Promoting Peaceful Coexistence through Community Social Contracts in Burundi and the Great Lakes Region

Burundi
Changemakers Archive

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

The ACORD initiative in Burundi focuses on reconciliation and conflict prevention through community negotiations which are followed by a signing of social contracts in the presence of the community, local authorities, and external witnesses. The community dialogue and negotiations bring community members of different ethnicities and groups together to talk through their situation, listen to testimonies, allowing people to admit to their wrong-doings, ask for forgiveness and ultimately reach a joint agreement to pro-actively work for peace. To consolidate this agreement, a social contract is signed between different social groups who commit to respect each other and live in peace and contribute to mutually beneficial community development efforts. The pilot phase of the initiative which began in 2002 involved almost 200,000 people in Rango, Rugombo, Kamenge and Buhiga communes of Burundi in areas that had been deeply affected by the regional conflict. Since then, ACORD has built upon this experience and developed its role of facilitation and capacity building. At the onset of the community social contract process, an in-depth analysis of the causes and impacts of the conflict is conducted, as well as an analysis of existing traditional responses to conflict. Following the analysis, ACORD identifies key local partners to engage in a community process to respond to the local situation. The capacity of these partners is then strengthened through training and sensitisation on the preparation and coordination of community dialogue and negotiation. Upon mutual agreement within the community, social contracts are developed and signed and a peace committee is elected to ensure that the social contract is respected.

About You

Location
Project Street Address
Project City
Project Province/State
Project Postal/Zip Code
Project Country

Focus of activity
Dialogue Processes
Start Year
2002

Positioning in the mosaic of solutions

Main barrier addressed
Culture of violence

Main principle addressed
Create communities of peace builders

Innovation

Description of initiative:

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Description of innovation:

The approach used in this initiative is different from others because it seeks to address the causes of conflict and poverty while at the same time introducing and supporting local responses and ownership of peace negotiations within the community. The initiative also promotes the emergence of local leadership committed to defending the interests of the community by creating favourable conditions for fostering peace and community solidarity. Local civil society organisations in Burundi often lack the appropriate tools and methodology to implement effective programmes. ACORD?ts participatory approach which involves the community in all phases of the initiative from identification through to implementation and monitoring, is the result of ACORD?ts previous experiences working in conflict affected areas in Africa, demonstrating the importance of involving community members and build their capacity to ensure local ownership and sustainable impact. The participatory methodologies and the integration of gender specific needs of the marginalised groups also ensure greater equality of opportunities for both women and men. ACORD is drawing on its research and experiences in gender relations and armed conflict, (described in the publication ?Cycles of Violence?, released in 2005). The successful transformation of high level negotiations and peace accords into concrete and practical solutions at the grassroots level makes this initiative unique. It has already caught the attention of the new democratically elected Burundian government, as well as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region under the auspices of the African Union and the United Nations. ACORD and its partner organisations in Northern Uganda, Rwanda, DRC, Sudan and Tanzania have established an informal network to learn from each other?s experiences and explore how to benefit from a cross-country initiative in line with the mobility both of rebels and refugees across these countries. There is also ongoing exchange with ACORD and her partners in Angola, which struggles with similar issues related to reintegration of IDPs, ex-combatants and child mothers (young girls abducted during the war) into the communities.

Delivery model:

ACORD has over the past thirty years, developed long term relationships with local partners on the ground. These established and credible networks have enabled ACORD to work with its partners to mobilise communities to reach wider audiences and vulnerable, marginalized populations. Strengthening the capacity of local partners to respond to the communities? needs and act as community representatives is the foundation of ACORD?ts strategy. Since women are particularly vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict situations, a gender specific approach is fully integrated within the initiative to ensure that women are accorded an equitable role in the process. Community participation in the situation analysis, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the initiative are also critical elements of the intervention strategy. The establishment of representative peace committees ensures that the initiative benefits those most in need and that the resources are managed in a fair and transparent way. The committees are democratically elected to oversee the implementation of the local peace projects and monitor progress. The committees have gender and age representation and balance between the different social sectors, e.g. those displaced and resident during the conflict. The committee formally signs the social contract in the presence of the larger community and external witnesses and takes on the responsibility for receiving returning IDPs and refugees, managing disagreements at community levels and conducting community consolidation meetings. One peace committee is set up for each suburb or quarter and typically has 12 members, including both Hutus and Tutsis, women and men, young people and old. After establishing the peace committees, the committees identify peace projects?, with the objective of benefiting the whole community and contributing to mutual solidarity. The projects are either related to post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, or to conflict prevention. They must serve the common interest and be accepted by everyone. The whole community should take part in the project?ts implementation and it should have a rapid and lasting impact. Examples could be reconstruction of a bridge, school, local road, or a common mill, grinding or storage facility.

Key operational partnerships:

Through its country office and team of skilled national staff, ACORD works with existing community associations, training them in the methodology for conducting the community negotiations and leading the implementation of local peace programmes. Working in partnership with local organisations is a fundamental prerequisite to ACORD?ts work and presents an opportunity to promote learning and enhance local ownership in the development process. Four principal partners have been identified to work with ACORD on this initiative: ? Collectif des Associations de Kamenge (CADEKA): a forum of 35 associations working for peace and development in Kamenge ? Comit? de Developpement Communautaire (CDC) ? Dusuzibehamwe ? a community development committee in Kamenge ? Reseau pour la Paix et la Reconciliation (RPR) (Network for Peace and Reconciliation in Rango ? Coalition HABAMAHORO ? Ligue ITEKA. These partners have been trained in organisational and operations management and are currently applying these skills to mobilise communities and promote peaceful co-existence. It was people from the neighbourhood who went to see displaced persons and to look up former neighbours now in refugee camps to convince them that the situation had changed and it was safe for them to return home. ACORD has also developed good partnerships with the elected local and regional authorities from the governor down to the level of the ?communes?. The involvement of government serves to guarantee the social contracts and the security of all. The Ministry of Peace and National Reconciliation has already recognized the social contracts as ?a big contribution to the peace process in Burundi.? 

Impact

Financial model:

Each peace committee has been democratically elected and is responsible for identifying and selecting which members of the community will benefit from the services provided. To ensure that selection of participants is fair, regular meetings take place between the project staff and the peace committees to monitor and take account of the ongoing progress and monthly reports are produced. Examples of peace projects that benefit the whole community include construction of a mill for grinding cereals, tree planting for reforestation and sustainable provision of firewood, communal cultivation of rice and vegetables or goat husbandry where each goat is jointly owned by people from different ethnic groups. Other examples are the construction of meeting halls that can be rented out, sanitary facilities and water points in the market place, and storage rooms where people can safely keep their merchandise for a small fee. The initiative has helped local partner associations to manage their own affairs such as opening bank accounts in local cooperatives or credit and saving institutions to facilitate access to local funds.

Costs as percentage of income:

0

Financing:

The pilot phase was co-funded by the European Commission and Oxfam Novib. The local associations get some revenues from the peace projects that support their operational costs and contribute to community development projects for vulnerable groups such as orphans. ACORD
convened a national forum to sensitize the Burundian authorities and the international community with the aim of securing financial resources for the continuation and scaling up of the activities. ACORD is also building the capacity of the local associations in proposal development, which already generated some direct funding from Action Aid and the Canadian Embassy.

Effectiveness:

- **Project outcomes:** Major impact to date includes enhanced trust, social cohesion and sharing of information within the communities. This is manifested in the return of displaced persons to their homes, renewal of inter-ethnic relationships through mixed marriages and solidarity gestures and functioning structures for the peaceful resolution of community conflicts. To date: 52 community negotiation workshops have taken place in the 4 communes involved; 52 peace committees have been established to monitor the 52 social contracts signed; 5 peace projects have been implemented; training has taken place for community leaders in conflict prevention and resolution; the capacity of 4 local partner organisations has been strengthened; 2 exchange visits have taken place; 1 study on the impact of conflict on the community has taken place and 2000 copies of a quarterly production have been published and distributed.

- **Number of clients in past year:** 182,124 people benefited directly from the programme last year.

Scaling up strategy:

*Stage of the initiative:*

<i>Scaling Up</i> stage.

**Expansion plan:**

Some of the perpetrators of violence went to neighbouring communes, where they would not immediately be recognised, to continue atrocities of killing and burning. For sustainable reconciliation, it is therefore important to expand the initiative to surrounding communes. ACORD plans to continue working in the four pilot communes with each of them expanding to four neighbouring communes (24 in total) ACORD has also received requests to start similar work in other provinces, such as Makamba and is considering the feasibility of responding to this. Within the expansion plan, ACORD and its partners will add components on truth processes related to crimes; civil disarmament / fighting light arms, and sustainable development. The conflict in Burundi has linkages to what is happening in Rwanda, Uganda and DRC, where ACORD also operates. ACORD has observer status in the UN/AU hosted International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and will advocate there for the importance of community social peace initiatives, such as the one piloted in Burundi.

**Origin of the initiative:**

?We went to see our neighbours who had fled and who were in refugee camps, bringing with us local beer as a sign of peace. They were willing to come back, but were afraid. We invited them to come to the negotiations where we would all speak the truth of events. We asked forgiveness and signed a contract never to be enemies again. The rebels signed agreement with the government, but we signed with each other. Now we have rebuilt the houses and started joint peace projects together? Member of community association in Kamenge Following a decade of war, peace was negotiated in Burundi and a democratic government elected in 2005. However when your real or perceived enemy is your neighbour, and you have killed or burned the houses of each others families, it is far from obvious how to decide to trust each other and live in peace for the future. The promotion of Peaceful Coexistence through Community Social Contracts was started by ACORD Burundi in response to the great need for national reconciliation and forgiveness.

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