



The African Peacebuilding Institute

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Introduction

Too often we accept the media's presentation of Africa as a continent where hope is rare.

Since bad news is what is deemed newsworthy, we get a steady diet of stories out of Africa that reflect situations of famine, conflict, and genocide—often recently overlaid with the numbing statistics of the AIDS pandemic in that continent. And sometimes we wonder if it is a bias rooted in racism that informs this stream of bad news from Africa.

So it is all the more refreshing when we have the opportunity to tell the story of an altogether positive and hopeful development from Africa. Such is the account of the African Peacebuilding Institute that you will find in these pages.

I hope reading about African efforts to address African issues in ways built firmly on African values and practices will be a way of encouraging and energizing your own efforts at peacebuilding.

And it just could be that multiplying the African Peacebuilding Institute idea on the African continent as well as in other places in the world—North America included—would make terrorist actions such as those of September 11, 2001, less likely and would thus provide at least one practical answer to those who claim that terrorism of that kind and on that scale makes biblical peacemaking an impossible dream.

Look in these pages three months from now for a variety of reflections on September 11 and terrorism in general.

—Editor

Nurturing the Tree of Peace

by Carl and Carolyn Swarr Stauffer

The Mustard Seed Grows Exponentially . . .

The mustard seed vision for the first annual African Peacebuilding Institute was carefully planted and watered, with many hands from across Africa and beyond joining together to help this seed take root and become a flourishing reality. During February through April of 2001, the first African Peacebuilding Institute (API) was launched in Kitwe, Zambia. The African Peacebuilding Institute

is a partnership between Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (MEF), and proffers a collegial relationship with Eastern Mennonite University's Conflict Transformation Program (CTP).

African Peacebuilding Institute's mission is to offer an annual intensive two-month course in conflict and peace studies from a Christian peace church perspective. The API caters to pan-African students pursuing academic certificates, professional enrich-

All of us are called upon to not only take the risk and trust the stranger, but also talk and walk together till we become relatives.

—Bayu Ayindo, African Peacebuilding Institute instructor

The drum was also a source of personal and social healing through the “holistic” working out of tension, trauma, and wrongdoing. Through the rhythms of dance, song, and movement, collective order and harmony were reestablished in place of a breach.

ment, and/or personal development and growth. The Institute focuses on combining theory and practice for conflict resolution through peacebuilding, nonviolence, intervention roles, trauma healing, and reconciliation. Other related topics explored include refugee and humanitarian assistance concerns and the transformation of ethnic, religious, cultural, and identity-based conflicts within the African context.

Course instructors, both Africans and non-Africans, bring a wide variety of experiences from international settings of conflict to the learning environment. The API is held at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe, Zambia, in conjunction with a nine-month diploma course in Peace Building and Conflict Transformation.

The API Seed Finds a Productive Niche . . .

African Peacebuilding Institute is a product of an ongoing dialogue around expanding options for strong African-based education and professional training in the arena of conflict transformation. In addition to degree programs offered overseas (many of which are housed in Europe and the United States), currently there are a number of African distance learning academic degree programs offered in conflict transformation (at the master’s level) throughout the continent.

These programs are very few and are still new and small in enrollment, but do serve a cross section of African students. Although these programs are appreciated, a major concern voiced by students of some of these programs is the lack of actual time for student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactive learning and engagement. As API is a residential course, ample time for group and interpersonal interaction and learning is provided.

African Peacebuilding Institute fills a necessary service niche through providing a rich context for ensuring contextual peace education and application—bringing Africans together to study in Africa. This expands possibilities to serve more students and in a more cost-effective manner than sending students abroad. API establishes a uniquely African peace church forum for engaging African approaches to conflict transformation.

API Instructor Fidèle Lumeya puts it this way:

African Peacebuilding Institute is an attempt to respond to the needs and desires of Africans to meet Africa’s problems by examining and

applying their religiocultural roots. As many participants have described it, API is a new space where Africans who care for the rebirth of Africa can come and meet other Africans, learn from each other’s experiences, and develop together a conceptual framework for the future of conflict transformation studies and analysis in Africa.

Summoning Life-Giving Water: A Call for Sustaining the Peace Plant . . .

The express aim of African Peacebuilding Institute is to invest in a generation of key peacemakers on this continent. The function of API could be analogous to that of the African drum. Traditionally the African drum has been used to send out a penetrating beat that called the village or community together. This resounding invitation could have been for the start of initiation rites, as a warning of war or in preparation for peace, or for celebrations, festivities, and feasting. The drum provided a sort of symbolic representation of the seasons of African communal life.

The drum was also a source of personal and social healing through the “holistic” working out of tension, trauma, and wrongdoing. Through the rhythms of dance, song, and movement, collective order and harmony were reestablished in place of a breach.

The purpose of my letter to you is to thank you for the knowledge you gave and the good understanding you imparted on me. I am now armed with enough knowledge whereby the Mennonite Mission and I have arranged a 20-day seminar to be conducted in the Hiram region of my native Somalia. I should be able to use what I gained from your lectures as well as what I gathered from my colleague participants and integrate the same to the real situation case in my home country.

—From a letter by Mustafa Haji Ahmed,
African Peacebuilding Institute 2001
Participant

Today, the pulsating beat of violent conflict is resounding throughout our beautiful African continent. The “peace drum” rhythm needs to be heard and heeded as we search for common expressions of harmony, order, and coexistence in Africa. As the drum call for the first API was sounded, our motivations were clear:

- *Peace education focus:* In the spirit of traditional initiation exercises, the API strives to generate and impart theory and skills, and applied practices of peace among participants.
- *Cultural cross-pollination:* As opposed to a warning of war, the API sends out

a welcome for all to prepare for peace. This preparation for peace is accomplished as a diverse group of committed peace practitioners come together in unity and engage in a valuable exchange of ideas and experiences.

- **Personal and collective enhancement:** The API provides a safe haven, a gathering space where celebration, transformation, reflection, healing, and enrichment flourish.
- **Spiritual formation:** The API places intrinsic value on work being undergirded by a spiritual foundation, grounded in a Christ-centered witness and its expression in the church, its community of faith. Dialogue with other faith traditions is a valued component of this process of spiritual growth and formation.

The Plant Grows into a Tree Producing Leaves of Healing . . .

One API participant, a Zambian woman, experienced considerable trauma through the early death of her husband, and then the destructive effects of “property grabbing” by her late husband’s family. It was her brother-in-law who primarily perpetrated this property grabbing and who emotionally and physically abused her when she tried to refuse him and defend that which was hers.

A short time later, the brother-in-law decided to break into her home and steal certain possessions from her. As a result, this woman broke all ties with the brother-in-law and had not seen him for five years.

During the API, her brother-in-law actually came to see her at Mindolo. She was in class at the time when she saw a man whom she did not initially recognize standing outside the classroom—waving at her. She soon realized that this was indeed her brother-in-law.

She told us that before she took the API course on Trauma Healing, she would have completely ignored him. But now, because of her courses at API, she felt ready to talk with him and forgive him. The two have now reconciled.

The above story is one of the many unexpected results of the API. It is stories of this nature that speak to the importance of a learning environment such as API. Our intention for the future of API is to throw out a wide net for the sustenance of peace within the regions, countries, and specific communities of Africa.

How will we do this? We believe API is a piece in the process puzzle of what is called “training multiplication,” which borrows its ideas from the scientific field of diffusion theory. This training multiplication process has identified at least four ripple effects of training that add value or benefit to the individual and the society as a whole. These ripple effects spur on expanded personal awareness, increased formal education, the reconfiguring of relationships that affect social change, and finally the transformation of whole groups or societal systems.

This was a personally healing time for me after some very difficult days with my current employment situation. I became aware of a “calling” to peace work and saw through the opportunity to reflect and analyse my own situation that “Uganda is ripe for peace.” I felt that I have received a lot of “tools for my toolbox” where peacebuilding is concerned and I am anxious to find opportunities to learn more about the situation in my area and to begin applying these tools.

—Ugandan API participant

Supporting the Tree Limbs, Inviting the Dove of Peace to Return to Its Home in Our African Branches . . .

The API comes at a time when the continent of Africa is experiencing remarkable new growth and harvest as well as unprecedented levels of violent upheaval and change. The very root systems of religious expression and sociocultural and politico-economic systems and structures are being redefined and reshaped. Many traditional cultural practices are being revived as sources of deep wisdom, sustenance, and stability, while other practices are being left behind as Africa reconfigures itself within the twenty-first century.

Much of this publicized struggle with change has been violent in nature, yet many courageous steps in the direction of peace and harmonious coexistence have gone unnoticed and unheralded by the global media. A number of the most prominent trends sweeping the continent include:

- The nation-state is beginning to decay and its relevance as a binding structure for social unity is in decline. Depending on which lens you choose to gaze through, the momentum of this phenomenon can be seen as either a negative or positive movement. Those with a skeptical view see this nation-state deterioration as a spiral resulting in the complete disintegration of law, order, and social organization, thereby leading the continent into a state

Idah Mukuka, a graduate of the African Peacebuilding Institute, used her skills to organize her neighbors to contest injustice. Idah was sent to API by MCC Zambia to increase her effectiveness as a counselor at Zambia’s only shelter for survivors of domestic violence. But in her private life Idah is a resident of an apartment complex in Lusaka.

Shortly after completing API, Idah discovered a conflict in her apartment complex. The government agency that owned the complex had offered a program that allowed the apartments to be sold to sitting tenants. But one of her neighbors was being refused the right to buy her apartment. Idah’s neighbor came to her for help. Together they organized a group of tenants to explore possibilities, then led the group in a sit-in protest outside the government offices, complete with a cooking fire, singing, and dancing. Their efforts led to a successful conclusion to the problem.

—DeEtte Beghtol

Many traditional cultural practices are being revived as sources of deep wisdom, sustenance, and stability, while other practices are being left behind as Africa reconfigures itself within the twenty-first century.

The African church shines as a vibrant light and prophetic voice for moral and social transformation on the continent. Increasingly, the African church is taking a proactive and courageous stance against injustice and oppression within and beyond its boundaries.

of chaos and anarchy. For others, this is a welcome trend that spells the final frontier of decolonization of the African continent, a violent struggle to put to death the inherited systems and structures of inequity and personal and structural racism. Out of the ashes will rise a phoenix and Africa will be reborn. Many call this the African Renaissance.

- Tied to the above trend is the increased violent struggle between ethnic, religious, or minority groupings calling for self-determination. With these new dilemmas, the question becomes what is the tie that binds groups of people together—is it the political ideologies and legal boundaries (artificial as they are) of the current countries of Africa? Or is it the common values of a shared history or heritage of language, culture, and religion among specific people groups that are really binding? New models of government power sharing are now beginning to take shape in Africa.
- Coupled with each of the above trends is the express need of Africa's new leaders and governments to reclaim the control and decision-making power over the land and natural and mineral resources of the continent. Unfortunately, powerful international and local business conglomerates are still exploiting these many rich natural resources. In certain conflict zones (e.g., Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Angola) the term "conflict diamonds" has become a common phrase to refer to the strategic maneuvering of warring factions to take over and control diamond mines as a way of sustaining their violent struggles. Other countries, such as South Africa, have historically stripped the land of coal, ore, and gold at the expense of local populations.
- Urbanization continues to sweep the continent, bringing with it expanded access to technology and global amenities for the few who can afford them. Yet for many Africans, Western-style urbanization has brought with it increased poverty, unemployment, and alienation. Much of valued traditional and customary practices of collective accountability and sustainability have been lost in the urban setting. Communal responsibility for the common good, in the spirit of *ubuntu* (humanity), has become a diminishing value in many urban environments. These changes in cultural practices have become a great source of contentious conflict between the different generations.
- Despite various interreligious conflicts in pockets across the continent, Africa continues to see a strong growth in Christian witness. The African church shines as a vibrant light and prophetic voice for moral and social transformation on the continent. Increasingly, the African church is taking a proactive and courageous stance against injustice and oppression within and beyond its boundaries.
- Along with the church, there are increasingly strong grass-roots networks of African people determined to stand for their rights and freedoms. This mushrooming of on-the-ground movements is mobilizing people of many walks of life to rise up and refuse to accept an existence that is enmeshed in protracted wars, landlessness, political corruption, poverty, and destructive criminal and domestic violence. Africa's people, the greatest resource of the continent, are empowering themselves to speak out against oppression and human rights violations in a new way. These movements are demanding change from their government leaders and the powers that be. They are insisting on playing a critical role in determining their joint future destiny.
- Amidst all these transitions, a momentum is growing among churches, politicians, academics, and practitioners to unearth and resurface truly African indigenous practices of conflict resolution, restorative justice, reconciliation, and healing. The resurgence of these African cultural traditions and values combined with contemporary disciplines has helped to shape unique forms of governance, justice, and social harmony in this new dawning of Africa.

The African Peacebuilding Institute is one place where the "multiplying" investment is made, where the Tree of Peace is nurtured through a community of participants and instructors who couple training diffusion and spiritual transformation with the strong root system of shalom. As participants return to face the challenges of their contexts, they journey with a new empowerment to be voices for peace in their communities and beyond.

Carl and Carolyn Swarr Stauffer are staff for MCC Peace Resource Networking, Southern African Region.

In the Toolkit of a Peace Worker

Ubuntu, Simunye na Umoja

by George Kut

Dedicated to the Peace Building and Conflict Transformation certificate class of the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, Kitwe, Zambia, and Charity Muhongo; also in honor of Fidèle Lumeya, whose facilitation inspires Africanism

Upon the mountains they stood
Elders of Africa
To the full view of day break
Consulting ancestors and God
Facing the early sunrise

“Thu! May you rise well and set in Peace”
Shower fortune on mothers,
Sons, and daughters of Africa
To provide for us all the time.
Lead us not into the worries of what lies
Beyond the horizon, but dis us into, lo!
Ubuntu, Simunye na Umoja

Oblivious of slave trade and imperialism
Africa welcomed you visitors
From Arabs armed with ropes and Qur’an
From the west armed with fencing wires and the Bible
Down with African Traditions!
Up with Islam and Christianity!

No more to “Nzombi Mpungu”
No more to “Nkulun Kulu”
No more to “Shaka Panga”
No more to the ancestors of ancestors
The all present, all knowing, and all powerful

“Allah and God must preside!” Slave trade,
Scramble for, and demarcation of, African State boundaries
Must prevail. No more, lo!
Ubuntu, Simunye na Umoja

The dawn of the dark faces African Continent?
No, No, not the faces of Africa, no.
Dark and dull are not faces of Africa, no.
Black and backwards are not faces of Africa, no.
Boggled with blotto are not faces of Africa, no. Lo!
Ubuntu, Simunye na Umoja

Faces of
Africa are but bitter
Bitter with perpetrators of
Vicious violence.
Bitter with biting trends of traitors
Tantalizing Africa’s leadership.
Tantalizing Africa’s renaissance.
But till when? Africa is tired.

• • •

Time to smile is now
The independent Africa is 40.
Maturity age is here, 40.
Africa’s age of building stable home is 40, lo!
Ubuntu, Simunye na Umoja

Look! Mother Africa is back
Sons and daughters of Africa are awake
Armed with food and medicine for
The hungry and the sick.
Armed with counseling skills
To heal the traumatized.
Reconnecting back to self-image, dignity and identity.
Look!
Mother Africa is back
Sons and daughters of Africa are awake
Armed with
Nonviolence mechanism, to transform
Conflicts. No more,
Returning fire for fire. But
To educate, to adjust means to an end,
to maintain control for lo!

Ubuntu, Simunye na Umoja

Welcome, Look!
Mother Africa is back
Sons and daughters of Africa are awake.
Look at their toolkit, peace-workers toolkit,
Full of intermediary roles.
To break impasse, use mediation “hammer”
For planning negotiations,
use facilitation “smoothing plane”
Measure ceasefire with peace accords
Construct permanent peace with holistic conflict
transformation frames,
And peacebuilding blocks. What then is the product? Lo!
Ubuntu, Simunye na Umoja

Lo! Mother Africa is back
Sons and daughters of Africa are awake once more
and we cherish, lo!
Ubuntu, Simunye na Umoja

©George Kut peace poems 2001 (e-mail: georgekut@yahoo.com)

George Kut is area coordinator for the Community Peacebuilding and Development Project of the National Council of Churches of Kenya and is a participant in the African Peacebuilding Institute. Ubuntu, Simunye, and Umoja mean “humanity” in three African languages. Na means “and.” Nzombi Mpungu, Nkulun Kulu, and Shaka Panga mean “ancestors of ancestors” in three African languages.

My Going to the African Peacebuilding Institute

by Noé Alberto José

But at present we must thank God that the civil society of [Angola] is getting stronger and stronger, which is creating a new mentality amongst the local communities. The communities are eager to learn about peace education.

Though I am a born peace-loving and peacemaking person, in part because I was born in a Christian home, and also maybe because I was born and brought up during wartime, my attending the peace classes at the African Peacebuilding Institute in Mindolo, Zambia, from February to November 2000 on an MCC scholarship has brought in me a very new concept of myself, of people, as well as of the environment.

Angola, my country, as many other torn-apart countries, has been scourged by the culture of violence for over four decades; almost all its inhabitants have expert knowledge in matters related to war, violence, conflicts, hatred, retaliation, poverty, and illiteracy. And myself, I am one of them.

Learning at Mindolo

The learnings I received at Mindolo have opened up new opportunities to my personal life. My long-held dream of helping people in building peace, every day, for themselves and for the whole community, as well as transforming their own conflicts in diverse settings, has become a reality.

Before I went to Zambia, I failed, for example, to understand the vital and teaching significance of “active listening,” not only on the part of the victimized or traumatized person, but on the part of the “healer” as well. Now, that is no longer the case.

The diploma course in peace education that I got at the African Peacebuilding Institute has not been easy at all. Even though in the past I was a translator for five years in my country, the English language still continued to be somehow a “secret” to me, at least during the first three months of my training at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (MEF). And to my linguistic limitations you must add the fact that MEF is a high school, which is to say that the teaching techniques used there are very sophisticated ones. The Diploma Peace Class had never existed before in the history of that teaching institution.

So, on the other hand, I am very proud of being one the first African participants who have contributed—in the course of the whole academic year, through the debates, assignments, and proposals—to the launching of the foundation of our API, which has

quite a lot to offer for the present and coming generations of peacebuilders in Africa, especially, and in the whole world at large.

At the end of the academic year I successfully completed my diploma with an 89 percent average. This success was due to my eager commitment (I worked all night several times), to my understanding lecturers (our beloved grandmom DeEtte Beghtol, Mrs. Nema, Mr. Stauffer, Mr. Katongo, Mr. Katebe, Fr. Kafwanka, and Mr. Mwanchongo), to my big brother Mr. Robert Neufeld, then the representative of MCC for Angola but based in Zambia, who, very friendly, used to call and visit me at the place I stayed and to assist me in many different ways. His frequent updates about my country kept me linked to Angola and empowered me when it came time to write my assignments, participate in debates, and tell the whole class about the “latest” realities in my country.

And first and last I thank God for allowing all that to happen. Now I understand that it was the fulfilment of God’s wonderful plan.

Talking about building peace through peaceful ways in a country like mine, where the culture of violence speaks louder than the culture of peace, is not an easy job at all. The ongoing culture of violence in Angola has also settled in the minds of the citizens a very heavy culture of silence and fear throughout the nation. And the difficulty was tougher when, one year ago, I came back from Zambia.

But at present we must thank God that the civil society of this country is getting stronger and stronger, which is creating a new mentality amongst the local communities. The communities are eager to learn about peace education. Almost every day we receive letters from all over the country where the citizens are requesting seminars, workshops, and conferences in peace education. And it gets even more difficult when it comes to organizing such an activity and our organizing officials have to select, for example, thirty participants out of a hundred who show great interest in joining us!

Actually, the Angolans have understood that peace is much better than war, and that peace education has power to change the trend of things in this country.

How I Am Using My Training

My scholarship to the API in Zambia has been sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee through the Angolan Council of Christian Churches (CICA), which is based in Luanda, Angola. In fact, my training in peace education took place at the right moment, as CICA was needing someone who could implement its Peace Building and Conflict Transformation (PBCT) Project and Program throughout the whole country. CICA employed me in January 2000 to work with the PBCT, side by side with the CICA general secretary, other CICA colleagues, and also Fidèle Lumeya and Krista Rigalo, MCC representatives in Angola, who always have something new to “bring in,” either for me as staff or for one of the local peace projects. They have been a real blessing to the Angolan Council of Christian Churches.

Apart from the great deal of seminars and workshops I have already conducted here in Luanda, for the sake of CICA as well as for many local institutions of civil society working for peace in Angola, I am now very involved in the implementation of peace education within the provinces, where we are establishing provincial core groups of peacemakers who will be, in the next year, properly trained to enable them to ensure a sustainable peace in their different and respective zones. Please do not forget us in your prayers!

We foresee the coming years to be very challenging and demanding ones in our prophetic mission of searching for a lasting, sustainable peace in Angola.

Noé Alberto José is the main implementing official of the Peace Building and Conflict Transformation Project and Program of the Angolan Council of Christian Churches.

I am now very involved in the implementation of peace education within the provinces. . . . Please do not forget us in your prayers!

Why We Need the African Peacebuilding Institute

by DeEtte Beghtol

African Problems—African Solutions: this is the focus of the African Peacebuilding Institute. The API grew out of several concerns. Sending Africans to the United States for training in peace at high cost is probably not the best use of resources and may continue the “brain drain” from Africa. A better use of funds would be to offer quality peace studies in Africa and encourage participants from the Southern Hemisphere, Europe, and North America to come to Africa to study peace with Africans.

Primarily we saw the need to generate a program with a particularly African focus. In order to build peace in Africa we need to respect African worldviews as well as consider how Northern Hemisphere theories might apply. We need participants conversant in both African and North American ways of working with conflicts.

The African Peacebuilding Institute grew out of the Peace Building and Conflict Transformation (PBCT) program at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (MEF). By 2000 the PBCT had grown to include two three-month certificate courses and a one-year diploma course. Participants from

eleven countries across Africa, sent by various church bodies, had been trained to intervene in conflicts, to train others in their home communities, and to promote peacebuilding on various levels.

Eager for More

But participants were eager for more. Some were wanting to join the increasing numbers of Africans trained at Eastern Mennonite University’s Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI). But the cost of travel put SPI out of the reach of many participants. And MEF already had a program built by Mennonite Central Committee volunteers and a structure and facilities that were available. Why not create an African Peacebuilding Institute?

Participants from Zambia and across Africa were looking for ways to study peace with other Africans that would not require too much time away from other responsibilities, but that would ground them in theories and practice from around the globe. The first group of API participants came in 2001 from ten African countries and one from Britain as a bonus.

In order to build peace in Africa we need to respect African worldviews as well as consider how Northern Hemisphere theories might apply. We need participants conversant in both African and North American ways of working with conflicts.

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Kanyatsi Mahirane came to the peace course as a refugee. He had worked for several years for the Anglican Church promoting economic development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But his work had led to attacks against him and the bishop of the area by rebel groups. Both he and the bishop had been jailed twice because of accusations against them. Finally, they decided that they could no longer continue their work and fled. Kanyatsi fled to nearby Zambia because of his close working relationships with Anglicans near the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation. During his exile he enrolled in the peacebuilding course as a way to further his work for development.

Now as a strong advocate for the principle “No development without peace; no peace without development,” Kanyatsi is in high demand back in his home province in Congo. Even though he lacks funding to support his work or an office to work from, people from many churches in the area flock to his door with requests for workshops on peace and development. If they can gather enough money for fuel to get him to the workshop, he arrives and begins facilitating. People bring their own food from their meager supplies and the workshops continue. Kanyatsi is feeding the hunger of the people for peace just as Jesus fed the people on the hillsides.

—DeEtte Beghtol

They brought personal stories of war, conflict, and peacemaking. From a multiplicity of views were developed shared understandings.

Participants from countries who were involved in war with each other—Uganda, Somalia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Congo, Burundi—ate at table together and studied peace with each other. A British journalist who came seeking an African focus on conflict resolution gained a new perspective on the history of colonialism. A predominantly Christian class—and a Christian institution—learned a bit about Islam and religious tolerance. Participants steeped in the rigid lecture-and-exam methods of African education were stretched by very participatory methodology. Participants organized their own mini-seminars to teach each other languages and to discuss the role of the media in African conflicts. Participants formed their own e-mail discussion group, which continues to keep them in contact with each other.

Common concerns that brought participants to API center around the bases of conflicts in Africa: identity-based conflicts, both ethnic and religious; economically based conflicts; the use and misuse of resources; structural violence; conflicts concerning governance, democracy, and human rights.

Africans have experienced many levels of conflicts and wars. Participants came to API very familiar with violence, failed peace accords, and the problems of displaced persons and refugees. They brought personal stories of war, conflict, and peacemaking. From a multiplicity of views were developed shared understandings. They left with a network of connections to support them in their continuing work for peace.

Most participants were sent by Mennonite Central Committee because they work with MCC partner organizations. So they came with a practical understanding of the role of MCC, churches, and religion in peacemaking. MCC is already benefiting from the work of these peacemakers as they put to use their new skills and understandings.

The Learnings of Three Ugandan Participants

MCC Uganda country representatives Dave and Mary Lou Klassen reported that the three Ugandan participants they sent were highly appreciative of the API modules they took. They appreciated “the opportunity this program provided them to reflect on the conflicts in their parts of Uganda, where each of them represent different ‘sides’ of a particular conflict in the east and north of the country.”

Sam Eibu Okiror became more aware of a “calling” to peace work and saw through the opportunity to reflect and analyze his own situation that “Uganda is ripe for peace.” He felt that he has received a lot of “tools for his toolbox” where peacebuilding is concerned and returned home anxious to find opportunities to learn more about the situation in his area and to begin applying these tools.

Romano Longole had begun focused efforts on peacebuilding between two clans of his own ethnic group in January 2000 because of the escalation of violence in his area. He therefore found it very powerful to have this practical experience, and then to come to the course where issues that he had dealt with were discussed and new concepts and ideas were presented. He particularly believes he benefited from learning about techniques of promoting nonviolence, the ideas about mediation and building a sustainable process, and that peacebuilding is not just crisis intervention, but needs long-term involvement to address other postcrisis issues.

For Samuel Ongwech, the third participant from Uganda, this was an opportunity to be exposed to conflict transformation philosophy and to reflect in a new way on his own situation. He reflected on his own role as a peace activist and what his capacity is. He concluded that humility is what is needed to be nonviolent in our approach to conflict. He also reflected on the activities of the Acholi religious leaders’ group that he works with and is seeking ways they might be proactive rather than reactive.

These are just examples of the effects API is having personally for the participants and for the work of MCC in Africa. The African Peacebuilding Institute is helping Africans to address in practical ways the many conflicts they experience and to create the culture of peace they seek.

DeEtte Beghtol is an MCC volunteer and coordinator of the Peace Building and Conflict Transformation program of the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, Kitwe, Zambia.

Learning to Facilitate at the African Peacebuilding Institute

by Krista Rigalo

Having just finished our master's degrees in conflict transformation at Eastern Mennonite University, my husband Fidèle Lumeya and I were very excited by the opportunity to facilitate courses during the first-ever African Peacebuilding Institute (API) February–April 2001.

“What better way to share what we learned during our studies?” we reasoned to ourselves. Focusing on what we had to offer as facilitators, we had, in retrospect, underestimated what a learning and growing experience API would be for us as well.

While our current assignment with Mennonite Central Committee has us serving in Angola as country representatives and peace consultants, we are also to periodically facilitate courses at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (MEF) in Kitwe, Zambia. Our first chance to facilitate coincided with MEF's special two-month training program—the African Peacebuilding Institute. Designed as a forum for peace education and a mechanism for the sharing of insights and experiences, API brings together peacebuilders from the African continent to explore together topics of mutual concern. Five modules were offered its first year.

We learned much by facilitating courses at API. Perhaps the greatest lesson for me was finally understanding the fundamental essence of “facilitation.” All too often we peacebuilding/conflict transformation trainers focus on the material to be shared—the theories, paradigms, frameworks to be presented and explained. While these are very important and do provide the foundation of peace education, I've discovered that true facilitation often entails introducing an idea or theory and then getting out of the way.

Learning Participant-to-Participant

The most meaningful learning at API happened participant-to-participant. The participants were able to discuss the theories presented from their contextual realities—and to challenge each other in ways that I, as a North American, could not or would not. I learned that my greatest role as a facilitator was to help this process of exchange happen.

Once I understood this, I was able to put aside my deeply suppressed ego about facilitating and training, and open myself up to the role of learner and student.

In our class on Trauma Healing, we struggled together with the often unanswerable paradoxes of true forgiveness and reconciliation. The participants presented cultural traditions for healing that bordered on the spiritual. Observing the students presenting their approaches to trauma healing, I learned that African approaches are often much more comfortable—and therefore successful—at working with humans in their complexity: on the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual levels. Western theories might discuss what should happen in trauma healing, but African approaches often show an optimal way.

I believe that the learnings and growth from API were not limited only to the facilitators. I honestly believe that working through the tough topics of violence, war, and trauma (phenomena unfortunately all too common to the participants), in the relatively “safe” environment of the course, effected a degree of healing in the individuals present. We had seven participants coming from the countries currently at war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While these participants came from opposing sides, a truly awe-inspiring level of mutual support emerged among these participants.

Facilitating at API taught me, in short, to embrace the reality that I'm no expert—nor do I want to be one. Rather, my role as facilitator is to midwife a process of learning in which we all participate equally as student and as teacher. Adult education, I've learned, is at its best when it encourages the exploration of paradoxes and creates a space in which we can all contemplate complicated truths.

The African Peacebuilding Institute, in two short, intense months, created such a space where African peacebuilders came together to edify, challenge, and encourage each other. I consider it a blessing to have been present as a facilitator—as a midwife and as a learner.

Krista Rigalo and her husband Fidèle Lumeya are MCC country representatives for Angola.

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More about the API

It was thrilling to have a diversity of geographic representation. I think all of us were struck by how rich it was to have . . . people from countries at war with each other forming friendships and challenging each other in the classroom.

Courses offered at the first African Peacebuilding Institute included

- Introduction to Conflict Transformation (core)
- Violence, Nonviolence, and Conflict Transformation (core)
- Intermediary Roles I (core)
- Fundamentals of Peacebuilding (core)
- Trauma Healing and Restoration (elective)

Future course offerings are projected to include the following elective courses:

- Refugees, Humanitarian Assistance, and Conflict Transformation
- Ethnic Identity and Conflict Transformation
- Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace?

A highly participatory approach of facilitation was utilized. This approach assumed that there is a great deal of experiential knowledge residing within participants. The role of the instructor was to elicit this understanding and guide the learning process. Each API module design was based on the Action-Reflection Learning Cycle of adult education. This model consists of four parts:

1. Experiential exercises (holistic learning)
2. Guided reflection on the experience (structured debriefing)
3. Generalizations of conclusions drawn about the learning (often in breakaway groups)

4. Reinforcement of learning through theory (instructor input)

Representative evaluative comments from participants:

“It was thrilling to have a diversity of geographic representation. I think all of us were struck by how rich it was to have . . . people from countries at war with each other forming friendships and challenging each other in the classroom. And to have a Muslim to add a bit of religious diversity was a great bonus. We should definitely work to continue and even increase this aspect as an essential component of API.”

“The diversity presented a real challenge initially. It seemed that the API participants were by and large in more advanced places in their peacebuilding, while some of the others in the [diploma] program seemed to be exposed to the material for the first time.”

“The composition of the [group of] participants was very good. However, from a pedagogical point of view, I had this constant feeling that the class process did not challenge enough the older and more experienced people.”

“I was delighted to have people teaching with participatory methods—practicing what we preach.”

From an evaluation report of the first African Peacebuilding Institute prepared by Carl Stauffer.

The Challenge of Peacebuilding in Africa

by Fidèle Lumeya

Upon completing our studies at Eastern Mennonite University's Conflict Transformation Program in 2000, my wife and I were asked by Mennonite Central Committee to serve in Zambia as facilitators at the first-ever African Peacebuilding Institute. The API was held at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe, northern Zambia.

Meeting the Challenges of Africa in the Twenty-First Century

Having received an MCC scholarship, I knew that I would return to the African continent to serve; my major preoccupation now was: How am I going to transform things around me? The fact of being unable to control things around you so that you can transform them in a positive way and for the common good is what makes many

African students reluctant to go back to work on the continent after their studies in the United States.

For the many African students studying abroad, the environment and opportunities we encounter during our time abroad are more attractive—to the point that many decide to stay in Europe or in North America rather than going back and facing the hardships of African life. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the “brain drain.”

African life in its holistic dimension is challenging for those who return from the United States or Europe. These challenges have increased at the dawn of the twenty-first century as African populations are becoming more and more politically conscious.

What is happening is that the more people become politically conscious, the more they demand equity in the way resources are allocated. And yet, the political consciousness needed to reach the level that can transform Africa requires that Africa should move from the mass “departicipation” that characterized the twentieth century to mass participation.

Moving from Departicipation to Participation

As an African facilitator during the API, I felt strongly that participants should be trained in the adult learning model rather than in a sort of monologue or one-man-show type of education. Participation was therefore the operational framework from which the African Peacebuilding Institute courses were designed. The classroom was viewed as an open space for all. The courses’ format, content, and methodology were designed to move the participant from departicipation to participation. In short, we used the elicitive style.

Compared to many other training settings, API was then a space where ordinary people were enabled and their capacities enhanced so that they could still be ordinary people, but with the potentiality and capacity to do extraordinary things at a personal level and then in the whole community for the common good. This unique experience has been what I personally and many of my colleague facilitators have been struggling for on behalf of the API participants.

Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity

Is Africa the same everywhere? Or, are Africans and their experiences different and varying from one place to another? The API 2001 brought together different

African peacebuilders—each of them carrying different views on key African issues, with different life experiences as well as field experiences.

Viewed from the outside, what comes from Africa is war and the AIDS pandemic. The Western media have portrayed African life experiences and reality as being the same everywhere—a generic Africa. I too held this false view of Africa, portrayed to me through the Western media, whose perspective even influences local and national African media.

My Western-influenced view of Africa was challenged when I was in touch with the participants coming from different African countries. I discovered that when I was talking about the war experience and its negative effects in Africa, the refugee issue, internally displaced people, and genocide, participants from Zambia and Lesotho (who incidentally were also among the youngest) had a hard time understanding these phenomena, which were so foreign to them, but unfortunately so common to other people in Africa.

Those of us coming from war zones spent time sharing our negative experiences of African war with those coming from countries where war and genocide are not their daily reality. I came to realize that the paradox of African integration lies in finding the solution to the dilemma posed by African unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

Overcoming Language Diversity and Barriers

I come from a Francophone African country and prior to my studies in the United States, I had never thought that I would one day study or facilitate courses in English. As a Congolese citizen, French is what I use fluently for international communication.

In Mindolo, most of our participants came from Anglophone countries. And yet, their English pronunciation was different from one to another. In conflict study, it has been said that inaccurate communication based on language or dialect differences can be one of the root causes of conflict, mainly when people in dialogue cannot understand each other.

The API 2001 had to deal with these linguistic differences between the Francophones and the Anglophones, all speaking English with different accents. To make the communication during the course easy for all of us, we had to find a solution that could help us

George Kut has spent years with the National Council of Churches of Kenya building peace in the Great Rift Valley of Kenya. He works with clans in violent conflicts to build peace and bring relief to dislocated people who have fled the violence. He came to the African Peacebuilding Institute as an experienced peacemaker desiring to increase his theoretical understanding of peacebuilding.

After the close of API, George remained in the diploma course and went for a month of field work to Kala Refugee Camp in the north of Zambia to work with Congolese refugees. There he developed materials and techniques that he later put to use in a workshop with Angolan refugee youth in Nangweshi Refugee Camp in western Zambia. These youth have never known life without war. They were born in Angola after the start of the war, and it is still raging. George is creating personal connections between refugees in Zambia and warring groups in Kenya so that they can learn from each other. He is particularly concerned about the interest of some groups in Kenya in beginning to use land mines. He feels they need to learn of the personal experiences of the many refugees from Angola who have lost arms and legs because of land mines. Hearing each other’s stories could be a way for displaced people and refugees to help each other and to build the culture of peace that they all long for.

—DeEtte Beghtol

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overcome our linguistic diversity and barriers. Therefore, we all decided to recognize first that we are culturally different and therefore we should be more sensitive. As an African, I have learned that unless Africa finds a common language, attempts at regional integration might end up being a hollow shell.

The Challenges Facing the African Peacebuilding Institute

At the end of the API, I asked myself these questions: What can I do to make the API experience a unique one? What is African in this institute? What can be done to render this experience durable and more real, rather than leaving it at the level of an abstract experience as has been the case whenever people gather for training?

The uniqueness of API has been enabling and enhancing the ability of the participants to look critically at African concepts of conflict transformation and discovering (rediscovering?) traditional African conflict transformation mechanisms, their potentiality, and their effectiveness in meeting the

African challenges of state formation, nation building, and nation-state building.

The post-independent African state and the future leaders have to discover or re-create or “recycle” traditional African mechanisms of conflict transformation as part of African solutions to African problems.

There cannot be African solutions to African problems if the future African leaders that attend API are not being retrained in the African cultural practice of sitting under the tree for hours and hours, talking and listening, and then reaching consensus around divisive issues through dialogue.

Relearning African ways of transforming conflicts in the twenty-first century has been the unique experience that has made API different and enjoyable. Helping participants to rediscover and reaffirm their own rich traditions of peacebuilding has been an enlightening and encouraging process—for myself as facilitator as well as for the participants.