their capacity to negotiate and lead, even under the most trying circumstances.

While women’s voices for peace are plentiful, even negotiating and building peace amidst the cross-fire, these initiatives too often remain invisible from the mainstream media’s coverage of conflict and peace, where women continue to be featured only as hopeless victims. This stereotypical coverage – whether due to a lack of gender-sensitive editorial guidelines or simply because most journalists do not have an opportunity to cover events and issues beyond the main warring factions – has meant that women have had to find alternative ways to communicate a culture of sustainable peace.

Through the experiences of a regional women’s media network, this chapter reflects on women’s contributions to peacebuilding and conflict transformation. FemLinkPacific not only serves as a media and information/communication network but is also using women’s media initiatives to shape and inform the regional peace and security agenda. The chapter also offers some recommendations for strengthening such initiatives.
Peace and conflict in the Pacific

Several countries in the region have recently suffered serious internal conflicts, including armed conflict in Bougainville, the 2000 and 2006 coups and current crisis in the Fiji Islands (see box), and ethnic conflict in Solomon Islands. These “are occurring against the backdrop of international turmoil and conflicts, many of which have dire consequences for civilians” (Rajesh, 2003).

WORLD YWCA CALLS FOR SUPPORT FOR THE WOMEN OF FIJI

The theme for 2009’s World YWCA Day was “Women Creating a Safe World”, and the YWCA of Fiji used the day to call for a safe Fiji after the President annulled the constitution and the Prime Minister, blaming free speech for causing instability in the country, placed restrictions on the media that the group Reporters Without Borders has called a “mortal blow” to press freedom. Women’s groups there are asking for international support and solidarity as they call for the protection of media personnel and civilians and the resumption of normal media operations, along with compliance with all international human rights commitments including UNSCR 1325.

“Without an elected government, Fiji cannot be assured of the economic security now so desperately needed in our country. Women and children will continue to bear the brunt of the economic insecurities. Children will bear the brunt of growing up during a time when political insecurity affects the core of our communities, and our society at large will continue to suffer due to the curtailment of our human rights,” said a leading Pacific women’s advocate.

Source: Adapted from World YWCA, 2009.

For many years, women working for peace in the Pacific have been communicating their vision of peace and security through traditional channels of communication, governance structures, faith-based initiatives and the mainstream media. Women have been particularly visible as supporters of peace in all these conflicts; however, they have been invisible in both mainstream decision-making and formal peace processes. A key requirement in post-conflict situations is providing substantive and long-term investment in building the capacity of new women leaders who emerge during times of crises to enable them to take on decision-making roles in all levels of post-conflict

1 See Chapters 16 (Bougainville) and 17 (Solomon Islands) – Eds.
transformation. Channels and sources of information and communication also need to be transformed to support these women.

For many years, women working for peace in the Pacific have been communicating their vision of peace and security through traditional channels of communication, governance structures, faith-based initiatives and the mainstream media.

Recalling gender equality commitments

On 31 October 2000 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. This historic document is the first formal and legal recognition from the Security Council that parties to a conflict and the international community are required to respect women’s rights and support their participation at all stages in peace negotiations, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. It calls for participation of women in peace processes, gender training in peacekeeping operations, protection of women and girls and respect for their rights, and gender mainstreaming in the reporting and implementation systems of the UN relating to conflict, peace and security (Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group, n.d.).

In addition, to date, 11 Forum Island Countries (FICs) are party to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). All members of the Pacific Islands Forum have endorsed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include MDG 3 on gender equality and the empowerment of women. All FICs committed to the 1994 Pacific Platform for Action for the Advancement for Women and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, agreed to at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women. All FICs committed to the Commonwealth and have committed to the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005–2015.

All these international commitments reaffirm the inextricable link between gender equality and peace, as well as highlighting the need to achieve equal access and

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2 In 1994 two of the 13 critical areas of concern were Violence against Women and Peace and Justice. The revised PPA (2004) highlighted Peace and Security as an emerging critical issue for women in the region. Women and Armed Conflict and Women and Media were two of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action. Nations made a commitment to increase women’s participation in and access to media, and to promote balanced and non-stereotyped images of women.

3 Gender, Democracy, Peace and Conflict is one of the four critical areas for Commonwealth action.
full participation of women in power structures to enable their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

The Pacific Islands Forum is also mandated to respond to issues of security at the regional level. In 2000, Forum Leaders endorsed the Biketawa Declaration, which highlights that the Forum must constructively address difficult and sensitive issues including underlying causes of tensions and conflict (ethnicity, socioeconomic disparities, lack of good governance, land disputes and erosion of cultural values). It also reiterates the belief in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief and in the individual's inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which s/he lives.

Furthermore, in October 2005 Forum Leaders endorsed the Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration, of which security is one of the four key components. The Plan has a specific strategic objective to improve gender equality, which means that all Pacific Plan initiatives must give due consideration to gender issues and demonstrate a positive impact on gender equality wherever possible. It is therefore critical that regional security initiatives are reconciled to ensure the inclusion of gender equality as a crosscutting issue. The Digital Strategy of the Pacific Plan also reaffirms the potential for alternative information/communication channels, in particular FM broadcasting as tools for the empowerment of Pacific communities.

Yet, despite this multitude of regional commitments to gender, peace and security, implementation on the ground has been limited.

**WOMEN IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA**

While women's voices for peace are plentiful, even during the most intense conflicts, negotiating and building peace amidst the cross-fire, all too often these peace initiatives are not covered by the mainstream media, which focuses on women as hopeless victims. This stereotypical coverage, whether the result of a lack of gender-sensitive editorial guidelines or simply due to the lack of opportunity by journalists to cover events and issues beyond the main warring factions, has meant that women have had to find alternative ways to communicate a culture of sustainable peace.
What is also interesting in reviewing women’s peace efforts is that there has been some use of the mainstream media by women working for peace to promote or highlight their issues. In the Fiji Islands, for example, a key strategy of the Women’s Action for Democracy and Peace (WAD’aP) initiative coordinated by the National Council of Women Fiji (NCWF) following the May 2000 crisis included the purposeful use of the mainstream media to express their opinion, not only to counter the stereotypical portrayal of their initiatives but also to speak a language of peace and justice especially during the height of the crisis. The media initiatives also included a series of media training projects for members of the NCWF in 2001 and 2002 involving the development and production of Women and Peace radio campaigns, as well as training on how to develop and produce information segments for television.

However, aside from the need to train women to effectively use the mainstream media, what is just as important is the critical need for more women working for peace to acquire the skills of understanding and using research and analysis frameworks to provide the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the coverage of women by the news media, through initiatives such as the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)\(^4\) to enhance their advocacy for greater representation of women in all aspects of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In fact, the results of the most recent GMMP (Gallagher, 2005) demonstrated the need for alternative forms of media, information and communication to support gender equality and women’s human rights. Like the three previous GMMPs, it revealed how women and men are represented in the news by monitoring radio, television and print media simultaneously on a single day in over 75 countries. GMMP 2005 showed that the news paints a picture of a world in which women are virtually invisible. Women are dramatically under-represented.

According to the GMMP 2005 report, only 20 per cent of people featuring in the newspapers and news broadcasts in the Fiji Islands were women and they predominated as victims of crime and violence. While there was a 3 per cent increase for women from the 2000 GMMP report, men’s voices continued to dominate the “hard news”.

What this means is that the news media is only telling stories about men; we see the predominant role that men play in terms of expert commentary, eye witnesses and popular opinion; news subjects are predominantly male. The “victim stereotype” continues to be perpetuated when coverage is offered to women, even though women are also offering solutions to situations, such as on issues relating to peace and human security.

But should women have to rely on the mainstream media as the sole channel for information and communication?

\(^4\) www.whomakesthenews.org/who_makes_the_news/report_2005
IF INFORMATION IS POWER, THE ABILITY AND OPPORTUNITY TO COMMUNICATE IS EMPOWERING!

A women’s media network

Women have long recognised that while in the past decades there has been an increase in the number of newspapers and publications, commercial radio and television and digital media, women’s non-stereotypical representation through media content has been minimal. And in order to play a key role in the society and in their development, women need to be informed on what is going around them and also have a means to speak out and have their voices heard about what is happening – something that could only be successfully possible in the current context through having their own media.

It was this notion of empowerment that gave birth in 2000 to femLINKPACIFIC: Media Initiatives for Women. The founders of femLINKPACIFIC realised during the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil held throughout the May 2000 crisis that women’s peace efforts continued to be marginalised from the mainstream of decision-making, and that in order to create greater visibility and understanding of women’s peace efforts, there was a need to provide alternative and additional viewpoints and analysis to the mainstream media coverage.

Inspired by the work of women working for peace who developed and enabled the unanimous adoption of UNSCR 1325, femLINKPACIFIC recognised that women’s media has a role to play in advocating for women’s participation in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, while also providing coverage of a range of women’s peace initiatives. This, femLINKPACIFIC believes, is one way to challenge the status quo. By offering a “safe women’s media space” for women from different communities to speak, femLINKPACIFIC is also able to repackage and deliver this information to the national, regional and even international level, to advocate for women’s participation in all levels of peacebuilding.

femLINKPACIFIC has worked to operationalise UNSCR 1325, to demonstrate the opportunities that exist at policy level, at community level, as well as within our own women’s networks, with the benefit of transnational links and support.

femLINKPACIFIC is also involved in other media initiatives (e.g., the feminist literature that is available for reference purposes at its community media centre). One of its successes has been the recognition of the importance of broadcasting and improving broadcasting content, and the need to improve on independent, traditional and community media in the Digital Strategy of the Pacific Plan. This has been referenced in the Fiji section of People’s Communication for Development (PC4D).
Reaching the community

The use of community media principles has resulted in femLINKPACIFIC’s establishing a network of relevant information and communication channels between women and their communities, especially rural communities, as well as with regional partners. femLINKPACIFIC has recognised the valuable potential of community radio and utilised it as a tool of community empowerment, providing women in their communities with an opportunity to address their realities and identify their development needs, which are inextricably linked to their human security needs. At the same time, this has
offered women a channel to communicate with political and policy leaders through the development and production of community media initiatives, as well as entrusting femLINKPACIFIC with a critical role of policy advocacy.

At a regional level, femLINKPACIFIC is also working to strengthen the regional women’s media network on women, peace and human security with partners who include the non-government organisations (NGOs) Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency, based in Buka (Bougainville), Vois Blong Mere Solomon (Solomon Islands) and the Legal Literacy Project of the Ma’a Fafine mo e Famili / Legal Literacy Project (LLP) (Tonga).

femLINKPACIFIC’s rural and regional network uses appropriate information and communication technologies (ICTs) to receive and transmit information from Suva in the Fiji Islands to New York and London, to ensure relevant agencies and partners are aware of the developments on the ground in the fragile Pacific states. Such activities are based on the recognition that media initiatives have the potential to inform and enable gender-inclusive reconciliation programmes, serve as an information and communication network for initiatives as well as for the early detection of conflict indicators. Community radio can be a safe, trusted and respected channel of information for a range of stakeholders, especially women, who remain sidelined from mainstream media content.

The appropriateness and accessibility of ICTs is also a critical factor in whether women are able to access the media, especially at the community level, where the lack of infrastructure has meant women are not only isolated from advancements using new ICTs but also have limited opportunity to access telephone and other communication services.

Therefore, there is a great need to remind policy makers that radio is a critical tool for empowerment and advocacy. This was verified following a three-year research partnership with ISIS Manila International to consider the most appropriate information and communication tool for the empowerment of rural women. Building on work previously done by ISIS and other groups, this study provides the first detailed analysis of the relationship between communication tools and the empowerment of women in the Pacific region. It looks at how intermediary groups – such as NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) – use communication tools to empower grassroots women. It also looks at what “empowerment” means to the informants in the survey and articulates the benefits perceived by women, such as economic independence, political participation, the building of community solidarity, self-transformation and societal transformations.

The study verified what most of us know: that although the Internet and email, computers and mobile phones have much to offer, these are the least accessible forms of communication for women at the community level. Some of this “technology
deprivation” may be explained by the absence of the necessary infrastructure such as electricity and networks (especially in rural areas), but it is also due to the low levels of technological literacy among the population, the high costs of the new technology and the depths of poverty among our peoples.

... although the Internet and email, computers and mobile phones have much to offer, these are the least accessible forms of communication for women at the community level.

Radio was identified as the most accessible communications tool for grassroots women in four of the countries studied: Fiji Islands, India, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Philippines (for Thailand, television was the most popular medium).

The reasons included:

- Ability to reach rural areas;
- Linguistic flexibility as vernacular languages can be used;
- Literacy is not an issue;
- Costs are low;
- Electricity is not required;
- The technology is simple and easy to use; and
- With the popular “talkback” sessions, radio is interactive.

femLINKPACIFIC has also invested valuable work in developing and implementing its innovative “suitcase radio” initiative (see box overleaf). This provides a non-commercial, powerful avenue to enable the voices of ordinary women in Fiji Islands and the Pacific to be heard on radio waves, and to receive information that empowers them, leading to a better quality of life. It cannot be emphasised enough that the quality of information being communicated can be more meaningful as there is less dependence on commercial advertisers, and the content goes beyond entertainment or cooking tips to include dialogue on social, economic and political issues not normally found on the commercial airwaves.

femTALK 89.2 FM is about community empowerment; it is about taking radio to women in their local communities; it is about enabling women and young women to have a voice and share an opinion about a range of social, economic and political issues that will help bring about sustainable development and peace.

Each broadcast is an opportunity to promote the potential that exists within women leaders in local communities, to identify critical development priorities as well as advise on development programmes. The women who participate in the broadcasts are free to express their opinions and beliefs in a peaceful and inclusive manner.
The quest to establish a women’s community radio initiative in Fiji Islands, begun after the coup in 2000, led to femLINKPACIFIC’s participation at the 2003 World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) Conference in Katmandu, Nepal. It was there that femLINKPACIFIC’s founding co-ordinator first found the “radio in a suitcase” that would enable the network to promote “women speaking to women for peace” at the community level.

The “suitcase radio” was identified as the most appropriate equipment for the organisation to develop women’s weekend radio broadcasts in the capital, Suva, and more importantly, take radio out to women in rural communities. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) assisted in funding a series of consultations with a range of NGO partners including representatives of the Fiji Disabled People’s Association, Interfaith Search Fiji, the YWCA and other women’s organisations. By September 2003, the station’s philosophy and programme format had been developed and by the end of that year the organisation had successfully acquired a community radio broadcast licence.

femTALK 89.2 FM was launched in partnership with the Catholic Women’s League on 5 May 2004 at the Asia Pacific Conference of the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations. It operates to bring people together in a safe space to share their views and opinions. The first team of broadcast volunteers was a group of fifth form students of St Joseph’s Secondary School, who hosted monthly broadcasts in Suva with assistance from the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA). Throughout 2004, the organisation also prepared itself to take the suitcase radio out to rural communities, which meant becoming more familiar with the technical operations of Fiji’s and the Pacific’s first mobile women’s community radio station while also developing networks with rural groups and mobilising the necessary resources from the donor community to support its community radio operations. At the same time, to prepare women, including representatives from the rural communities as well as women from marginalised groups (particularly those with disabilities), femLINKPACIFIC staged broadcast-centred training programmes for women drawn from national women’s NGO networks.

The commitment to youth empowerment through the use of community radio has evolved into the “Generation Next project”, which has now trained close to 20 young women as community radio broadcasters, including four young women with physical disabilities who stage the Women’s Weekend Radio broadcasts in the capital.
The radio broadcasts are an opportunity for the women to be heard by local leaders – from those in local government to the leadership of district and provincial councils – most of whom are men. The broadcast of these interviews in the capital city also reaffirms the need for national decision-making to be inclusive of rural women’s realities.

Each broadcast is an opportunity to promote the potential that exists within women leaders in local communities to identify critical development priorities as well as advise on development programmes. The women who participate in the broadcasts are free to express their opinions and beliefs in a peaceful and inclusive manner.

The suitcase radio has also been the basis from which the organisation can continue to advocate for the use of appropriate and accessible information and communication technology, for the role of women’s media as a platform for policy advocacy and bringing about peaceful change for all. When people in the Pacific are able to share their opinion freely and safely, then we can say we are truly experiencing democracy. Where women have not been able to develop their own community radio projects, investing in buying airtime for their own radio programmes remains a viable option – as long as funding support is available to purchase the programme airtime (see box).

**RADIO TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND PEACE INITIATIVES**

In 2005, Vois Blong Mere Solomon began development and production of a monthly radio programme to support women and peace initiatives. “Thinking Globally and Acting Locally” has been a programme to link gender equality commitments with women’s efforts. This is in addition to their weekly radio programme on national radio. The Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency has effectively used their weekly radio slot during the regional broadcast hours allocated for the province of Bougainville as a platform for women’s human rights and peace advocacy through a programme designed to inform and to reach communities in post-conflict Bougainville. Both organisations, together with Ma’a Fafine mo e Famili (MFF), are members of femLINKPACIFIC’s regional women’s media network on UNSCR 1325.

Women’s media have provided an important foundation for policy advocacy and provided policy makers with much needed anecdotal evidence of the activities of women
in grassroots communities who should be represented at the policy table. Some of these initiatives are outlined in the next section.

**Publications and policy documents**

femLINKPACIFIC has also found the need to enhance its policy initiatives by building on the collation and dissemination of these women’s voices and opinions through the monthly Enews bulletins and other publications. On 31 October 2008, the eighth anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325, femLINKPACIFIC launched its first policy publication reflecting the human security issues drawn from a three-month long series of interviews undertaken by regional correspondents in Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Tonga in 2007. A total of 288 women’s views are reflected in this policy document. In addition, with a network of rural correspondents and community radio volunteers in Fiji Islands, more than 200 women have spoken of their human security concerns and priorities to femLINKPACIFIC (see table). They addressed a number of critical areas of concern: transcending violence and transforming conflict – responses; survival; healing; women’s budgets for conflict prevention and economic security; democratising security; decision-making; disarmament and reintegration – more than weapons disposal; security through women’s eyes; and women communicating a culture of peace.

These strategies have combined the use of the still important inter-personal communication, including community meetings and consultations, and complement other empowerment programmes delivered by other members of civil society. They take into account the need to ensure that the approach at the community level:

- Is in the language of the community;
- Enables the discussion of topics that are of interest and concern to the community;
- Is undertaken in a culturally appropriate way; and
- Is framed in a way that is clear and understandable to members of that community

The next step is to strengthen and expand the community radio operations with women in local communities, including in conjunction with regional media network partners. This, however, also requires ensuring that appropriate regulatory frameworks are in place as well as that women, including young women, are able to be effective managers and producers/broadcasters in each radio station.
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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A plan for conflict transformation in any country will not be complete without the equitable inclusion of women in the design, delivery and evaluation of all development programmes and plans. UNSCR 1325 has the potential to provide the necessary impetus to make this change. Women have demonstrated the ability to effectively work together at the local level, but there is a need to strengthen women’s and peace networks at the regional level. This requires investment in capacity building and institutional strengthening. Women peace advocates need to be able to exchange ideas and lessons learned from their own Pacific Island experiences. The following steps are recommended to help make this possible:

1. Ensure formal recognition of community media in regulatory frameworks, including licensing provisions for the establishment of community radio stations that reflect and support the non-profit nature of these operations.

2. Reform public service broadcast policies to ensure a quota of gender equality content, including through broadcast of local content by community media practitioners.

3. Pacific Islands News Association and the Media Councils and associations are urged to collaborate with women’s media networks to enhance peace programming and implementation of gender equality commitments including UNSCR 1325.

4. Training of editors and journalists should be provided to eliminate gender bias in reporting and investigative journalism in conflict and post-conflict situations, and to promote gender equality and peace journalism.

5. Development assistance programmes should be designed to strengthen the media sector to take into account Pacific community needs, including implementation of the Digital Strategy of the Pacific Plan and recognition and support for existing community media initiatives and provision of appropriate equipment such as wind-up radios.

6. Governments and civil society partners should recognise and enhance the role of women’s community and independent media as an enabling tool for the further implementation of policy commitments and a process that involves the women themselves.
in documenting their peace efforts, and their experiences during a conflict by:

- equipping women with appropriate training and equipment to develop communication strategies that can convey the importance of their participation in the peace process. Such documentation is critical also to ensure that human rights abuses are addressed.

- enabling women in affected communities to provide and receive information with updates on progress made towards finalising a peace process, both as a form of monitoring of the implementation of agreements and as a channel for women’s participation from the local to the national level.

Vibrant yet safe information and communication networks that are respected by local communities also serve as early warning detectors of any sign of re-emergence of conflict and violence. Of the different types of media – government-owned, privately owned, independent and community-based – community media offers women an opportunity to communicate a culture of peace. Community media can be as vital to the post-conflict infrastructure as housing and water, particularly radio, which can disseminate information to many people, including illiterate people, the majority of whom are women. In conflict and peacebuilding situations, women are increasingly learning to use new and traditional media forms to tell their own story, to document human rights violations and to report on peacebuilding.

Getting women into the picture – both as producers of media information and as its subjects, that go beyond being depicted as victims – is vital. Otherwise, women’s role in peacebuilding will continue to be ignored, and the primary images we receive from conflict zones will be ones of despair rather than hope.

References


Using Live and Video Drama to Reach Communities in Vanuatu

Peter Walker

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about drama, primarily theatre but also film drama. It is a personal view of the different techniques employed under the umbrella term “Theatre for Development” (TfD). Many of the examples used here are drawn from 20 years experience with the group Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Vanuatu. My partner Jo Dorras and I were founder members of this group in 1989, and today it employs over 100 people. The theatre initiatives have led to delivery of services such as youth clinics and village-based monitoring networks as WSB has become involved in the lives of its audiences.

The Republic of Vanuatu is made up of 83 islands located in the Pacific Ocean. The economy is based primarily on subsistence or small-scale agriculture, which provides a living for 65 per cent of the population. Fishing, offshore financial services and tourism are other mainstays. More than 98 per cent of the inhabitants are native Melanesian, or Ni-Vanuatu, with the remainder made up of a mix of Europeans, Asians and other Pacific Islanders.

Vanuatu shares many of the concerns of other developing countries. Depending on one’s point of view, the traditional culture has to withstand or adapt to the modern globalised world. Most of the population of 205,754 is rural, though tens of thousands live in the two largest towns: Port Vila, the capital, and Luganville. The population is also rapidly growing, with 50 per cent under the age of 21. The education received by
these young people, if they get much at all, prepares them for urban-based kinds of work and this, in turn, accelerates the drift to the towns. It also puts an unbearable burden on natural resources. At the time of writing, the start of the 2009 school year, the annual worry of how to find school fees leads to whatever is valuable in the surroundings, in the sea and on the land. One actor returned from five weeks leave in his home village describing how a portable sawmill is offering to pay people for any large trees. “People are cutting down their big breadfruit trees, their nut trees. And one landowner is preparing to sell the sand on the turtle nesting beach to a construction company,” he said sadly. “I’ve begged him before not to but he says to me, ‘well you pay my children’s school fees then.’” And even if the school fees can be found, the standard of education and facilities of most schools, especially in the rural areas, will mean that very few will realise their dreams.

There is high unemployment in many countries, particularly in these times of economic crises, but there is no benefit system in Vanuatu to pick up some of the pieces. It has the much vaunted extended family network, and many urban families still have land on their rural home island, but both of these are feeling the strain of conflicting cultures and population growth. Gender-based violence, a high STI rate (though a low HIV prevalence to date), political corruption, a massive sell-off of land to investors – all these factors mean that there is no end of issues for TfD to tackle. All this too in the country voted the happiest country in the world, albeit in a weird survey that sadly received rather a lot of publicity.

**LIVE DRAMA**

On the face of it, live drama could not be further away from a distance model of education. Live theatre thrives on the immediate, on being there; the audience and the actors, all in it together. This is what sets it apart from other forms such as radio plays and films. The live theatre looked at here, though, is a model of education that can be taken to the people rather than being confined to a conventional theatre. It is also a tool of empowerment, as Robert Chalmers puts it in his preface to Julie McCarthy’s excellent book *Enacting Participatory Development: Theatre-based Techniques* (2005):

The cerebral activities of development studies, data analysis, policy influence and the like all miss the personal, emotional and experiential dimensions, which are fundamental to development as good change. It is as though development has been brain without body or heart. Theatre combines these as a whole, which is greater than its parts; it accelerates, deepens and embeds learning and change and it opens up areas and forms of experiences, which are not accessible in other ways.
The first stage of TfD, which for many practitioners is the one that matters, does not even look at theatre in terms of a finished play for performance to an audience. It tries to find techniques that will enable people to discuss the usually “undiscussed” in a safe environment where they don’t feel frightened to say things against the prevailing norm. At this level it could be something as simple as an Agree/Disagree/Don’t Know debate in which people are encouraged to get out of their chairs, stand by a card with others of a similar opinion and prepare their case to put to others of a different opinion on, say, the topic “Condoms should be placed in all secondary schools” or “A woman’s place is in the home”. This may not sound a particularly adventurous exercise, but it is amazing how many people say their entire formal and non-formal education experience consists or consisted largely of lectures and note-taking and never getting out of their chairs (see box).

**NO QUESTIONS – JUST TAKE NOTES**

Three years ago WSB filmed a drama called No Questions, which explores different teaching techniques. Much of it took place in the classroom, and 25 school dropouts had been employed to act as students. One of the scenes was going to involve a teacher who spends her entire time getting students to copy notes off the board. Some notes were written on the board before filming and the students came and sat at their desks. The team then started making adjustments to the lighting. In the meantime, every single one of the students had got out an exercise book and had automatically started copying the notes off the board, even though there was half an hour till shooting and no one had asked them to do anything. When this was pointed out to them, they all laughed. In the ensuing discussion it became clear that, when they had been at school, copying notes was one of the major activities, to the point where it had become an instinctive response to seeing writing on a board. Even allowing for the fact that a shortage of textbooks might well mean more copying than in a better-equipped school, it is still a depressing way to spend one’s time. After “lack of school fees”, “boredom” is one of the most often quoted reasons for dropping out of school.

Another technique that WSB employs is using games or “ice-breakers”. There are hundreds upon hundreds of group-building games. Some crazy levels of enjoyment can and have been experienced playing a game like “orange, lemon, grapefruit” by people who have been waiting for a presentation at a workshop with paper and pen in hand only to be asked to bring their chairs into a circle as they are going to be an orange or lemon for the next 10 minutes (it’s a bit like musical chairs without the music).
Everyone seems to revel in the ripping off of straitjackets, in the chance to be silly. The games also play an important group-bonding role because everyone has been silly together, they have shared their guilty secret that they like being a little bit childish. This is especially important if there are some participants who feel they are not as important or as high ranking as others in the group. Since the facilitator is the one who enabled them to throw off their inhibitions, they are more likely to trust her or him when they are asked to participate in another activity.

A further step towards drama might be to ask each group to make a statue with their bodies showing a picture of each of their main points; for the condom debate above, one picture might be of a girl in tears being expelled because she's pregnant. The activity of statues enables even the quieter participants who may not have contributed to the discussion of points to be part of the exercise. They engage in the topic without realising they are doing so because they are concentrating on modelling their statue. Another way of organising the debate is not to put down Agree/Disagree/Don't Know cards but to split the participants into small groups and ask them to make statue stories showing different sides of the topic under discussion.

These are just a few of the many simple activities that can be used to make workshop sessions with different communities more open and participatory. Although simple, there are serious implications for the role of the facilitator, who needs to create a safe environment, especially when dealing with sensitive issues in sensitive surroundings. When running sessions on gender-based violence in rural communities, for example, it is important to be aware of the possible impact this may have afterwards. Has encouraging women to speak out about their experiences led them to receive further beatings for the comments they made? Has someone been fined by local authorities for a remark they made during the workshop?

This leads to a crucial issue with TdD work. What processes actually empower people? Does it function best at a community level, with a facilitator from within or at least with strong links to the community who is committed to being with that community for a long stretch of time? Is it best at a very local level? Is it diluted when it is run out as a programme across a country? The conventional play is viewed sceptically in some quarters. Unlike statue and discussion techniques, some say, the audience is passive and only an onlooker; too much emphasis is put on the level of performance rather than the issue at hand. The play is probably generic, not specific to a particular village's problem, and written by someone outside the community rather than improvised by those affected so it can't really touch the heart of the issue.

Another criticism of the play approach is that it tends to be didactic, to deliver messages to people – “Use a condom if you don't want to get AIDS” – and it fails to look at all the complexities of human nature and the problems of access to condoms that beset many communities. As Professor Tim Prentki from King Alfred College, which
runs a masters in Development Theatre, has noted, NGOs see issues but people tell stories. Critics say that this approach is favoured by donors because on the surface it looks as if it is ticking all the right boxes and makes good photo opportunities, but in reality it is a top down approach; the group arrives, tells the people what they should do and leaves and nothing changes. A project timeframe and numbers of people who have to be “targeted” or “reached” also limit the depth of the work, preventing it from going in unexpected directions. The messages they bring are invariably those on the donor’s agenda because that is how the group gets its money. You would be better off, critics say, exploring styles of theatre such as forum theatre, a type of playmaking invented by Augusto Boal. Briefly summarised, a piece is devised in which a lead character is oppressed by a series of events and other characters. Members of the audience (or, as Boal calls them, “spect-actors”) can take over from the protagonist, and by changing the actions of the protagonist, can achieve a more positive outcome. However, if the way the spect-actor tries to improvise a new solution is deemed impossible or unreal, other spect-actors can claim this to be “magic” and another spect-actor can take over. The empowerment comes from people actually experiencing this change for themselves. And the group collectively works out a positive change. A facilitator – called a “joker” by Boal – ensures that things work smoothly and fairly.

With foreign entertainment so prevalent, people can start to feel their own stories are of no importance or are uninteresting. Telling those stories in a play can also create a forum for discussion where the voices of the oppressed can speak more freely.

So two approaches in TfD circles are: (a) the improviser, the participatory audience, the keep-it-at-local-level camp; and (b) the more conventional play-making, touring troupe approach that may engage with many communities in the course of a year. McCarthy (2005) refers to them as “exogenous theatre and development”, where interventions are initiated from outside, and “endogenous theatre and development”, where change comes from within. Both approaches have strengths and one may be more applicable in certain circumstances than the other. The play approach does not need to be preachy or didactic. Even in a written script, the stories and incidents can have their origin in the lives of the actors or the research of a writer in a community. The power of telling stories in itself is often overlooked. Good drama deals with conflict possibly in a more nuanced way than a straight protagonist/oppressed divide.

Entertainment even in remote villages is often in the form of Western gospel TV shows or Hollywood action movies. With foreign entertainment so prevalent, people can start to feel their own stories are of no importance or are uninteresting. Telling
those stories in a play can also create a forum for discussion where the voices of the oppressed can speak more freely.

They can relate their comments to the characters they have seen in the play rather than appear to be talking in the first person in a workshop where a husband or his family might be part of the same group.

Much depends on the writer in the play approach. WSB has a full-time scriptwriter. One reviewer of its work, more disposed to improvising, said grudgingly, “your method only works because you have a good writer”. However, it’s doubtful that audiences in the communities the group works with are as passive and politely observant of the proceedings as they may be in Western communities. A discussion or role-play after a performance can be as participatory as a forum intervention. In the end any style of theatre depends heavily on the skills involved. A good facilitator and improviser has an equally important role with the forum theatre approach as a writer does with a play. And both are still a step away from the real world; any change that ensues will still depend on a person’s commitment and the obstacles s/he faces in real life away from the world of performance or spect-actor intervention. If family planning is a 40 dollar speedboat ride away, you may want it with all your heart, you may be able to role-play away all your husband’s objections, but the ocean and lack of cash still stand in your way.

The issue of delivering messages through theatre is again not so clear-cut. It is easy for people with varied and easy access to information to say that information alone does not change anything, but where there is no Internet, where the radio transmitters seem permanently broken, where there is no TV, how do people learn about the decisions being taken on their behalf by the government whose representative from the area has done his (usually his) visit at election time, bought everyone kava1 and tinned fish and gone back to his life in the capital? And if someone cannot read and write, isn’t theatre an ideal way of receiving that information to enable people to take action?

At the time of writing, two troupes of Wan Smolbag actors are working in a number of villages with a play looking at the issues behind the new Family Protection Act. This law caused a furore in Port Vila last year where it was seen as an attack on culture, on a husband’s and parent’s right to discipline their families. This had trickled down to some people in remote villages; others, for all the noise it made in town, had not even heard of the proposed law. So here is a particularly sensitive issue and change in the law with half the population none the wiser. The troupes follow the performance with a workshop that uses discussions and games to look at the gender issues the law addresses and the actual law itself. And this, perhaps, is the way the two approaches to theatre can work side by side: a performance to open up proceedings and a number of participatory discussions and activities to follow up.

1 An ancient root from the Pacific consumed as a drink to relax.
Post-drama discussions following dramas about good governance can also be used to build peaceful solutions at the village level. Conflict within villages is often caused by groups of people having their own priorities and not listening to other groups when decisions are made. These differences can lead to conflict when, for example, men prioritise the construction of a big meeting house or the purchase of a speedboat in the budget, women wish to buy a few sewing machines and youth want a sports field or youth centre. In the discussion, each group has to identify its main priority and present it to the groups, and all participants must agree on one forward plan. The discussion then turns to how, in real life, consensus-building and participatory decision-making could happen without having to depend on a politician’s largesse. There are several villages that have, as a result of viewing these plays and working through the discussion activities, developed strategies together to improve village life.

Drama can also be used to challenge long-held beliefs. For example, the play “The Las Kad” was created in the aftermath of a riot in Port Vila in March 2007 and subsequently developed into a film for many audiences. The riots stemmed from accusations of witchcraft that led to the burning of several houses, three deaths and many more injuries. The practice of consulting *klevas* (witch doctors) to find out the cause of death is a common practice, and in this case (and others) had led to accusations and persecution of an individual. The play tried to create a platform in which the role of *klevas* could be criticized without pointing the finger at any one individual in the hope that in future events the verdict of *klevas* might not be so readily believed, thus averting violence. Certainly audience reaction to the *kleva* character, both during the performance and afterwards, suggested that the play allowed an outlet for people to express opinions they would have previously been too frightened to vent.

**Providing information through theatre**

The following are two examples of the impact that information can have, one nationwide, the other in relation to work in Vanuatu’s second town, Luganville.

**Turtle conservation**

WSB initiates deep discussion on controversial issues that can lead to conflict. Their work encourages people to explore the relationships between tradition and custom in areas such as land management in the context of increasing pressure on resources. In 1994, the South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) announced “The year of the turtle”. WSB visited a number of small communities on and offshore at the northern end of the island of Efate where the theatre is based. The actors sat around and asked questions about the numbers of turtles people saw, what custom stories
people knew about turtles, and what people knew about the life cycle of the turtle. From this it was clear that people were not seeing as many turtles as they were, say, 20 years previously and also that people did not know much about the life cycle of turtles (nor did the WSB members when the project started). As populations grew, turtle eggs and turtles were being eaten in ever increasing numbers.

WSB returned to Vila and, using the stories told by the people, both custom and modern, created a play that also contained information about the turtle’s life cycle. The group returned to the same communities, the play was much appreciated, and in post-play discussions people went far further than anticipated. Some were for putting immediate 10-year taboos on the harvesting of eggs and eating turtles. From this tour grew a network of informal monitors as people from the original villages accompanied the group to other islands to share their experiences. Today the network is 412 strong and runs nationwide. Neutral observers suggest that, 15 years on, more turtles are being seen close to the shore in many islands. Some communities have started ecotourism projects centred around turtle watching. This project is a clear case of where having access to information through theatre has had a long-term impact on people’s lives (and is discussed in a video documentary made by WSB: Vanua-Tai ... of Land and Sea).

Youth clinics

Reproductive health has been a big part of WSB since it started. Once more was understood about lack of access to facilities, it found funds to start youth clinics offering family planning and STI and HIV counselling and testing. When the clinic opened in Luganville, WSB created a play with three stories illustrating who might find the clinic useful. According to the staff at the clinic, this play marked a turning point in its history. The play was performed in many different settlements, sometimes even just for a few houses within a settlement. Numbers attending the clinic grew greatly in the weeks following the tour of the play, and now three years on it is an important part of the northern islands health services.

Involving a community in a theatre project

There is no question that the more time a theatre group can have with a community, the greater its chances of really telling a community’s stories. In 1997 WSB decided to work on a community play for six months with the settlement community of Blacksands that is its closest neighbour in Port Vila. This is a poor peri-urban area settled by people from various outer islands with the reluctant approval of the landowners from an island close to the capital. They are really rent-paying squatters with no tenancy rights. Two months of workshops twice a week were held with 80 people aged between 10 and
70 who had responded to leaflets that were distributed in the area. Role-plays, chorus work, discussions, making musical instruments from local materials – many different techniques were used to elicit stories and opinions. At the end of the sessions, anyone who had a story to tell Jo, the writer, could stay behind to share it. A two-hour play emerged that included a mixture of the stories – the men’s view, the women’s view, the children’s view, the custom stories people had told – all adding up to a mosaic of life in the community. Rehearsals were held over the next two months. It was not easy. The community was by no means united. There were fights and disputes, which needed huge meetings to resolve. But the cliché about “the show must go on” being something that pulls people together was certainly true of this project. The two months of performing were thrilling, although with 80 in the cast there were many anxious hours wondering if everyone was going to turn up. This project had an impact on WSB that is still felt 12 years on.

During rehearsals, time was taken out once a week to look together at reproductive health issues. It was clear that one obstacle to many of the group accessing contraception was that it was a bus ride away and that cost 2 dollars – which, when you are earning 100 dollars a month, is a real expense; it could be more if you have young children whom you cannot leave behind. When the play was finished the whole group sat down to discuss what kind of reproductive health clinic in their area they would like to see if WSB could find the money to build it. Every age group was given the chance to make its wish list of services. Some wanted expatriate nurses because they wouldn’t be pressured to say who was visiting the clinic; others said it didn’t matter as long as they were kind. Some thought the service should be free; others thought people should pay. WSB found the money and built the clinic onto the back of the theatre. The original peer educators for the clinic were drawn from the cast of the play; several are still there today.

Whether the project would have had such an impact on people’s lives if there had not been a performance at the end of it is debatable. In this particular project the performance was the statement. It wasn’t about a follow-up workshop or discussion. It was saying “here is what 80 people from the poorest sector of Vanuatu, some of whom have never been to school, can achieve. Why are we not making more use of the talents and energy in our country?” Beware though of saying this to an audience. WSB learnt this lesson when the play was taken the following year to Luganville. Quite apart from the problems of travelling with 80 people, some of whom had never left Efate before, the troupe was alienated by the way they were introduced to their first packed-out performance. A leading actor of Wan Smolbag said that what this troupe had achieved, some of whom could not read or write, was amazing. The next morning there was a big meeting and threatened strike because the group had been shamed in public by it being said they were illiterate. It was a mark of how far they had come that the group felt they could take that step.
This is more strictly speaking community theatre and does benefit from theatre specialists. There are questions of “quality” too that raise the issue of what value is placed on performance in this kind of work. It is one thing to put on a small play that has arisen from workshops. For example, perhaps a village is looking at how best to manage a water supply that seems to be breaking down and is never repaired. A series of workshops have established all the issues involved; is the system of water the right one for that village? Is the village contributing to a repairs fund? Is such a fund well managed? If not, why not? The participants have developed a small play to prepare the way for a full village discussion on the issue. In such a situation, where everyone knows all the actors, where the issue is relevant to everyone, the level of performance may not matter. Yes, it is good if everyone can hear and see but part of the pleasure derives from seeing your aunty or your sister’s cousin’s uncle “having a go”. The further a play gets from home, the more likely it is that the audience is going to be critical of aspects of performance: she looks nervous, he’s overacting, I can’t hear her.

Eventually in the community play project, although no one was excluded, performance skill had to be prioritised and auditions held for main parts when the switch was made from games and storytelling. Some of the contenders for these parts may not have known two months previously that this was a skill they possessed, and there were leads who could not actually read the script and worked through a mixture of teaching themselves to read bits of it and improvising.

In a country where youth are in such a majority and yet still marginalised, drama and other arts can play an important part in giving youth a voice and pushing leaders for change.

This is another aspect of theatre for development: performance as self-discovery, which isn’t as inward looking as it might sound. WSB employs over 30 actors full time, many of whom were unemployed and had had no experience of drama when they started. They have discovered skills and information that they have shared with families and friends. In a country where youth are in such a majority and yet still marginalised, drama and other arts can play an important part in giving youth a voice and pushing leaders for change. Having so many keen actors always looking for new challenges led us to film and radio drama.

**FILM AND RADIO DRAMA**

Film and radio are the main sources of WSB’s distance education. The actors have become well-known faces all over the Pacific, especially since the start of *Love Patrol,*
Using Live and Video Drama to Reach Communities in Vanuatu

the annual 10-part TV series we have made for the last three years, which explores the growing issue of HIV in the region.

While this chapter started by declaring the primacy of live theatre, the cost of travel – particularly across the distances of the Pacific Ocean – means that most live theatre work is going to be local. Moreover, video and radio, although initially quite expensive (especially video), have the added advantage of being repeated. Not that this is always a good thing. The shortage of material for some cable networks in the North Pacific means that some of WSB’s films have been shown an embarrassing number of times.

Film and radio drama in the Pacific, and possibly in other developing regions, generate something of the immediacy of theatre. In Vanuatu they are often a communal event, particularly in rural areas, and even in a household the numbers watching or listening would be larger than in most Western homes. There is also the local stories factor. So few local dramas are told on Pacific TV stations that there is great excitement when they do appear. WSB has produced films for all levels, from primary to community, on topics from human rights and gender to sustainable development and population. For example, *George and Sheila* looks at domestic violence and at the relations between women and men – who looks after the children? Who has the right to go out? Who should make decisions in a family?

WSB has also broadcast numerous half-hour documentaries in Bislama2 on Radio Vanuatu since 2000. They deal with many issues: child rights, women’s rights, land issues, the constitution, corruption, environmental laws, reproductive health rights, divorce law, the role of the police, the role of MPs, election laws and Western and custom law.

But what is the post-play workshop equivalent in video or radio? Many educational films around the world are accompanied by users’ guides or discussion notes. Similarly, most WSB films come with a student and teacher workbook, which has a more specific year group focus for teachers. The challenge lies in making sure that they are useful, well expressed and well laid out and, hardest of all, that they are used.

A good users’ guide will be full of participatory games and exercises that will enable the audience to become more involved, more akin to Boal’s “spect-actor” in forum theatre terms. Not every teacher or community coordinator will find it easy to interpret the exercises. There are still in Vanuatu quite a number of untrained teachers with only a class 10 certificate working in schools. Even trained teachers groomed over years in more conventional classroom methods might find it hard. Some village level NGO trainers may be excellent but not comfortable with interpreting texts. Writers need to be aware of this when they prepare the guides. It is good to pre-test the exercises, both

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2 English-based Pidgin, which is the most widely spoken language in Vanuatu.
with proof-readers and with potential users, to see if the exercises can be followed correctly and that the description of how to play a game is not going to end up with half the group contorting themselves into some potentially life-threatening shape or with the boys spending most of their time looking up the girls’ skirts. It is also worth considering different guides for different users. At village level WSB can produce a comic book form of guide. This was done for a radio drama series on ecotourism. The guide told the story of the five radio plays in five sections of a comic book, interspersed with some discussion points. For the first Love Patrol series, one guide was designed for school use that had a wide range of exercises, drama, discussion and writing exercises and another more structured for a non-formal learning environment.

It is good to have a range of exercises as certain activities will not be possible in some venues. For several years WSB has been training teachers across the region in the use of its video guides. Members of the group also follow them into the classroom to give them the initial confidence to use the exercises. It was quickly apparent that class size and space can limit the use of the drama-based activities. It’s no good starting some noisy drama exercise with 40 students if the maths teacher on the other side of the partition can’t then make herself heard. Another consideration in rural areas is whether communities and schools have regular access to DVD players and power. WSB has also produced a number of issue-based CDs of songs, which can sometimes be easier to set up for use in a classroom or remote village.

Another problem is how much time to allot to an activity. This is equally true of any TFD style workshop. When does the impassioned debate on gender-based violence become a slanging match or, even if it is going well, is it getting a touch repetitive? Yes, everyone’s enjoying this game but should things be moving on? If an introductory exercise lasts too long, it may mean that people have less energy for the more detailed exploratory activities. Again, taking some exercises from a guide and not others, planning how much can be covered in two hours/half a day or a full day’s workshop, are all skills that are developed when running workshops on the users’ guides. Before a WSB guide goes to print, suggestions are incorporated from a trial group of teachers or staff from the teachers’ college who may recommend modifications to some of the exercises. In the end though, even the best guide will only be as good as the facilitator who brings it to life.

Reference

16.
Learning in a Post-conflict Environment: The Case of Bougainville

Volker Boege and Pam Christie

INTRODUCTION

For almost 10 years (1989–1998) the Pacific island of Bougainville was the theatre of a large-scale violent conflict. Subsequently it has undergone a comprehensive process of post-conflict peacebuilding that presents a rare success story. A range of promising approaches to learning can be found that are adapted to the specific conditions and focus particularly on the needs of peacebuilding, reconstruction and reconciliation in the local communal context. Customary institutions have proven to be remarkably resilient, and teaching and learning kastom, customary ways and indigenous knowledge are of major importance in community peacebuilding and a high priority for both politicians and people at the grassroots. Open and distance learning (ODL) may still be in its infancy, but there is considerable potential for its inclusion in learning for peace.

Taking Bougainville as a case study, this chapter analyses the challenges to peace-oriented learning at the community level in a fragile post-conflict environment. It provides a brief overview of the background to the conflict and the main features of post-conflict peacebuilding, with a particular focus on the significance of traditional approaches to conflict resolution. It then discusses various initiatives towards learning for peace in the local context, again stressing the role of culture and custom. It proceeds to address the potential for ODL and current activities in this field. The chapter concludes with some remarks on the options and limitations of external assistance.
WAR AND PEACEBUILDING ON BOUGAINVILLE

The island of Bougainville, with an area of about 9,000 square kilometres (approximately the size of Cyprus) and 200,000 inhabitants, belongs geographically to the Solomon Islands archipelago. Politically, however, it is part of the state of Papua New Guinea (PNG). From 1989 to 1998 Bougainville was the theatre of a large-scale violent conflict, and over the last few years it has gone through a comprehensive process of post-conflict peacebuilding. Learning in the community context has been a key component of this. In considering the possibilities of “Learning4Peace”¹ and ODL in peacebuilding, it is important to reflect on the specificities of the island’s post-conflict context.

Bougainville society is characterised by a complex web of cultures, languages and social systems that evolved in the course of thousands of years. Its highly egalitarian communities consist of social groups of different sizes and with different functions (clans, sub-clans, lineages), with descent being the organising principle. Matrilineal descent is widespread, and this provides an important role for women in the social life of the groups. Access to land depends on membership in a specific social kin-based group; the group and the land are closely interwoven. Land is at the heart of life and belongs to the whole group (including the spirits of the dead and the unborn generations). Loss or scarcity of land not only poses economic problems but has far-reaching effects on the social structure, the spiritual life and the psychic conditions of the affected groups and their members.

Given the great importance of land, it comes as no surprise that one of the main sources of the violent conflict was a giant mining project, the Panguna mine in the mountains of central Bougainville. In the 1970s and 1980s this was one of the largest open-pit mines in the world and brought considerable revenues for the PNG Government in the far-away capital city of Port Moresby. At the same time, however, the mine caused immense environmental destruction, thus endangering the traditional land-based way of life of the people. In addition, an influx of numerous workers from outside the island and large amounts of cash and associated social changes added to the pressures local communities were experiencing. Local people blamed outsiders – workers, expatriate company management and the agents of the Government – for not respecting indigenous culture and their special status and rights as the original owners of the land.

¹ In this article, we adopt the term “Learning4Peace”, which was coined by the Commonwealth of Learning for an approach where women, young people and other members of the community learn and share skills and approaches to mitigate and prevent conflict and to build peaceful communities.
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The people demanded meaningful environmental protection measures, compensation for environmental damage and the loss of land, and a larger share of the revenues generated. Both the mining company and the PNG Government disregarded these concerns and rejected their demands. In late 1988, young members of the local clans in the mine area brought the mine to a standstill by acts of sabotage, and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) was established. The BRA managed to overrun and shut down the mine (which has remained closed ever since). It then adopted a secessionist stance and called for independence for Bougainville. The fighting soon spread across the whole island.

In its war against the BRA, the PNG military was supported by local Bougainvillean auxiliary units, the so-called Resistance Forces. Over time it was the Resistance that bore the brunt of the fighting on the government side. This changed the character of the conflict. From being a war of Bougainvillean against “foreign” government troops, it became a war among the islanders themselves. Traditional conflicts between different groups and clans were also fought under the umbrella of the “great” war of secession as parties joined one side or the other. However, both groups were made up of largely independent units and there were no explicit and efficient lines of command and control. Over time the war became more and more complex, and the frontiers blurred. There were no two clear-cut sides fighting each other over one single distinctive issue as in conventional wars.

The main victims of the war were civilians, who were subject to massive atrocities, massacres, torture, murder, arbitrary arrests, looting of property, destruction of houses and villages, rape and other gross human rights violations. They also suffered from the collapse of basic services such as health and education and the breakdown of infrastructure. Approximately 20,000 Bougainvillean lost their lives, and large numbers of the populace were forced to flee their homes or were forcibly resettled during the war. The history of the successive steps and stages of the political process that led to a comprehensive peace arrangement for Bougainville, starting with talks in New Zealand in 1997 and culminating in the establishment of an Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) in June 2005, shall not be recounted here (for an overview see BCC, 2004 and Wolfers, 2006). Suffice it to say that an agreement in January 1998 provided for a “permanent and irrevocable” cease-fire. Since then a stable process of political peacebuilding has ensued, with the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) of August 2001 and the adoption of a new constitution for the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in November 2004 representing the most important political results.

Peacebuilding, however, has not yet been completed. Despite a politically successful process of weapons disposal, there are still a large number of weapons in the communities; some areas are still controlled (to varying degrees) by armed groups that have not yet joined the peace process; some sections of the population do not
acknowledge the ABG as the (only) rightful government. In particular, one major faction, the Meekamui movement – which remains in control of the area around the Panguna mine – has so far abstained from joining the peacebuilding and state-building processes. Given these circumstances, the general feeling in Bougainville today, 10 years after the cessation of major combat, is that peacebuilding is far from over.

PEACEBUILDING IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The above-mentioned deficits notwithstanding, Bougainville is one of the rare peacebuilding success stories of our times, not least because of the comprehensive utilisation of non-state customary institutions and methods of conflict resolution and the combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches to peacebuilding (Boege and Garasu, 2004).

Of utmost importance for building peace, rebuilding communities and re-establishing order was the utilisation of customary forms and institutions. This was possible because customary institutions had experienced a renaissance during the war, when the state and its institutions were forced to withdraw. In many places elders and chiefs once more became responsible for regulating conflicts and organising community life. In doing so, they referred to longstanding customary norms. Elders and chiefs as well as women were also entrusted with an important role when violent conflicts had to be settled in the transition phase from war to peace. They were widely successful in achieving reconciliation at the intra- and inter-community levels by drawing on long-established methods for dispute resolution and the rebuilding of peaceful relations. At the core of customary peacebuilding is the restoration of social harmony among the conflicting parties. To achieve this, a lengthy and complicated process of talks and negotiations is necessary that aims at the reconciliation of conflicting parties.

Reconciliation is cemented by the exchange of gifts as compensation for damage done and wrongs committed. The exchange takes place in the context of peace ceremonies when former adversaries feast together, eating, drinking, dancing, chewing betel nut, symbolically breaking spears and arrows, etc. Christian elements such as church services and prayers are combined with customary practices in peace ceremonies as the great majority of Bougainvilleans are devout Christians. The combination of traditional and Christian spirituality was of major importance for peacebuilding on Bougainville, and women’s groups associated with the churches were particularly active in this area (see box).
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

Given the relatively high status of women in the mostly matrilineal societies in Bougainville, women were in a position to negotiate peace in their communities and to use their influence as go-betweens with the warring factions to initiate and maintain dialogue. During the war women were to a large extent able to regain their customary authority and power. Mothers went into the bush to attempt to bring their sons home. Moreover, women’s groups and individual women leaders became important players in the political arena. They organised peace marches, peace vigils, peace petitions and prayer meetings for peace, thus putting pressure on the male leaders of the warring parties. In July 1995 the Bougainville Inter-Church Women’s Forum (BICWF) was established, uniting women from all denominations. The BICWF organised a Women’s Peace Forum in August 1996 that was attended by about 700 women from across the island who freely voiced their fears about the conflict and their desire for peace and who developed concrete plans on how to work towards a lasting resolution to the conflict. That peace conference was an important step on the road to the peace process that started a year later.

Women’s different forms of support for a political solution to the conflict, often expressed from the sidelines at official meetings or discreet lobbying of the different parties, have maintained vital pressure on the men to continue the search for peace. However, although women took part in all the decisive rounds of negotiations at the official political level, they were clearly under-represented. While women and girls are often the victims of direct physical violence and sexual violence in contemporary conflicts, men dominate negotiations to resolve conflicts and negotiate compensation exchanged between males, for example, for the rape of women or girls. This means that the women and girls are degraded to become objects of male negotiation. Moreover, although women leaders are demanding that women be given the opportunity to participate fully in public life at all levels, men try to sideline them (again). The issue of more meaningful participation of women in politics in general and conflict resolution in particular during “normal” times poses a challenge. This is all the more important as the sexual violence against women during the war is still difficult to talk about and women and girls continue to be the main victims of everyday violence – not least domestic violence.

The issue of youth is another problem. Young male ex-combatants and other disgruntled young men who grew up during the years of the war, who missed out on both formal modern education and customary education, who feel abandoned and
neglected by their former leaders, who have no prospects in the formal economy and no societal status and no prestige and who often turn to alcohol and drugs, can become a serious threat to the peace process. These young people are often alienated from their communities of origin and highly traumatised by the violence they conducted and/or experienced during the war. They need both formal and customary education, trauma healing programmes and counselling as well as customary healing rituals.

**EDUCATION, CUSTOM AND PEACEBUILDING**

Community support for schooling and education is strong in present-day Bougainville, and indeed, people point out with pride that before the war the island had the highest standard of education in PNG. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presents a relatively positive picture of literacy and numeracy levels. It puts the adult literacy rate in Bougainville in 2006 at 80 per cent, with female 83 per cent and male 77 per cent, compared to 57 per cent in PNG in general (UNDP, 2007). These figures are one example of the “gender equality in education” (ibid: 48) that has been achieved on Bougainville. Others, however, are more sceptical, pointing to the on-going effects of the severe disruption of the education system during the war. Illiteracy is thus an issue in some remote regions, especially for those young people and adults who grew up during the war period.

In the current post-conflict situation, Bougainvilleans are struggling hard to develop forms of learning that contribute to peacebuilding in their communities. As customary institutions have proven to be remarkably resilient and of major importance for communal peacebuilding, teaching and learning *kastom*, customary ways and indigenous knowledge are a high priority for both politicians and the people. Government representatives and officials from the education department strongly advocate the more meaningful inclusion of custom into the curriculum; at present there are some provisions for teaching this, but they seem to be implemented only rarely and superficially. The necessity to teach custom is clearly prioritised by the ABG. “In particular, the President and his senior ministers insisted that they were not interested in replicating the formal education systems of industrialized states. They are interested in learning programmes that combine elements of proven value in indigenous knowledge systems with relevant international pedagogies” (UNDP, 2007: 30). Furthermore, government

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2 Much of the information in this section draws on interviews with representatives from government, civil society and the customary sphere that were conducted in 2007 for a Bougainville case study that was carried out by Volker Boege in the context of an AusAID-funded project, “Towards Effective and Legitimate Governance: States Emerging from Hybrid Political Orders” (2007–2008).
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officials pointed to the need for citizenship education and political education that explains the Bougainville constitution and what it means to be Bougainvillean to young people, and they see no problem in “marrying” citizenship education (on human rights, the constitution, etc.) and kastom education. This is perhaps an over-optimistic and harmonious gloss on a complex process of mutual adaptation. In particular, such a “marriage” will require deliberate efforts to reconcile certain aspects of kastom with the universal understanding of human rights and women’s rights.

At the village level, chiefs, elders and other customary authorities generally demonstrate a great interest in providing decent formal education for children and the young as well as for those adults who missed out on school because of the war (UNDP, 2007). At the same time, they are keen to make the point that there is not only one form of education – the Western education taught in the formal school system – but that customary education has served the people well from times immemorial. They believe that custom should play a prominent role in the education of the younger generation and are concerned that, because many young people missed out on customary education during the war, the customary wisdom may get lost. They posit that customary leaders should teach custom as a fully-fledged subject in the schools. School inspectors acknowledged that the teachers who were trained in the formal system do not know custom and made the important point that “you cannot teach kastom textbook-style”. The establishment of “schools of culture” was therefore seen as necessary to preserve custom and, along with it, peace and harmony in the communities.

A number of informal schools and training centres that operate outside the state system are held in high esteem because they are focused on village-based applied education and make use of customary teaching methods. Examples are the Paruparu Training Centre, the Trade and Human Development Resource Centre in Panam village, the Arawa Women’s Training Centre, the Mabiri Training Centre and the Tunaniya Open Learning Centre. The last of these explicitly focuses on adult literacy “for the young people who have missed out on formal education” because of the 10 years of war and on life skills training in order to enable young adults to participate in “the developmental activities that take place in the communities” (Sirivi, 2007: 1). It operates four schools that take adult students from several dozen villages in central Bougainville.

The Development Resource Centre in Panam village in the Nagovis region focuses on applied village-based skills, food security, culture and custom. The centre does not receive any government or donor funding. The same holds true for Paruparu, which

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3 Interestingly enough, this concern is echoed by some educated government officials and public servants who regret that they missed out on customary education themselves as they had to leave their villages for education at high schools and universities and have lost touch with their customary local roots in the course of their professional careers.
operates on similar lines. It has a long history of informal education given that it was the main educational hub of the BRA-controlled areas during the war and served as the BRA’s “high school” and ‘university’.

Furthermore, there are some distinct “custom schools” that also operate completely outside the formal education system. An example is the school of the “Indigenous Society” in the Aropa area. Learning here focuses on custom, local languages, indigenous mathematics, genealogy, dance and songs. These “custom schools” utilise storytelling, dancing, singing, painting and other forms of visual communication, with storytelling of particular significance, given the oral nature of traditional Bougainville knowledge systems. Storytelling continues to serve important functions in local peace negotiations and reconciliation processes. Songs and dances are important too as they model relationships – among people, with the environment and with the spiritual world. By performing song and dance people are taught and learn social skills, attitudes and values.

The idea to establish a “centre for the study of custom and culture”, at the University of PNG branch in Buka, was raised by a number of people interviewed in our study. In fact, an institution similar to the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS – Vanuatu Kultural Senta) could be of great value for Bougainville. Since it cannot be taken for granted that everybody in Bougainville is “learning kastom” in his or her everyday life due to the war and other disrupting influences, the transfer of kastom knowledge from one generation to the next has been interrupted, and there is some need to re-establish it (while adapting it to changing societal circumstances). Such a centre could strengthen and promote the knowledge of kastom and function as a bridging institution that can represent customary perspectives to government, civil society and external actors.

Within this array of activities, there is no doubt that opportunities for ODL exist. In particular, there are opportunities for taking customary knowledge (especially with regard to conflict resolution and peacebuilding) and informal institutions seriously – which are important starting points for ODL in peacebuilding.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ODL**

Clearly, ODL has the potential to reach large numbers, including those geographically isolated, but it is not an inexpensive alternative to conventional formal education. At the very least, it requires infrastructure for the technology it uses (be that print-based materials, radio, Internet or mobile phone coverage). Particularly for formal learning, it requires well-designed materials to suit its educational goals, an administrative infrastructure and procedures for ensuring quality.

The mix of formal and informal education in Bougainville, as well as Western education and kastom, offers spaces as well as challenges for ODL. This chapter focuses on
ODL and peacebuilding specifically, with an emphasis on community contexts, rather than the general application of ODL in education more broadly.

The analysis presented so far suggests that ODL and Learning4Peace initiatives would need to take account of the specific context of peacebuilding in Bougainville, as well as the hybrid nature of the socio-political order of which peacebuilding practices are part. There are a number of examples of community education practices that support peace values and peacebuilding. The questions that then arise are: What processes and experiences of peacebuilding in Bougainville are amenable to ODL? And what can be generalised and could be replicated elsewhere? These questions do not have easy answers.

In terms of the context of peacebuilding in Bougainville, the importance of local communities and customary practices has already been pointed out. These cannot be regarded as homogeneous and easily replicable in other contexts. Community relationships, particularly those involving reconciliation and peacebuilding, entail living with people and sharing their stories. Learning4Peace in Bougainville has a strong and highly important emotional – and spiritual – dimension. It has to deal with fear and hate, and it is about forgiveness – asking for forgiveness and forgiving. Reconciliation (not in a superficial understanding of the word, but in a deeply felt spiritual religious sense) is about restoration of relationships; hence it is about trust and empathy. Peacebuilding processes in Bougainville require a lot of shedding tears together. This learning does not come easily and has to be adjusted to the needs of the village. Face-to-face communication is of the utmost importance.

Experience elsewhere, however, demonstrates that ODL can be utilised to bring people together in shared learning processes, e.g., through digital voice and audio recordings. There is no doubt great potential for this on Bougainville, yet the necessary technical infrastructure is still underdeveloped. Only in the past few months has Digicel provided the technical basis for island-wide use of mobile phones (the previous mobile phone network was of limited geographical reach). Mobile phones are becoming more and more common on Bougainville, and it can be assumed that their use will mushroom in the near future. This will dramatically change local ways of communicating, particularly for people in remote rural regions. Costs, however, will remain a problem, as many people engaged in the rural subsistence economy only have limited amounts of cash at their disposal, and the money is primarily used to cover school fees, transport costs and basic household supplies. Access to the Internet is currently also very limited, with Internet cafes available only in the “urban centres” of Buka and Arawa (Arawa Communications Centre); and only a few people, mostly those working for government or civil society organisations, have access to personal computers.

Young people in particular are very excited about new means of communication such as mobile phones and the Internet, and this excitement and curiosity can definitely
be used for ODL. The youth are also the main consumers of video and DVDs. The older generation, women, chiefs and elders, however, are not very happy about videos and DVDs coming into the island as they are perceived as containing violence and pornography and hence as further “spoiling” the young people, thus adding to problems of anti-social behaviour in the communities. Some people even advocate a ban on videos, DVDs, computers, etc. For ODL to become utilised and effective on a broader scale it will be necessary to convince people that these new means of communication can be put to purposes that serve the needs of the communities for development, peacebuilding and learning.

That said, several community institutions can be found outside of formal education that provide promising approaches on which ODL can be built. These are adapted to the specific local conditions and focus particularly on the needs of peacebuilding, reconstruction and reconciliation in the communal context. Various civil society organisations provide valuable experiences in this regard. The churches and women’s groups have been and still are at the forefront of efforts for learning about peace and peacebuilding. The Catholic Church, for example, started a programme as early as 1992 called “Healing of Memories Retreats”, initially facilitated by the Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth. The retreats aimed at mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. They were well attended by people from all the churches and combatants from both the BRA and the Resistance. Later the BICWF continued the programme.

Today, women still carry out much of the work in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working for reconstruction and reconciliation, and they are particularly concerned about the provision of good education for their children – both girls and boys. As women are confined to a largely non-public “behind the scenes” role in the traditional context of community life, and as they are still massively under-represented in the sphere of formal politics and government, they turn to the realm of civil society as a means of becoming engaged in public life and making their voices heard. Women’s NGOs such as the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom or the Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency (LNWDA) are contributing valuable work to the peace process. LNWDA offers a range of services for women and young people such as counselling and a programme to combat violence against women. Since 2000 it has been running a very successful project titled “Strengthening Communities for Peace”(Jenkins, 2006a). LNWDA has broadcast a weekly programme on peace issues (“Peace Talk”) on Radio Bougainville since 1999 – a good example of ODL. Topics have included “Domestic violence”, “Violence against women”, “Problems arising from homebrew alcohol”, “What is rape?”, “Justice and peace”, “Cycle of abuse”, “Corruption”
and “Say no to marijuana”. The radio programme complements the workshops conducted by LNWDA in the field, as does the Agency’s Hihatuts Theatre Troupe, which conducts village and street theatre (Jenkins, 2006a; 2006b).

Special mention should also be made of Peace Foundation Melanesia (PFM), which started workshops as early as 1995 to train grassroots people as mediators, facilitators and negotiators of conflicts at the local level. Over time, PFM has conducted mediation courses for several thousand participants. Hundreds of village leaders have been trained as facilitators and dozens as trainers. As with the “Healing of Memories” seminars, these village-based courses and workshops did not introduce Western-style concepts of conflict resolution into the local environment but built on the customary indigenous experiences, e.g., by heavily referring to the concept of restorative justice, revitalising old customary ways and adapting them to contemporary needs (Howley, 2002). PFM is still very active on Bougainville today, running basic training courses on community justice (including people skills and conflict resolution), community development and restorative justice. On the initiative of PFM, so-called Peace and Good Order Committees have been established in many villages. They often substitute for the judicial and police institutions that are seen by many people as lacking capacity, effectiveness and legitimacy.

These various courses have contributed considerably to spreading the idea of peaceful conflict resolution at the grassroots level during times of war and in its aftermath. The fact that hundreds and thousands of Bougainvilleans have participated in them and in similar endeavours of other groups needs to be highlighted.

Modes of teaching and learning in ODL would need to take into account the issue of language. There are around 20 different languages spoken on Bougainville; PNG Pidgin serves as the lingua franca and many people also speak English. Due to the war and the separation of communities from the outside world, however, a lot of people today (particularly the younger generation who grew up during the war) can hardly (or not at all) speak either Pidgin or English. Given that Bougainville communities historically have an oral culture, it is of great importance to convey traditional knowledge regarding peacebuilding and conflict prevention in the local language of the communities in question.

While written modes of communication are required in the formal schooling system, it is important that they are not privileged in all learning contexts at the expense of other forms of knowledge, particularly if customary peacebuilding practices are to be built. Learning and disseminating of knowledge through storytelling, dancing, singing, drama, painting and other visual communication is relevant as well. Storytelling

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4 A list of the radio programme topics from 2000 to 2005 can be found in Hakena, Ninnes and Jenkins, 2006: 160–163.
in particular serves important functions in local peace negotiations and reconciliation processes. It lends itself particularly well to ODL; by means of radio, cassettes and cassette recorders, etc. stories can be shared among people beyond face-to-face communication (provided they speak the same language), and this certainly enhances the options of Learning4Peace in the Bougainville context. Using digital storytelling, sharing of songs and video for dance, drama, etc. provide strong future possibilities for peace-relevant ODL.

In engaging with community projects at a local level, ODL may have a role in the scaling-up of successful local projects. And it may also have a role in generating new participatory spaces. In using both formal and informal modes, ODL would have the potential to broaden the discursive resources available for bringing about peace and development. Different purposes could be accomplished in different languages and through different modes at different times. The goal here would be to equip people with the capabilities to engage in participatory development and governance, building on the hybrid nature of the social system.

Many other opportunities for ODL come to mind. For example, femLINKPACIFIC has its own mobile women’s radio station and manages a rural women’s media network.\(^5\) It also coordinates the Fiji-based regional women’s community media network on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and provides a good example of ODL. The above-mentioned LNWDA is its Bougainville-based partner.

As well as community radio, possibilities are likely to open up through the development of email and learning networks, such as People’s First Network, and through the previously mentioned mobile phone networks that cover the whole island.

Another way to tap into the wealth of traditional knowledge, and also to enable custom to reflect on itself, would be through centres for the study of culture and custom. These centres could develop in ways that suit local circumstances – the VKS in Vanuatu provides a very effective example. Again, there are many possibilities to explore for ODL within this approach.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS: NICHEs FOR EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE**

The conditions for external assistance for ODL and for Learning4Peace are good on Bougainville. The political will of government and state institutions as well as the commitment and support of communities are there. In terms of formal education, the ABG knows very well that people expect the delivery of quality education that is adapted to the specific local circumstances (which definitely include the need for learning that

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5 See Chapter 14 – Eds.
supports peacebuilding and peace practices). The legitimacy of the government and state depends to a large extent on the provision of such education, which ranks highest in people’s expectations and is seen as an important dimension of the peace dividend. Forming political community also hinges very much on education and on learning in support of peacebuilding and peace practice. The communities acknowledge the relevance of education in general and learning for peace in particular. Though this chapter has not explored the opportunities for ODL within the formal system, there is no doubt that they exist. And it has shown that there are many opportunities for ODL in informal programmes of community learning around themes related to peace.

What is lacking then is not political will and commitment but capacity, particularly in terms of infrastructure and how it can be used for ODL. External assistance may well make a contribution in this regard. This may take the form of infrastructural support,6 or support for the development and implementation of learning materials of various sorts. However, we suggest that external support, particularly if it is intended to support peacebuilding, needs to engage deeply with the local context. As shown throughout this chapter, peacebuilding in Bougainville was and is highly community-based and community-driven. Much of it has depended on customary practices and the active support of traditional authorities. Hence it is important that external assistance be based on a thorough understanding of the local context and valuing of customary practices as a prerequisite for adequate programme and project design and implementation. However, within these parameters, there do exist many opportunities and spaces for peace-oriented learning through ODL.

References


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6 For example, the Australian Government contributed to the refurbishment of Radio Bougainville and the distribution of 1,000 solar-powered wind-up radios to primary schools on Bougainville. There may be other examples of technological support that enhance opportunities for ODL.


INTRODUCTION

Between 1999 and 2002, Solomon Islands experienced ethnic conflict and a breakdown of law and order that was only restored with the arrival of a military intervention force, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), in mid 2003. The root causes of the “tension”, as it is known locally, are complex and include the failure of successive governments to address issues related to land and authority structures and the exploitation of demands for compensation and Melanesian kastom (Fraenkel, 2004). The manipulation of perceived ethnic differences by political interests and the activities of criminal opportunists also fuelled the conflict.

The fighting was between rival militant groups, the majority of them young men, and the period of “tension” that followed was greatly accentuated by the slow progress in demobilising these youths and creating adequate alternative opportunities for them. Unemployed youths were also the majority of those involved in rioting that took place in the capital, Honiara, in 1989, 1993, 1996 and 2006. Although the problem of “urban drift” has not accelerated as quickly in the Solomons as in other developing nations, due to customary land ownership in rural villages, the influx of people to the town is often described as a contributing factor to many social problems. A chronic lack of employment opportunities, low salaries and increasing rents combine to severely strain the working families with whom the (mostly young) incomers find automatic residence rights stemming from kinship ties.
While the young may have been the primary players in these events, they did not write the script, however. For example, the Commission of Inquiry into the 2006 riots commented in an interim report on “evidence connecting the identity of a number of leading politicians, political groups and organisations who had in one way or another contributed to the execution of the planning for a regime change, should the previous government or elements of it return to power” (Government of the Solomon Islands, 2007). And at the same time, young people have also often been at the forefront in attempts at peacebuilding. Solomon Islands only became an independent state in 1978, and the concept of nationhood is a new one, but a sense of national consciousness in the making has been detected among the youth, especially in urban areas, stemming from: (i) the education system; (ii) Pidgin as a common language; and (iii) popular culture (Jourdan, 1995).

It is clear, therefore, that young people are at the heart of the issue – they are the victims, the unwitting protagonists and the solution – and thus a strategy of intervention to address the underlying social tensions and the causes of the conflict must involve their participation. This chapter discusses a Learning4Peace pilot project in Isabel Province, where there are strong youth (and women’s) networks and a province-wide network of rural information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. First, though, it looks more generally at the communications and community networking that are a vital part of rebuilding peace and promoting development and capacity building. ICT offers great potential in many areas such as improving government service delivery, citizen participation, programme implementation, support for rural development, and monitoring, accountability and transparency in all of these areas. This was affirmed most recently at the Pacific ICT Ministerial Forum “Connecting the Unconnected” in February 2009, the communiqué from which noted that ICT can be a key enabler for socio-economic development through various applications from e-Education, e-Health, e-Environment and e-Commerce to e-Governance.

SOLOMON ISLANDS AND ISABEL PROVINCE

Solomon Islands is a nation of around half a million people scattered over an area of the South West Pacific the size of France, Germany and Spain combined, although the total area of land – 347 permanently inhabited islands of which six are large – is only 28,000 sq km. Though relatively small on a global scale, it is the second biggest of the

1 Learning4Peace, Solomon Islands, http://wikieducator.org/Learning4Peace Solomon_Islands
Pacific Islands states in terms of land mass and third in terms of population.

The Solomons is classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC) by the United Nations, and around 85 per cent of the country’s population live in isolated rural villages, with many on underdeveloped outer islands. The country is peopled by a Melanesian majority, with Polynesian outliers and, in more recent times, influxes of settlers from Kiribati (previously the Gilbert Islands), Europeans and Chinese. The diversity is illustrated by the large number of languages spoken (more than 80). Around 80 per cent of the population is largely engaged in subsistence agriculture. More than half the formal employment is concentrated in and around Honiara.

ICT offers great potential in many areas such as improving government service delivery, citizen participation, programme implementation, support for rural development, and monitoring, accountability and transparency in all of these areas.

Isabel (or Ysabel) province, where the Learning4Peace project discussed later in this chapter is located, has a total area of 4,156 sq km with vast natural resources. Most of the land is rugged and mountainous with 2.3 per cent of the total land identified as an Agriculture Opportunity Area. It is primarily rural with no road other than a few kilometres of unsealed track near the capital, Buala, and one or two other locations. Travel is almost exclusively by sea, along the reef-fringed coastline by dugout, motor canoes or the weekly round-island ship. Most villages are located on the coast. Buala, which also has a twice-weekly air service to Honiara, features small stores, a market, a small hospital and clinic, and a police post as well as fixed and mobile telephone coverage.

In a country that is highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, traditional governance, land ownership (lineality) and language, Isabel Province has long been a settled and unified province. People on Isabel have a strong affiliation to their culture and to Christianity. Chiefs govern village affairs and land issues and mandate cultural practices. Traditionally land ownership is passed through the matrilineal system. There are eight main languages spoken, plus Solomon Pidgin. English is the official administrative language, but is spoken confidently mainly by the young and educated. Major income-earning activities are from copra and cocoa, logging and marine products. The formal employment of the province is small, making up only about a fifth of the working age population. Most people are either self-employed or work in the subsistence sector to provide for own consumption.

3 Almost exclusively within different branches of Christianity, although there are also Muslim, Baha’i and Pagan minorities and Buddhists within the Chinese community.
THE RECENT CONFLICT IN BRIEF

The recent conflict began with the 1998 Isatabu uprising in Guadalcanal Province and the eviction of thousands of settlers from the most populous province, Malaita. Things came to a head on 5 June 2000 when militant factions from Malaita, allied with many of their wantoks in the police force, staged a coup, deposed the Prime Minister and took over control of Honiara. Meanwhile, the Guadalcanal militants developed alliances with counterparts in Western Province and as far as Bougainville. The Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) that was agreed to in October 2000 largely failed due to non-implementation and this led to further deterioration, lawlessness and more serious atrocities, especially on the remote “Weathercoast” of Guadalcanal. In Honiara the worsening situation began to undermine the democratic functioning of state institutions. This finally led the Prime Minister to request assistance from Australia in May 2003. The violence was curtailed before it could reach the levels of the earlier conflict on neighbouring Bougainville by the deployment of RAMSI on 24 July 2003, with a mandate unanimously approved by the Solomon Islands Parliament, to help the Government restore law and order, strengthen government institutions, reduce corruption and re-invigorate the economy.

The underlying tensions surfaced again when riots occurred in Honiara in April 2006 following the General Election. This time the ethnic Chinese business community was the target. Again, as hinted at by the Commission of Enquiry that followed, there were signs that the political stand-off had been manipulated by opportunists who wished to take advantage of the unrest. In 2007, a coalition government was formed.

As of April 2009, there remain concerns over governance issues and the future stability of the Government. Major challenges include addressing the root causes of the conflict, capacity building in the government and private sectors (including non-state actors), commitment to the reform process and the urgent need to improve living standards in rural areas. However, the country is now firmly engaged in confidence and peacebuilding measures. Agricultural, health, education, communication services and infrastructure are being restored and improved. More children are going to school and more people are engaged in learning and capacity-building activities.

4 Members of the same clan, who have very strong social obligations towards each other.
5 The conflict that took place between 1989 and 1998 in Bougainville, a province of Papua New Guinea, preceded and was interlinked with the conflict in the Solomons. [See Chapter 16 - Eds.]
**PEACE THROUGH EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

In 2004 the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development launched the Education Sector Investment and Reform Programme. As of 2009, the Ministry was nearing the end of the implementation of the National Education Action Plan 2007–2009 and in the beginning phase of the Education Strategic Framework 2007–2015. The European Union is supporting these plans in several ways, including the introduction of the distance learning mode into many of its programmes by:

- funding the development of a distance learning strategy for formal and non-formal education;
- funding a pilot project to establish nine distance learning centres in rural community high schools; and
- establishing and maintaining a Technical Working Group for DFL (distance flexible learning) since 2007.

The Ministry has recognised the opportunities that open approaches to content and capacity development will bring and held the very first “Learning4Content” Wikieducator training workshop in January 2008.

The main thrust of the European Union’s support to education in the country is now shifting to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. By linking in the distance learning mode, facilitated by ICT, and by empowering a widening pool of educators including rural teachers and TVET trainers through open educational resources approaches and tools like the Wikieducator, young people in the rural areas will be able to access more opportunities to build livelihoods and continue life-long education.

**THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIONS IN PEACEBUILDING**

It is precisely in deprived and remote areas that basic telecommunication has the most value and impact. Yet, currently, the only two means of communication with the outside world for most remote locations in Solomon Islands are short-wave radios and satellite telephones. Telecommunication suffers from a small, scattered population with logistical challenges and lack of opportunity to aggregate demand, resulting in extremely high costs. When short-wave radios are used for voice communication, they often require hours of patient queuing and retrials, at a cost still very high for rural people living in a non-cash subsistence economy. In turn, satellite telephones, when available, are far beyond the reach of most of the population.

Mobile coverage via the national provider Our Telekom, which holds a 15-year exclusive license, is making some inroads into rural areas and will be an increasingly
important component of national communication infrastructure. In Isabel province, however, only Buala and the village of Kia have mobile coverage, with possibly 10 per cent of the island’s population having access, and the small scale and lack of competition translates into very high cost. It can be calculated that a rural teacher’s monthly salary would be almost completely used up in making just 20 minutes of mobile calls per day at current rates (April 2009).

It is precisely in deprived and remote areas that basic telecommunication has the most value and impact. ... studies of media and communication systems in Solomon Islands indicate that most people, and in particular the 85 per cent living in rural locations, are information poor.

The Isabel Province Development Planning (IPDP) communication system

The United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Isabel Province Development Planning Project (IPDP) 2003–2007 noted in a situation analysis in 2006 that studies of media and communication systems in Solomon Islands indicate that most people, and in particular the 85 per cent living in rural locations, are information poor (Pacific Media and Communications Facility, 2005). This is manifest in different ways, such as lack of access to market information for rural producers, lack of access to information to assert human rights, lack of information to empower and enhance the role of women in society, and the absence of an information environment to complement and reinforce the education system. The province therefore attempted to support the growing governance institutions by creating a linkage between the modes of communication in order to allow two-way information flows, extend the reach of two-way communication to the Highlands, add programming initiatives to build local capacity, and provide a communication system that can widely distribute local content and information. The components of the system are HF radio, the People First Network (PFnet), Distance Learning Centres and FM radio.

HF (shortwave) radio

HF radio transceiver coverage is very high in Solomon Islands, and the health, education and religious sectors depend on their own HF networks to coordinate activities. One-way communication via shortwave broadcasts from Honiara is provided by the national radio station, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, and is heavily relied on in remote areas, particularly for “service messages” that convey news about job postings, scholarships, family information or other topics. HF radio communication
has several drawbacks, however, including limited privacy, difficulty in reaching the intended recipient (especially when intermediaries are relied on to “pass on” the messages) and the relatively high fee charged by radio owners.

**People First Network (PFnet)**

The UNDP-initiated PFnet⁶ is a rural connectivity project that aims to promote and facilitate equitable and sustainable rural development and peacebuilding. It offers basic email services, dramatically reducing the price of communication and making it affordable for low-income users. Its main component is a network of community-based and managed email stations located in accessible and secure public facilities on remote islands across the country. Email operators act as “infomediaries”, assisting customers with sending and receiving emails at a nominal cost. The network is now being used to facilitate the rural networking needs of sectors such as education, health, women, sustainable livelihood programmes, finance and agriculture.

PFnet also opened the country’s first Internet Café in Honiara in 2001, a facility that also serves as the base station and gateway for the email network and as a training facility for a number of rural development stakeholders and the broader public. In addition, PFnet provides substantial information resources and news on its web site and is active in facilitating the flow of trusted news between communities. This is an important part of peacebuilding in a nation torn by ethnic conflict.

**The Distance Learning Centres Project (DLCP)**

DLCP is being implemented for the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development by the PFnet of the Rural Development Volunteers Association (see Leeming, 2007 and www.schoolnet.net.sb). It has established nine DLCs in rural community high schools in each province and has worked with education providers in building capacity to deliver distance education in support of the curriculum, for in-school teacher training, TVET and open and flexible learning. The centres are run as multipurpose community telecentres and are equipped with broadband Internet access, 24-hour solar power, seven laptop computers, a projector, a scanner, microphones and other diverse equipment and resources, and a highly trained full-time supervisor. The project is also running pilots for the One Laptop Per Child programme,⁷ and to demonstrate how the distance learning network could be extended using Wi-Fi.⁸

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⁶ See www.peoplefirst.net.sb
⁷ See http://wiki.laptop.org/go/OLPC_Solomon_Islands
⁸ See www.peoplefirst.net.sb/DLCP/Marovo.htm
FM radio

There has been increasing interest in community media in Solomon Islands. Community radio has the potential to reach a wider audience than other modes, and if the stations are genuinely founded with community ownership and participatory programming, can be a powerful means of disseminating and sharing information with strong local content. Content can be produced locally in local languages and can be accessed by people who are illiterate. The IPDP worked with rural communities in Isabel to establish eight community radio sites by 2007. However, recent feedback from the FM stations during the Learning4Peace workshop showed that most stations were broadcasting national and local news, weather reports, local messages (known as “service messages”) and some health awareness with involvement of the local clinic, but the predominant content was popular music – with very little locally recorded music. It was clear that the concept of participatory programming was not sufficiently understood by the host communities.

Elsewhere in Solomon Islands, the Don Bosco technical school situated east of the capital has assisted Tetere community in running a community station named Radio Bosco, and the Solomon Islands Development Trust – a long-established community development non-governmental organisation (NGO) – has established, with the assistance of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), a Community Media Centre to build local capacity.

The appropriation process

The degree to which the rural email facilities are utilised, and the degree of participation in the FM radio broadcasting, depends on a process of “appropriation”. New PFnet email stations are normally added to the network only after the host communities demonstrate that the demand exists and that they are sufficiently mobilised to have approached PFnet with a proposal. Research in 2004 showed quite clearly that uptake of the email service was strongly related to the sense of ownership of the facility by the host community (Chand et al., 2004).

However, in the case of the Isabel stations, only one site (Sigana) was genuinely driven by the community. The remaining PFnet stations and all the FM stations were provided in locations selected through the IPDP. This process was undoubtedly undertaken with strong participation of, and in consultation with, rural communities. Nevertheless, the result is that some additional intervention might be needed to assist with the appropriation process.
One of the most difficult challenges has been for development programmes and organisations to make effective use of the rural ICT opportunities in their development programmes.

“Joining the dots” for integrated communications

In the national context, Isabel Province presents a unique opportunity to combine these various communication modes and build an integrated, inter-modal communication system that will serve community and rural development, peacebuilding and economic advancement.

The locations of the various facilities are indicated in the diagram below. Isabel Province enjoys some degree of Internet connectivity in nine locations around the province, including via Our Telekom in Buala and the DLC at Guguha (the only location with broadband), and seven PFnet email stations. All the email stations have been paired with FM radio stations. Telephone access is augmented by mobile coverage in Buala and Kia.
The email and FM operators serve as technical intermediaries, but as PFnet’s experience has shown, for effective information sharing involving a significant group in the village, enthusiastic and motivated “champions” are required. These “champions” – for instance, an agriculture officer, a teacher, a local member of the Mother’s Union or a youth leader – need to be trained to understand how the communications work; they do not need to be able to use the technology itself as that service is assisted by the operator. Committees also serve an essential purpose, underpinning community ownership. A community can really be seen to have appropriated the facility when it mobilises the committee to solve problems that emerge from time to time.

Audio material is already available locally from a variety of sources, including the Solomon Islands Development Trust and other NGOs, the Chamber of Commerce, the Civil Society Network, government information offices providing market and commodity information, and any number of development projects with outreach programmes, many of which already produce audio content for the national broadcaster. Content can also be obtained from educational institutions in the country and region.

Through the development of strong linkages with programmes and providers, the integrated network can deliver information for different interest groups in the rural communities. The email access can be “amplified” through broadcasting in community radio format, including in the local languages, and thereby reach even the most vulnerable, the illiterate and the elderly, many of whom do not speak English or Pidgin.

The intermodal communications have great potential for the empowerment of pan-Isabel interest groups through building supportive networked communities and peer-support networks that can then collaborate on various developments and programming options. There is a strong foundation for this, as there are some very active networks on Isabel, in particular youth, women and the Church.

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Youth development is organised by the province through its Ministry of Community Affairs (MCA). Youth Coordinators are appointed in each of the 16 wards, with an official Isabel Province Youth Coordinator working in the MCA office in Buala. The ward-based coordinators work with youth leaders in the villages in communities of that ward. And, an Isabel Youth Council has been launched.
THE LEARNING4PEACE PILOT PROJECT

In February 2009, Isabel Province launched its Youth Policy and Learning4Peace initiative, developed with national youth stakeholders.\(^9\) The first such work in Solomon Islands, it “recognises young males and females as the basis of the community and seeks to develop their optimum potential and promote their active partnership in the socio-economic and cultural sphere in Isabel”. It affirms the principles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, develops a set of principles, key strategies, priority target groups and implementation mechanisms, and then charts out a detailed action plan. The provincial MCA is implementing the plan working with Youth Coordinators in each ward, the Youth Council, NGOs and other youth stakeholders.

The project is building capacity to use the existing ICT networks to allow youth groups in many parts of Isabel to join together, discuss important issues and develop learning materials for their communities. As the focus is on youth, and the means of dissemination will include the community FM stations, audio materials are a feature. This is exciting to the young participants and can involve much creativity including, for instance, songs and debates related to the topic areas.

A workshop in March 2009 for Youth Coordinators and Isabel Provincial Government youth development officials identified issues of concern to young people and related to the provincial Youth Policy. Another workshop was later held in Honiara attended by FM radio and PFnet email operators plus a few Youth Coordinators and FM committee chairpersons where participatory techniques for developing community media content were explored, and the participants practised developing storyboards for their selected content ideas.

An expanded community of practice for community media, focusing initially on the Isabel Youth development, was established with (currently) 74 members from a variety of youth and community media stakeholders including the Solomon Islands Development Trust and the national Ministry of Women and Youth. Networking is enabled for the community via a Google Group and Ning site.

On the strength of the work so far, funding of approximately USD 15,000 was obtained from AusAID’s Community Sector Program (CSP) for equipment for the community FM radio stations to support the project. This equipment included netbook computers, CD burners and digital voice recorders. Workshops were then held at Tataba and Sigana communities from 23–30 May where four storyboards were developed based on content ideas identified and selected by those communities: shortage of sea resources and need for marine conservation; reviving our customs; influences

\(^9\) Isabel Province Youth Policy and Action Plan, February 2009, can be downloaded from www.wikieducator.org/Learning4Peace/Solomon_Islands
from town affecting youth in Isabel; and combating the ill effects of drug and sub-
stance abuse.

Input was then received from the expanded community. A one-day workshop
was held at partner organisation Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP)’s facilities
in Honiara, attended by six community media specialists from the Solomon Islands
Development Trust and a representative from the national Ministry. At this workshop,
the four storyboards were further developed. In the final phase of the project, the Isabel
communities then worked on the actual content based on the four storyboards and
produced a radio programme “Reviving our Customs – Kwarao Custom Fishing”. It was
first programme broadcast, to much interest, by the community radio station in Buala.

“Reviving our Customs” is a serial programme that can be repeated with contribu-
tions from each of the FM communities and shared between them. It is intended to
celebrate and preserve valued customs and traditions. Wikieducator articles are also
being created for each programme, with transcripts and illustrations.

Although the recording was all carried out on one busy day, and understandably
was a bit rushed with variable sound quality, this programme is significant because
it was entirely the product of Isabel youth using sound community media principles.
They consulted their communities to identify the Isabel customs that should be high-
lighted, developed the storyboards and recorded the content. The only outside help
came in the digital editing; however, it is intended that training will be given in this
skill using the Audacity open source software.

Already, the project is creating interesting synergy. For instance, UNDP has a
conservation project based in Buala, which is intending to consult with rural commu-
nities and identify traditional approaches to conservation of marine and other natural
resources. Thus, “Reviving our Customs” is very relevant. At least two of the customs
highlighted by communities concern traditional fishing methods – such as Kwarao
and Gria – and the interest created by the radio programmes can be harnessed imme-
diately and channelled into conservation-related activities. It will be seen that this links
together two of the themes selected by the youth, i.e. customs and conservation. Buala
youth members are working with the UNDP project to include documentary content
that can be used in the programme “Shortage of Sea Resources”.

Thus, the project is helping to link grassroots/ community demand to an impor-
tant Isabel development programme, and that is in addition to the linkage with Isabel
Youth Policy. Furthermore, the Isabel Provincial Government is seeing the potential
of the networked communities and FM radio for delivering their programmes. It was
already suggested by the Minister of Community Affairs that there are efficiency gains
in terms of reaching a wide audience with lower transport costs.

The project has raised the profile and demonstrated the potential of inter-modal
communications to both the host communities and their government and development
partners. This is leading to increased support and a stronger partnership between the IPG and the communities to sustain the FM and email facilities. All of the above impacts are due to the innovative aspects of the project, namely the connecting and networking of community groups and the building of a supporting community of practice to support the development of open educational content.

References


Conclusion

Rawwida Baksh and Tanyss Munro

The case studies featured in this book from the various regions of the Commonwealth provide a wealth of experiences on the creative and innovative use of open and distance learning (ODL) in community peacebuilding. They point to the critical role that organisations and individuals in communities can play in conflict prevention and resolution and in peacebuilding and reconciliation leading up to, during and in the aftermath of violent conflict.

The human impacts of various types of conflicts are most acutely felt among individuals and groups in communities, whose response can be empowering. In Kashmir, a group of nine Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women initiated Athwaas, a radio programme described by Seema Kazi as “a modest, albeit significant attempt at peace and reconciliation”, in recognition that “the conflict was not merely a political problem but a human tragedy” whose casualties included both Muslims and Hindus. Their main aim was “to acknowledge a common sense of loss and pain, and strengthen the values of coexistence and trust integral to Kashmiri society and culture”. The programme has connected women across Kashmir who have experienced political violence and sexual assault at the hands of the military and militants.

Women’s organisations have mobilised radio as a means of getting their voices heard and articulating their perspectives, raising awareness within and among communities, and bridging the divide between their isolated and marginalised rural communities and policy makers in national capitals. Women around the world have been inspired by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security to increase their presence in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Examples include Radio Apac in Uganda, where the radio programme, “Women’s Forum” engaged women in telling their real-life experiences through workshops and focused discussions. In the Pacific, femLINKPACIFIC: Media Initiatives for Women, established in
2000, developed femTALK (89.2 FM) to facilitate “women speaking to women for peace” at the local level.

Discussing the conflicts occurring within Pakistan, Ahmar and Khan highlighted the ability of radio to address issues of peacebuilding since it is highly affordable, accessible and does not rely on access to electricity. Radio can increase communication between parties, counter misperceptions and stereotyping, provide an emotional outlet, encourage a balance of power, help to foster consensus building and promote solidarity among listeners.

POST-CONFLICT PEACEBUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT

Peace at the community level is often intrinsically linked to access to developmental resources such as land and opportunities for health, education and employment. Sanjay Asthana explored the post-conflict, post-apartheid situation in South Africa, where Bush Radio was established to ensure that “communities who [were] denied access to resources [can now] take part in producing ethical, creative and responsible radio that encourages them to communicate with each other, to take part in decisions that affect their lives, and to celebrate their own cultures”. Bush Radio is highly accessible throughout the Western Cape region, is broadcast in three languages (Xhosa, Afrikaans and English), and focuses a substantial amount of its programming on children and young people. Its “Township Heroes” programme is a “socially responsible strategy” to not only address incidents of crime but discuss the “underlying causes” that lead young people into criminal activity. Bush Radio has also created three innovative programmes that are further contributing to peacebuilding in South Africa: “Community Law,” “Taxi Talk” and “Prison Radio.” These are having positive impacts in the community. For example, “Taxi Talk” has initiated dialogue between the various taxi gangs and hosted a public debate to try and bring collaboration and peace to this group.

Among the activities in Solomon Islands described by David Leeming is the People First Network (PFnet), a “rural connectivity project” initiated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that focuses on the promotion and facilitation of “equitable and sustainable rural development and peacebuilding”. The network provides basic email services and FM radio, and is affordable and accessible to low-income users. PFnet facilitates the networking needs of many sectors as part of the post-conflict development process, including health, women, education, sustainable livelihoods, finance and agriculture.
ADAPTING LOCAL CULTURAL PRACTICES TO COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING THROUGH ODL

Senthilnathan, Khokan and Guha explored the work of the Alternative Living Theatre in using folk drama and reviving the traditional “Pot Songs”, which are focused on peace, harmony, prosperity and development, and engage local people and enable them to change their life conditions. The group conducts many programmes that promote human rights with a focus on reducing violence against women, (including domestic violence), reducing the trafficking of women and children, leadership development, building women’s organisations, civic awareness and voter education, and democracy and governance. The Pot Songs have been effective in “creating the desired impact in terms of changing the thoughts and beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of the target groups”.

Boege and Christie discussed the path to reconciliation in post-conflict Bougainville. Reconciliation is understood “in a deeply felt spiritual religious sense” of restoring relationships, rebuilding trust and empathy and “shedding tears together”. The Peace Foundation Melanesia (PFM) has trained hundreds of village leaders to act as facilitators, mediators and negotiators of conflicts at the community level. A key component of this foundation is the “Healing of Memories” seminar, which includes locally based workshops that explore indigenous approaches to conflict resolution and examine peacebuilding themes such as restorative justice. Additional programmes of PFM are the Peace and Good Order Committees. These are often utilised to supplement local judicial and police institutions, which face issues of capacity, legitimacy and effectiveness. The authors noted that thousands of Bougainvilleans have participated in these peacebuilding programmes, and that the accessibility of these programmes facilitates a more sustainable peace.

USING ODL FOR COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING

The book points to the still preliminary but innovative use of ODL approaches in transforming structural conflicts at the community level.

Drummond and Cran traced the development of a “neutral, shared learning space” in the remote Yekooche First Nation community in Canada, focused on peacebuilding within the community. All are welcome at the learning centre, which is inclusive. Its key objectives include mitigating conflict, promoting co-operation and encouraging interdependent relationships within the community. It provides individual community members with a space inside of the community where they can learn, ensure a community vision, promote cultural values, sustain current support systems, and maintain a sense of place and ties to the community.
Horace Levy et al. examined the social impact of gang violence in Jamaica and the development of peacebuilding initiatives. These include the Peace Management Initiative (PMI), which was established in January 2002 with the support of the Ministry of National Security. The aim of the PMI was to address national crime and violence issues and the limitations of the police system. The authors also discussed the Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA), which reached out to young people and provided peacebuilding messages through dancehall and reggae culture in communities and schools. They sought to “infiltrate” dancehall settings, national reggae shows and community dances to promote “positive messages” on violence prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The VPA has supported such initiatives as “No Violence, One Love” and “Violence is Preventable, Stop Now”. ROOTS FM, an alternative media radio station, has facilitated positive change through its Mek We Talk cross community network that encourages ordinary citizens to talk to each other about their experiences, sharing their pain and finding their common heart.

Rowena Kalloo’s chapter examined the link between the use of discipline and punishment in the primary and secondary school system, and the manifestation of violence at the community level in Trinidad and Tobago. She also explored three initiatives that strive to promote peace and positive co-existence in the country: the national “Peace Promotion Programme”, the iEARN teacher’s forum and the Toco Foundation. The Foundation is an example of a bottom-up, community-based initiative that is contributing to peacebuilding. It connects rural communities and focuses on promoting communal values and cohesive living. It conducts a variety of projects, including: agro-tourism, a “Young Farmers’ Project,” community radio (Radio Toco 106.7 FM), a wildlife conservation programme, a computer training, distance learning and multimedia centre and a social service delivery unit. The programme specifically seeks to engage young people, and also provides health and HIV and AIDS awareness through the Toco Youth and Sexuality Project (TYSP).

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The “Women’s Forum” radio programme in Uganda faced two main challenges: (i) few women called in to participate; and (ii) most of the callers were men. The main reason was that few women owned telephones and they were often unable to borrow phones from their husbands, particularly if the latter were uncomfortable or disagreed with the issue being discussed on the radio show.

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1 The International Education and Resource Network, which is a forum of teachers and classrooms linked to each other through the Internet.
The radio listening clubs in Zimbabwe and Zambia have enabled women to benefit from technology and learn through active participation. However, a key limitation in Zimbabwe, pointed out by Rashweat Mukwundu, is that discussions of political issues at the community level are not taken seriously by the Government, which tends to blame the lack of service delivery on “incompetent junior and local officials”. A similar point was made by Kazi with regard to the impact of Athwaas, which promotes reconciliation and healing between individuals and groups at the community level in Kashmir.

While discussions of the root causes of conflict are important at the local level, including awareness-raising, community peacebuilding and reconciliation, dialogue at this level in isolation cannot resolve the deep-rooted structural and violent conflicts being driven at the national and sub-regional level, and – as Kazi points out – is not a substitute for the justice and public accountability mechanisms that are required.

The power of community radio to facilitate Galtung’s concept of positive peace (“the capacity to deal with conflict non-violently and creatively”), is reflected in many of the case studies explored in the book. However, it is evident that radio may also be mobilised as a tool to incite hatred as in the Rwandan Genocide and the current conflict in the Swat Valley in Pakistan discussed by Ahmar and Khan in this book.

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls discussed the importance of ODL in the promotion of equality and the status of women. She has noted, however, that these technologies (cellular phones, computers, the Internet and email) are the least accessible to women. On the other hand, she points out that radio is a very accessible form of technology for women due to its ability to operate in rural areas, be linguistically flexible, reach the illiterate and cost little. In addition, radio does not require electricity and is a simple and easy to use technology that promotes interactive “talkback” sessions.

The chapter on the Yekooche First Nation community in Canada presented the numerous challenges of providing effective and accessible ODL programmes. Cran and Drummond stated that the difficulties of bringing the Internet into this community included lack of technological experience, minimal computer literacy skills and the costs of required software. There were also challenges with establishing the learning centre including a lack of a sense of ownership by the community, issues about the building itself (for example, around the security and accessibility of the location), as well as disagreement within the community as to how the technology should be utilised. Lastly, Cran and Drummond also explained the challenges in developing and maintaining a cooperative relationship with the community, as there were issues of bias surrounding “external intervention” by those outside the community.
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COUNTRY CHAPTERS

In the chapter on peacebuilding and ODL in Trinidad and Tobago, Kalloo stated that the current initiatives provide insights and lessons for open educational approaches. Important lessons include that projects must be designed through a collaborative approach with the community and take community needs into account; focus on building expert capacity (training local people to become the trainers); have a strong and sound knowledge base in order to be effective and constructive for the community; and should be based on a proactive approach, meaning that they anticipate the importance of an issue and can therefore identify future opportunities. As peacebuilding work often deals with highly sensitive, personal issues, projects need to ensure confidentiality, as noted by Kalloo, and build trust, as noted by Levy et al. and others. Building trust between opposing factions necessitates a commitment to high standards and accountability, such as when ROOTS FM went back to communities to ask people to comment on change two months after an intervention.

Senthilnathan et al., Levy et al., Boege and Christie, and Walker all stress the importance of culture in peacebuilding work, whether to prevent, mitigate or recover from violent conflict. Drama and storytelling can be powerful tools to bring people together and to distance emotions from difficult, sometimes painful, situations.

Moreover, in order to be effective projects need to be sustainable, flexible and holistic. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, projects should focus on the engagement of young people and women – two groups that tend to be un- or under-represented in formal peace negotiations and without whom peacebuilding is not possible – and ensure that they are key facilitators and participants in all projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ODL

In the case of a Ugandan radio station, Carol Dralega indicated that its needs included: increased awareness and funding for capacity building, further engagement with local schools, expansion of the drama programme, and increasing the quality and the scope of sensitisation programmes on tolerance, reconstruction and resettlement. She also stated that radio broadcasters need further training and support in how to discuss issues of tolerance, peacebuilding and reconstruction, and in how to support UNSCR 1325 and specifically highlight issues that affect women. She concluded that Radio Apac needs increased support and resources from both NGOs and government.

Mukundu suggested that radio club members in Zimbabwe and Zambia require further capacity building in radio operation and leadership skills. Furthermore, he indicated that any assistance to the radio clubs must be conducted through a collaborative approach, and noted that the significance of the media as an empowerment tool
cannot be “overemphasised”. Thus new and innovative thinking is required in these
countries to tackle the specific challenges that restrain the accessibility of radio in rural
and marginalised communities.

Ahmar and Khan stated that the Uks Radio programmes need increased support
from state and non-state actors, and further involvement from local and national agen-
cies (which could be commercial, non-commercial, public or communal). The authors
also stated that licenses should be issued to NGOs and to civil society organisations
that want to run radio programmes. Lastly, the authors made the recommendation
that the Government needs to increase the regulation and monitoring of radio pro-
grammes, to see how this form of communication is being utilised and ensure that it
is not promoting hate speech, violence or conflict. They also argued that the Pakistan
Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) should put in place detailed policy
interventions, through a regulatory system, that will help to prevent and stop “all ille-
gal transmissions”, and should endorse a community-based broadcasting system that
focuses on development and peacebuilding.

Bhagwan-Rolls provided key recommendations for improving the effectiveness of
ODL through radio. She stated that women must be equally included in the “design,
delivery and evaluation” of all development plans and programmes. In order for this to
happen, there is a need to support capacity building and the strengthening of institu-
tions. Also, she called for increased collaboration between women peace advocates.
Her argument, reflected in other chapters, was that it is imperative that the image of
women in the media is extended beyond that of a traditional “victim”, and she con-
cluded that the diversity of women’s experiences must be more fully demonstrated.

Bhagwan-Rolls provided six specific recommendations to improve radio programming
and ODL: (1) formal recognition of community media should be ensured in regula-
tory frameworks; (2) public service broadcast policies should be reformed to ensure a
quota of gender equality content; (3) national and regional bodies should be urged to
 collaborate with women’s media networks to enhance peace programming and imple-
mentation of gender equality commitments; (4) training should be provided for editors
and journalists to eliminate gender bias in reporting and investigative journalism in
conflict and post-conflict situations, and to promote gender equality and peace journal-
ism; (5) development assistance programmes should be designed to strengthen the
media sector and take community needs into account; and (6) governments and civil
society partners should recognise and enhance the role of women’s community and
independent media.

Boege and Christie also discussed recommendations for improving accessibility
and effectiveness in this area. They stated that conditions for “external assistance
for ODL and for Learning4Peace” are present and positive within Bougainville, as the
Government and the community are supportive of expanding these programmes.
Thus, the authors argued that increased capacity is needed, especially with regard to infrastructure. The authors stated that increased external assistance, through infrastructural support or resources, is required in order to further develop the programmes. They further noted that any support provided to Bougainville must engage with the local context and receive the “active support” of traditional authorities. Boege and Christie concluded that the opportunities for increased peacebuilding and reconciliation through ODL are clearly present within Bougainville.

The chapter on Solomon Islands by David Leeming explored the challenges faced by ODL initiatives. Leeming stated that such programmes require many resources, such as: increased credit; accessible, affordable and effective transportation; and overall increased awareness of the various information and communication services that are available to a country or community. There is also a need for more effective and clearer coordination at the development planning level, where the community should also be engaged. Lastly, Leeming called for the provision of training for key members of the community, including those involved in agriculture, teachers, local members of the Mother’s Union and youth leaders, as they need to more fully understand how communications work and the effects it can have on their community.

Herbert Mudzamba, in discussing the case of Zimbabwe, stated that ODL programmes can have a strong impact on peacebuilding, but they require a “conducive environment” and a supportive government that will allow such initiatives to be implemented. Mudzamda also argued that any ODL programme must be community-based and be developed through a collaborative approach; if a programme is not approached in this way, it is a “failure before it even starts”. He highlights the fact that peacebuilding and community-building programmes and initiatives must be created and carried out by those who are in the most appropriate position to lead: the community members themselves.

As observed by Mukundu, there is enormous potential in facilitating developing communities’ use of two-way communication technology to interact with policy makers, with one another and to change the agenda. The challenge, as noted by Leeming, is that often with remote, scattered communities, costs for telecommunication such as email or cellular phones are extremely high. This situation has a negative impact on many aspects of life including health, security, education and staying in touch with family and friends. Lack of access to information on human rights, market updates or environmental issues seriously retards development progress while at the same time creating a greater need for this.

ODL lends itself well to allowing learners to create content – particularly for audio media. This is particularly useful for work in peacebuilding, as it can lead to very practical application of new knowledge, bringing positive change to communities, and,
as Mukundu noted, hearing their voices broadcast to others can be a very powerful experience for people marginalised from decision-making.

As evidenced in these chapters, many conflicts begin or are exacerbated at the local community level. As environmental, economic and other pressures increase with population growth, the need to reach grassroots populations in matters of peace-building is increasingly critical. ODL provides an effective and efficient way to involve many of the people most affected by violent conflict in being part of its prevention, mitigation and resolution. It is important that local and national NGOs, regional and international development agencies and learning institutions work together to support ODL approaches to community peacebuilding and post-conflict development to build a brighter future together.
Author Biographies

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Tasneem Ahmar holds Masters degrees in Communication (University of Hawaii, USA) and Mass Communication (University of Karachi, Pakistan). Currently heading Uks Research Centre, a media advocacy and monitoring organisation, she is also Executive Producer for Meri Awaz Sunno (Hear My Voice), a rights-based radio programme with an all-female technical and editorial team. She has previously held the posts of Research Associate, Women’s Study Centre, Quaid-e-Azam University and Assistant Professor, Mass Communication Department, Karachi University, both in Pakistan. Ms. Ahmar has had extensive experience as a journalist, authored many research papers and edited numerous media studies. In 1998, she received the Mary Morgan Hewett Award for Excellence in Feature Writing.

Sanjay Asthana
Professor in Journalism at the Middle Tennessee State University, USA, Sanjay Asthana earned his PhD in Journalism and Mass Communication in 2003 from the University of Minnesota, USA. He also holds degrees in Philosophy and Communication from the University of Hyderabad, India. He has previously worked as a radio broadcaster at All India Radio, where he scripted and produced current affairs programmes and numerous documentaries on social and political themes. His major research areas include globalisation and culture, media education and literacy, visual communications, postcolonial theory and cultural studies, and his research has appeared in many journals and media studies books. Dr. Asthana carried out a UNESCO project on Innovative Practices of Youth Participation in Media that was published as a book in 2006.
Rawwida Baksh
Rawwida Baksh leads the Women's Rights and Citizenship programme at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada. Before joining IDRC, she was Head of the Gender Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat, where she developed a series of publications on gender mainstreaming, initiated the Gender, Democracy, Peace and Conflict programme and co-authored *Gender Mainstreaming in Conflict Transformation* and *Women and Men in Partnership for Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Sierra Leone*. She also led the development of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005–2015. Before this she was Co-ordinator of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) and lectured in Language and Linguistics at the University of the West Indies (UWI). Dr. Baksh has a PhD in Socio-historical Linguistics from UWI, an MA in Gender and Development from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague and an MSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics.

Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls
As a "suitcase radio" pioneer and founder of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) femLINKPACIFIC, Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls has enabled Pacific women's voices and perspectives to be heard. She has been a prominent advocate in the region for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and for the inclusion of appropriate and accessible ICTs in policy strategies. She is currently the Pacific focal point for the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC)-Women's International as well as the Vice President of AMARC Asia Pacific Board. Ms Bhagwan-Rolls has served on the Reference Group of the AUSAID Pacific Media Communications Facility and is the region's coordinator for the (WACC) Global Media Monitoring Project. In 2003 she was selected as a member of the UN Expert Group Meeting on Women and the Media and in 2005 was one of the Pacific women put forward for the 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize initiative.

Rosamund Brown
Rosamond Brown is a career broadcaster with almost 30 years experience in public, commercial and community radio. Over the last five years she has been closely involved in community broadcasting in the Caribbean. Her work in this area includes co-developing the Caribbean Internet Radio Portal (a UNESCO project) and also co-developing curricula for the online community media programme delivered through the University of the West Indies (UWI) distance teaching programme UWIDEIC (http://ict4dev.dec.uwi.edu/media). Ms Brown holds an
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**Volker Boege**
Volker Boege is a peace researcher and historian. Originally from Germany, he is currently a Research Fellow at the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (ACPACS) at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. His fields of work include the state and violence, post-conflict peacebuilding, customary approaches to conflict transformation, trans-boundary water governance, natural resources and violent conflicts, with a focus on the South Pacific and Southeast Asia. Dr. Boege has a PhD in Political Science from the University of Hamburg and has written numerous articles, papers and books on peace research and contemporary history.

**Pam Christie**
Pam Christie has a PhD in Education and is the Director of the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (ACPACS) and member of the School of Education at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. A South African by birth, she is also Visiting Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand and Adjunct Professor at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Dr. Christie holds the UNESCO Chair in Teacher Education for Diversity and Development, a university twinning and network (UNITWIN) scheme that aims to give voice to issues of teacher education from the Global South. She has published numerous books, articles and papers on education in South Africa and Australia.

**Gregory Cran**
Gregory Cran is Director of the School of Peace and Conflict Management at Royal Roads University in Victoria, Canada. He has spent over 25 years working on conflict issues that range from hunger fasts and blockades to bombing and burnings among Russian Doukhobors living in Western Canada. He has worked as a provincial treaty negotiator for Aboriginal land claims and self-government agreements and, more recently, with parliamentarians from Asia and Africa and the World Bank Institute on strengthening parliamentary leadership in conflict-affected countries. Dr Cran has taught conflict analysis and management in Thailand and at Sharif University of Technology in Iran. He has recently authored a book, *Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy and Conflict Resolution*, and a chapter in *Parliaments as Peacebuilders in Conflict-Affected Countries*.
Carol Azungi Dralega
Carol Azungi Dralega is professor/Senior researcher at the Western Norway Research Institute. She obtained her PhD (2008) and MPhil degree (2002) from the Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo and a BA (Hons.) in Mass Communication from Makerere University, Uganda. Her academic training and work revolve around the links between media, communication and development/ democracy and understanding how (new) media and the development question can be conceived, developed, promoted and interrogated to engender social change in the context of developing countries or communities of interest, particularly marginalised communities, women and youth in Africa.

Kallie de Beer
Kallie de Beer, born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, started his academic career as a teacher in technical subjects. After a career change to political science, he worked at the University of the Free State and for a while in the South African Defence Force. In 1993 he embarked on higher distance education. He is currently a Director in Academic Support and Research in the Unit for Academic Development at the Central University of Technology, Free State as well as external study leader and moderator for postgraduates of various universities. His current research field is on distance peacekeeping courses for African military forces. Mr. de Beer is the co-author of academic books, author of numerous articles in local and international academic journals and has presented several papers at conferences in Africa and abroad.

Wendy Drummond
Wendy Drummond is Special Projects Coordinator with the Office of Research at Royal Roads University and is currently working on capacity building initiatives with First Nations. She has spent nineteen years in technology, including seven as a manager and entrepreneur in her own training business. Her background includes developer/trainer in information services, technical support and training in adult/youth employment readiness and adult re-training programmes. She has provided technical training and support for both individual and community development in both remote communities and international settings (Iran and Thailand). Ms Drummond has an MA in Interdisciplinary Studies, combining her business and conflict management interests, focusing on First Nations capacity building through the use of technology.
Swapan Guha
Chief Executive of Rupantar since 1995, Swapan Guha is a theatre activist who has been involved with various theatre groups for many years. He was one of the initiators of the use of folk cultural forms, especially the Pot song, in mainstream development programmes. With Rafiqul Islam Khokan (see below), he co-founded the Rupantar Institute of Folk Theatre (RIFT), the largest folk theatre organization in South Asia. He is actively involved in various developmental issues including democracy and governance, human rights, environment, disaster risk reduction, women’s empowerment and children’s theatre education.

Mervin Jarman
Mervin Jarman has been a street activist for more than 20 years and is the founder and director of mongrelStreet. In 2003 he established the Container Project, a media lab in a shipping container in Palmers Cross, Jamaica, where he has been working with local youth who tested his resilience and commitment with the challenging behaviour that had given them the label “hard to reach”. In 2008 he created jStreetLab, a mobile community multimedia-training unit in a garbage disposal wheelie bin. Mr. Jarman speaks regularly at conferences and has contributed to numerous publications. He won the Stockholm Challenge 2008 Award in the Education category for Lifelong and Informal Learning using ICT for Community Development and was awarded the Badge of Honour for Meritorious Services for his work using ITC for young people and adults in the Palmers Cross area.

Seema Kazi
Seema Kazi is a researcher and writer based in New Delhi. She has worked with NGOs and women’s groups in India in the area of women and laws in the Muslim world and subsequently as an independent researcher and writer on Muslim women and human rights. She has authored a book on gender and militarisation in Kashmir and is currently engaged in research on democracy, gender and the state. Dr. Kazi has a PhD from the Gender Institute, London School of Economics.

Rowena Kalloo
Rowena Kalloo is an assistant Professor at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. She works in the area of student-centred pedagogy and the pedagogy of science. She has been an educator for over 20 years, beginning as a secondary school science teacher. She has an interest in women and children’s rights, and has been part of public advocacy for ending violence against women and
children. In 1999, she was the main technical expert for the campaign spearheaded by the local NGO WorkingWomen to end corporal punishment in schools. Dr. Kalloo has produced numerous workshops on alternative non-violent forms of discipline. She recently attained her PhD from the University of the West Indies.

Rafiqul Islam Khokan
Rafiqul Islam Khokan has worked in development since 1984 in the social, political, cultural and environmental fields. In 1995, with Swapan Guha (see above), he started Rupantar, an NGO using folk cultural media, and he is currently its Director. He was one of the innovators of the new form of Pot songs in Bengal, which educate people about their rights, and co-developer of the Rupantar Institute of Folk Theatre (RIFT), which has 110 folk performers working on a regular basis. Mr. Khokan graduated from Duke University, USA, in fiscal decentralisation and financial management of local government and has also received training in a number of areas from disaster management to development communication to gender and development. In addition, he has undertaken research into faith healing as a Grameen Trust Research Fellow.

David Leeming
Based in Solomon Islands since 1996, David Leeming is a specialist consultant in ICT for development, rural development and education. He has a BSC Hons 1st class in Electro-acoustics from Salford University. Mr Leeming came to the Solomons initially as a VSO teacher working in rural schools for three years. Before that, he worked for the UK Health and Safety Executive research laboratories in Sheffield as a Senior Scientific Officer researching Quantified Risk Assessment for hazardous materials. His main work in the Pacific region has concerned the establishment of the People First Network, Distance Learning Centres Project and regional One Laptop Per Child programme. He has also consulted for UNDP, the EU, Ausaid, COL and directly with departments of education in the region. He has a Wikieducator user page at http://wikieducator.org/User:Leeming.

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Horace Levy was for many years Director of the Social Action Centre, a Jamaican NGO, and from 1999 was Senior Lecturer in Social Work in the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work at the University of the West Indies (UWI). Currently Research Fellow in the Centre for Public Safety and Justice, also at UWI, he is a member of the Peace Management Initiative and the board
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**Tanyss Munro**

Tanyss Munro’s work has focused on empowering resource-poor and marginalised communities through education and good governance. At the beginning of her career in Canada, she worked with remote First Nations communities. As a school principal and regional superintendent, she upgraded underachieving primary and secondary schools and school systems into quality institutions where high-risk youth and schools without an academic tradition became high achievers. This was accomplished through innovative pedagogy, including bush radio programmes and establishing student-operated social enterprises. Later, as an advisor to federal ministers, she worked with members of Parliament, other senior government officials and the public to reform policy and strengthen institutions. Dr. Munro currently directs the portfolio for Good Governance with the Commonwealth of Learning and is also Co-Founder and Director of Amarok Society, a charitable organisation dedicated to empowering very poor mothers in Asia.

**Herbert Mudzamba**

Herbert Mudzamba is an agricultural machine designer who has designed and contributed to the development of farm machines used in Zimbabwe, particularly those for conservation tillage. Since land reform was introduced, he has assisted both former commercial (white and black) farmers as well as new landowners by producing and distributing distance learning materials, backing up government educational programmes on radio and television, and supporting the information dissemination efforts of NGOs and private companies. Due to the political situation, Mr. Mudzamba was forced to leave the country in 2004, but he continued to provide information to support the learning and development of the farmers with whom he had previously worked. He currently runs a project to distribute conservation farming machinery to Southern Africa, but with a passionate focus on Zimbabwe and the aim of returning to assist in re-building the country.

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Sara Niazi has an academic background in gender and peacebuilding. She has worked as faculty in the area of gender studies and is currently a member of adjunct faculty at the Centre for Excellence in Gender Studies at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. She has also been a freelance consultant on gender and peacebuilding, particularly in the field of education as a means of building lasting peace.

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Ian Pringle is a programme specialist with 20 years experience working with community groups and media. His focus is community-based media and localised ICT applications as tools for rights-based development and education programmes. After a decade working in the community sector in his native Canada, he spent eight years living and working in South Asia and two at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. He returned to Canada in January 2008 to work with the Commonwealth of Learning, where he directs a portfolio of media for learning interventions around the Commonwealth. Mr Pringle is a skilled media producer, trainer and facilitator as well as an experienced researcher and writer.

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Carley Jayne Robb completed her BA High Honours in Sociology at Carleton University in 2006. She has obtained her MA in Sociology and Collaborative International Development Studies at the University of Guelph in 2009. Her research focuses on gender and reconciliation processes. She has worked with non-governmental organisations in Canada, as well as in East Africa. She plans to start her PhD in Sociology and Migration and Ethnic Relations at the University of Western Ontario in 2009.
S. Senthilnathan

S. Senthilnathan is a Lecturer and Deputy Co-ordinator of UGC-Special Assistance Programme in the Department of Educational Technology, Bharathidasan University, India. He has Masters degrees in English and Journalism and Mass Communication, an MEd and a PhD. His areas of interest and specialisation are educational technology, ICTs in education, e-content development, ODL and English language teaching. Dr. Senthilnathan has organised a number of training programmes on e-content development for higher education teachers, contributed to the successful completion of UNESCO's assignment on “Learning to Learn with Information and Communication Technology”, and served as a consultant to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) on ODL materials development in Bangladesh.

Peter Walker

Peter Walker and his partner Jo Dorras founded Wan Smolbag theatre when they arrived in Vanuatu in 1989. They had met in Zimbabwe and started their collaboration, the one as writer and the other as director, with a school troupe that toured extensively. Wan Smolbag started as a theatre group consisting of Ni Vanuatu friends Peter and Jo made on arrival. It attracted funding as audiences started to respond to the way the plays dealt with issues that related to their lives. Today the group works in radio, film and live theatre. It also runs a number of clinics and services for youth and employs around 110 staff, the majority of whom are young Ni Vanuatu.

Elizabeth Mary Ward

Elizabeth Mary Ward is Consultant/ Research Fellow at the Institute of Criminal Justice and Security and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Violence Prevention Alliance in Jamaica. She is the former Director of the Disease Prevention and Control at the Ministry of Health and is on secondment to the University of the West Indies (UWI). Dr. Ward has a BSc in Food Science and Nutrition from McGill University, MBBS from UWI and MSc in Epidemiology from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Her work has focused on research, data analysis, use of geographic information systems, injury surveillance and violence prevention programmes. She has also worked as a short-term consultant for a number of regional and international agencies, including the World Bank and World Health Organization (WHO).
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Learning To Live Together includes a range of community peacebuilding experiences from across the Commonwealth that have been applying open and distance learning (ODL) approaches. The case studies offer insights into the challenges as well as the kinds of interventions that have worked and how they can be built upon. They show that ODL can be an effective and efficient way to involve many of the people most affected by conflict in being part of its prevention, mitigation and resolution. It is hoped that this publication will set the stage for further work in this area and expand community learning opportunities in Commonwealth countries.