

The gender approach: peace work and the fight against discrimination

Editors: Christiane Kayser and Flaubert Djateng



Building Peace

Civil Peace Service (CPS) / EED – Mano River Region,
Great Lakes Region of Africa and Cameroon



Building Peace

EED (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst – Church Development Service)
Financed by the BMZ (Bundesministerium für
Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit – German Federal
Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)

The gender approach: peace work and the fight against discrimination



EED (Church Development Service, an Association
of the Protestant Churches of Germany)

Financed by the BMZ (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation
and Development, Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit)



All rights reserved in all countries

English edition, March 2012
Copyright © 2012 by CPS/EED,
Bafoussam, Berlin

Edited by Christiane Kayser and Flaubert Djateng
Translation from the French: Linda Herbertson
Copyright photos: Zenü Networks and N'kashh
Production and design: Eberhard Delius, Berlin
Layout: Reih's Satzstudio, Lohmar
Printing: Druckerei Format, Berlin
Printed in Germany

Contact:
Flaubert Djateng: fdjateng9@gmail.com
www.peaceworkafrica.net

Contents

Introduction	7
<i>by Christiane Kayser and Flaubert Djateng</i>	
The gender approach: women are not the only ones concerned...	8
<i>by Christiane Kayser</i>	
Towards a new vision of gender and its global political implications	13
<i>by Kä Mana</i>	
Lonely soul	19
<i>by N'kashh</i>	
Peace work and the interaction of gender, generational and social justice	24
<i>by Rita Schäfer</i>	
“Before the war, I was a man”: men and masculinities in Eastern DR Congo	31
<i>by Désirée Lwambo</i>	
Peace work and gender issues: the view from Sierra Leone	45
<i>by Shecku Kawusu Mansaray</i>	
The gender approach: peace work and the fight against discrimination	53
<i>by Laura Anyola Tufon</i>	
The construction of womanhood and its impact on the current socio-economic situation of women in Northern Cameroon	56
<i>by Viviane Tassi Bela</i>	

A look at the role and place of women and girls in Cameroon society	68
<i>by Stephanie Knott</i>	
My aunt, life, Churches and “Doing Good”	78
<i>by Flaubert Djateng</i>	
In Africa, a step backward on human rights	81
<i>by Desmond Tutu</i>	
Religions and homosexuality: the situation in Cameroon	83
<i>Organised by the SID'ADO Association*</i>	
<i>Communication by Rev. Jean-Blaise Kenmogne</i>	
Divide and Rule	91
<i>by Nicole Poissonier</i>	
Young Congolese in the turmoil of conflict	99
<i>by Tharcisse Kayira</i>	
Entertaining, explaining, sensitising – a radio play promotes peaceful coexistence	
SLADEA strikes out in new directions	102
<i>by Iris Liethmann</i>	
Youth and the Traditional Authorities: advocacy for dialogue between the generations, a prerequisite for harmony and sustainable peace	106
<i>Joint WDYP Article</i>	
The psychological consequences of the exclusion of street children	119
<i>by Prof André Masiala ma Solo</i>	
Creative work with street children...	122
<i>by Wassy Kambale Bahitirye</i>	

Introduction

This publication on gender approach, discrimination and peace building is intended to illustrate the links between these different fields of action. These issues do not only affect relations between men and women, but also between young people and old, between ethnic or religious groups, people with different skin colour or sexual orientations.

The articles in this publication are very varied, at times even contradictory, and were written by people working in DR Congo, Cameroon and Sierra Leone.

Starting from the principle that “peace grows from within”, our aim is to illustrate the different forms of the struggle against discrimination in order to achieve a more united society. One that is capable of appreciating difference, as well as rallying the forces of peace, justice and stability.

We believe that a network like ours, which works for a peace based on greater equity and justice, should be able to accept diverging and marginalised points of view to achieve fruitful dialogue. We share fundamental values which should allow us to respect others in their diversity. We are not aiming for a unanimous position that would paralyse progress, but rather a frank exchange of a diversity of points of view.

The articles are based on the experience of their authors; these authors are representatives of CPS partner organisations, resource persons and peace workers. They describe situations involving discrimination and conflict, but often also give hints on how to overcome these situations. The writers express their obviously subjective points of view, that we have respected by making sure only hatred and ostracism were excluded.

The large number of contributions we received were a measure of the progress being made by our inter-African Civil Peace Service networks, and the links being forged between them. We trust this publication will also further this.

We hope you enjoy reading these articles and, as always, any feedback is welcome.

*Christiane Kayser
Flaubert Djabateng
Goma, Bafoussam
February 2012*

The gender approach: women are not the only ones concerned...

*By Christiane Kayser**

One of the major challenges for peace work is the fact that without a minimum amount of justice, peace is simply “graveyard peace” and thereby not sustainable. Over the past few years, however, the armed conflicts in Africa’s regions have been based not only on the pauperisation of a vast majority of the population but also on divisions and fragmentations between different social groups that appear to be easy to manipulate in power struggles. This often leads to growing insecurity, which further reinforces the divisions.

Differences between women and men, young people and old, ethnic communities, religious denominations, regions, skin colour and sexual orientations... all these categories give rise to fracture lines that divide society and prevent it from developing. The bad behaviour of an individual or a small group becomes confused with all those we think we can stick the same label on. If, in addition to this, there is no institutional framework and applied jurisprudence to protect the weak, preconceived ideas quickly become strong discrimination and witch hunts run riot.

There are numerous examples of this: the image of all Congolese men seen as rapists and Congolese women seen as powerless victims; the conflicts between ethnic groups and regions in Rwanda, Burundi, DRC and Côte d’Ivoire; the marginalisation of young people in many African societies; the persecution of one or another group for religious or ethnic reasons in Nigeria; homophobia in many countries; the ostracising of

* CPS/EED mobile team for Africa

albinos; the recent persecution of Touaregs in the capital of Mali against a background of rebellion in the North and, of course, the marginalisation of women, often relegated to the sidelines and confined to submission when in fact they bear a large proportion of the burden in terms of subsistence and the development of societies.

All these phenomena bear witness to a fragmentation of society and are the Achilles heel of the social fabric. They are an obstacle to the progress of African countries and engender frequently violent conflicts.

As part of our peace work, we should promote behaviour patterns that bring people together and combat those that divide. But for the progress of the cause of sustainable peace, we also feel it is important to support the emergence of non-violent ways of defending interests, based on differentiated analyses, enabling alliances between different under-privileged groups.

The gender approach: a new way of integrating the struggle against all forms of discrimination

Working in different countries with the gender approach, we came to realise that it is often adversely affected by unilateral points of view and seems to be restricted to the struggle of women for their place in society. Now, this divides the players in their efforts to achieve more justice and more equity. Men, for example, automatically feel excluded. In a gender strategy development workshop run by HEAL Africa in Goma in October 2011, the discussions proposed a broadening of the approach as follows:

“The gender approach acts:

- ◆ against discrimination, fragmentation and exclusion.
- ◆ in favour of cohesion
- ◆ in favour of respect for others and human dignity

The gender approach is not simply the concern of ‘air-dropped specialists’. It can allow everyone to work on cohesion while respecting our differences.”¹

In a conference on Decolonizing Gender², Gabriele Dietze stressed that gender studies were initially set up in Anglophone countries as an academic discipline following a socio-political movement in the United States and the United Kingdom. By this very fact it was necessarily “eurocentric” (or, rather, “westerncentric”). In parallel, cultural studies, which also emerged from socio-political movements geared towards social equality, focussed on all sorts of discrimination, without always seeing gender discrimination. Dietze draws our attention to the fact that today, these two disciplines are faced with an essential challenge described as a “postcolonial turn”. The point is to achieve a shift in perspective by “decentring” the debate, “decolonising” it in order to “provincialise” the West³ so that Judeo-Christian culture and western practises are no longer the benchmark.

One of the flagship theories in the field of postcolonialism⁴ is that of “critical whiteness”. This is a question of critically addressing the fact that “white” is considered the norm, the basic criterion for evaluation in general.⁵ The ethnocentricity of “white” or western women in gender discussions is criticised because it excludes the women and men from

1 Internal report for HEAL Africa, F. Djabateng and C. Kayser, October 2011, see also HEAL Africa’s strategic paper on the gender approach, D. Lwambo and F. Nabintu, December 2011.

2 Gabriele Dietze, *Decolonizing Gender. Kulturwissenschaft und postkoloniale Theorie*, Berlin 2011

3 In the words of Dipresh Chakrabaty, see *Provincializing Europe* (2000)

4 On postcolonialism, see Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 2001.

5 See, inter alia: Ruth Frankenberg (*White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, 1993), Toni Morrison (*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, 1992), David Roediger (*The Wages of Whiteness*, 1991), Nakayama, Thomas K., and Judith N. Martin, eds. *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999, Najmi, Samina, and Rajini Srikanth, eds. *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. *Identity*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999.

the South. This is a major challenge for cultural studies and gender studies, but also for all peace and development work: how can we become aware of and take into consideration all forms of discrimination including the ones we are guilty of ourselves, albeit often unconsciously?

The new voices of “Critical Whiteness”, often from Asia and the Afro American community are unfortunately still scarcely audible in French-speaking countries.

Their point of view broadens the concept of the gender approach, as proposed in this publication. It also encourages us to take a closer look at the relationship between external “developers”, humanitarian workers, “peace builders” and “democratisers” and the populations who are often subjected to their “goodwill” as passive victims.⁶ But above all it will be an essential challenge for the future to identify and analyse the fracture lines in African societies in greater depth and to define new tracks for overcoming this fragmentation.

CK, Goma, February 2012

⁶ There is no reason to exclude the “ethnic groups” of volunteer workers, humanitarian workers and sponsors from the equation.

Towards a new vision of gender and its global political implications

By *Kä Mana**

A new vision of gender and its anthropological basis

It was long assumed that the question of gender mainly concerned male-female relations and their implications in terms of political and economic power and the application of the fundamental rights of women as fully-fledged members of society. The gender issue was part of the general trend of a feminism whose deviations it wished to correct by including men in the battle field opened up by women to gain their place in the sun in social relations.

Today, this conception of gender has been extended and enhanced with new aspects. It is not simply a question of fighting for recognition of the fundamental anthropological male — female equality, but of basing this equality on a global vision of the world that combats all inequalities, all forms of injustice, discrimination and all the inequities between human beings in every aspect of their lives.

Gender has become a preoccupation for restructuring human relations around certain demands without which the very humanity of the person loses its substance. For all men and women, we strive to base the authentic experience of being together for individuals and societies on a twin imperative.

The first imperative concerns how the question of good and evil is handled in society, to build a community of existence on the basis of the demands of values in opposition to the forces that destroy these values

* President of the Intercultural Institute in the Grands-Lacs Region
University lecturer in Cameroon and DRC

among humans. Here we are on the scale of what we should call gender ethics.

The second imperative concerns the meaning to be given to the destiny of human communities, in opposition to the forces of non-sense, absurdity and chaos. The forces that strip humans of all their multiple interrogations regarding the foundations, significance and ultimate design of their being together in a common destiny. This is the scale of what we should call the spiritual side of gender.

Ethics and spirituality perceived in this way make gender relations the site for the construction of a certain type of social personality and a certain profile of social actor. A personality type and actor profile for positive, in-depth changes in collective existence. And for the building of a new society on the basis of ethical and spiritual values.

What I call gender politics is the action taken to make these fundamental positive changes successful and to build a new social order on a global scale, on the scale of individual nations and on the scale of local struggles for a society with truly humane values.

Understanding and building gender politics

From this perspective, it is important to grasp the noblest aspects of the political sphere, political action and political commitment.

The noblest aspect of the political sphere is a socio-historical community's superior vision of what it wants to be and experience as a profound force of being, as an ability to creatively organise the entire space of existence and as a force of initiative to take up the challenges of its destiny. It is the ardent desire to arrange a public area of inventiveness that will allow male and female citizens to flourish in assuming their liberty, responsibility and force of solidarity, to give their society the highest image of itself and of its future.

Within such a sphere, politics as a vocation to public responsibility and a concern for profound social transformation of reality becomes a

service fuelled by the most fundamental human demands and values. The demands and values that make the involvement of the citizen in the crucial issues of collective life a vital necessity for all. To the extent that it is essentially a service to ensure that the nation flourishes and to promote the influence of its ambitions for the well-being of the community through a radical sense of organisation and fertile governance, driven by competent management of the public sphere, political action is necessarily an ethical force. Political power guided and enlightened by the idea of the common good and community values, even at the heart of conflicts which tend to rip the fabric of the social sphere as a whole. It therefore constitutes a power of responsibility through which the people in charge of public jobs pace their destiny with the determination to forge in a people the force to control, contain and conquer the tides of inhumanity that can destroy community existence. Basically, it is the determination to gain liberty and happiness that should be developed and promoted in the people in charge not only of embodying the highest and most fundamental quests of the human in the public sphere, but also of revitalising the ardent, majestic and immense dreams of the populations, under the aegis of the good and the ideal as concepts that regulate individual and community responsibility. The responsibility of always basing the action of social transformation on principles, values and ideals that are worthy of the human, in spite of all the misguided ideas that make political commitment a world of anti-values where only posturing and inhumane strategies reign.

This amounts to saying that the political figure, ideally and pragmatically speaking, is different from the figure of the politician commonly known in the popular imagination: this maestro of double talk, Machiavellic calculations, lying as a way of life, dissimulation as a vital force, continually repeated pretence and constantly reinvented ways of “dribbling”. A man with a tendency to live solely to serve his selfish or ethno-regionalist interests and who, through his allegiance with the forces of evil, destroys the very significance of political commitment which he empties of all humane substance.

It can be clearly understood, the problem of many countries in the world today is the inflation of politicians within the public sphere, to the detriment of a truly responsible political conscience. In many nations, the world suffers from the absence of real political personalities, men and women capable of nurturing citizenship commitment and of orienting the impulses of the population towards the common building of a new society. This is on the basis of a clear conception of interdependent good, of collective well-being through which shared existence radiates as the management of liberty and of creative responsibility by a whole people to solve the major problems of its historical destiny and daily life. *From the interior and in the interior*, as Aminata D. Traoré would say.

By distinguishing *clearly and distinctly* between the *political sphere* as a space for action, *politics* as the dynamics of human management of collective life with its tensions, violence, impulses and passions, *citizen commitment* as a force for social transformation and *politicking* as an arena of pretence, we in fact define the ideal to which the vision of gender as a perspective for the invention of a new world leads us. At the same time we situate this ideal in the perspective of the concrete choices to be made here and now and the methods of social transformation to be invented and promoted in the world. The choices and methods of male and female citizens responsible for the state of their nation and aware of the stakes for which it is appropriate to live by placing precisely “at stake” their very being in community political action.

We perceive this ideal as the commitment of an individual future and a collective destiny at the service of the nation, in the name of a real design for liberty, responsibility, dignity and concern to change the world in a positive way.

In the present day when it befalls the upcoming generations to invent new forms of hope and open up the horizon of a new form of creativity to build another possible world, the concept of gender politics defined along the lines I propose is capital. It opens up the way for a new force of world governance, based on combating the most ferocious political pathologies that are undermining many countries.

Conquering our political pathologies

From an African point of view, the pathologies we are talking about here are the following:

- ◆ the increasingly glaring inequalities between the extremely wealthy and the extremely poor, both on a global scale and within nations;
- ◆ the exacerbation of violence and insecurity of all sorts that transform the world into a relentless, lethal machine;
- ◆ the order of a leadership of despotism and destructive dictatorship that typifies many political regimes;
- ◆ the denial of human rights and habituation to the inhumane in relations between peoples;
- ◆ the *culture of imbecility* which forces men and women to refuse the force of reason and the power of rational ethics to resolve current global problems.

Conquering these ills requires a vital new ideal of humanity: the rebuilding of the global political sphere on the terrain of ethical and spiritual values, the reinvention of politics as a concern for the humane as well as the re-fertilisation of citizen commitment in community action fuelled by a veritable revolution of our being, our imagination and our creative capacities, far from national and international tragi-comic politicking and the pathologies it condemns us to.

If we must, from this perspective, define the political stakes surrounding gender, the answer to be given after these reflexions is this: Gender justice, in the amplitude and depth of its vision, can radically transform the essence, values and orientations of everything pertaining to the political order in the world today.

Against the abysses of inequalities, injustice and the disproportion in living conditions between the social heavens of wealth and the hell of poverty, it proposes the pragmatism of combating poverty and producing community wealth on the basis of the idea of common good as the impetus behind all global economic policies.

Against lethal violence and the rising tide of insecurity, it proposes the way of reciprocal cross-fertilisation of the creative energies of human communities.

Against the order of a leadership of despotism and destructive dictatorship, it traces an order of democracy of interdependent well-being, a foundation for the rule of human rights, freely assumed community duties and collectively liberated creative powers.

Against the geopolitics of the inhumane, it opens the way for the values of humanity, a launch pad for a policy of community development and collective prosperity.

Against a culture of imbecility, it offers education on reason, ethics and spirituality.

Its life force lies in these perspectives that it opens up. These fertile demands make the question of gender the greatest project, the most important issue at stake for humanity in our time.

Lonely soul

by N'kashh



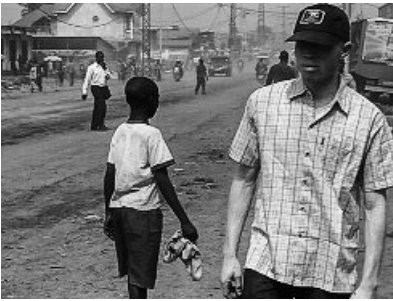
Lonely soul × 2 (murmured)

*A brother told me you could have loved me
But the problem is this envelope in which my soul has shoved me
For my part I've learnt to be proud
Since I decided not to suffer too much out loud
But that's what they teach you to scorn from the bottom of your soul
You have to spit and say the words that chase this evil from
the clan of women
This sentence is an oracle of the elders
But a legacy of rejection that wounds the palms of my hands
A paradox brings a bitter smile
Since it wants to reach me in the integrity of my flesh
Just like the man who'd rather die than touch me in his lifetime
But dreams of cutting off my balls for a good luck charm
That's my Africa in all its lowness
I loved its highness and don't hate its weaknesses
Even if I remember the little girl from Burundi
And all those from Tanzania to whom I dedicate this rap that pisses
on prohibitions
Forgive me if I strayed in any case between you and me its all been said
You and me, we'll pass by, no hello, pretend not to see
So you won't have to explain to your sisters how come you know a guy like me*

Chorus

*The walls resound with the sound of my loneliness
Lonely soul
Even if this land denies me its negritude
Lonely soul
With my bare hands I'll fashion one with my own aptitude
Lonely soul × 2*

*Seems I've been wearing the same brown boots since the day you met me
That explains the nickname your little sister gave me
I must admit I'm dreaming of a new pair for the ones on my feet have finished
their life cycle on this earth
What's more, they weren't even new
And if I got them half price it's cos the salesman thought he knew
I was a Rasta, I don't wallow in illusions
It doesn't lessen my confusion
Specially since I only told you about my doubts and my pain
Obstacles that go against the grain
Of how I live my life
How I survive this dream that others take for sweet madness*



*If I did it, it was never to inspire your sadness
but from a question of integrity and honesty
for you to share my empire with me
African rap gave me a crown but told me to go dig for the gemstones
to make it glow*

*That's what you refused three times
and further than that I can't go
So I put it all back in my bark of pride
and I put it aside for the one who deserves it
I know what that kindred spirit will look like
to her eyes, all men are god's children and the rap will make her heart sing*

Chorus

*Day after day this idea takes root
I don't push it away any more like a sheet covered in soot
I look at it rather coldly
if that's what my life must be, better profit from it boldly
But when I say that to my aunt, she says oh shut it up will you?
don't you know those kinds of words can draw bad luck to you
I understand what she says, she's a Bantu forsooth
she thinks witch doctors use against us all our spoken truth
but I want to reassure her
this life, I maybe didn't choose her
but it seems I'm asking too much
when I say my girl must be pretty understanding, good and such
since my shadow will demand she be an Amazon warrior
but women from here have just started the fight
forcing mine onto her would somehow not be right
so that's the reason why I christen myself in tears: N'kashh, lonely soul
Remember this name you'll hear it on all the battlefronts where I'm fighting
for my rebel causes*

You think these words are not humble enough

I admit it

*But I forbid myself that feeling since I found out I have to fight
Anyway, what's 27 years of pride compared to 10 centuries of intolerance
and against that I only have my rap to weigh in the balance*

*To get back to you, go in peace, indeed
and find the man who in your belly will plant the perfect seed*

Chorus



N'kashh

Biography and background

Rap artiste N'kashh was born in Goma and spent most of his life in this bubbling cauldron that is Eastern DRC. His encounter with art came in 1997 when he met classmates who shared the same passion. He started to organise little concerts with them, to let their talent burst forth. In 2002 he joined the group **Empire Z** with whom he had his first experience of the recording studio, in Kampala (Uganda).

When **Empire Z** broke up and the other members either gave up music or left town, N'kashh joined **Trilogy** with whom he toured around the countries in the region. N'kashh went solo in 2009 and is currently working on an album.

N'kashh: nkashh@yahoo.fr, nkashh@gmail.com, 00 24 39 97 12 02 75

His writing

Commitment is the backbone of his writing, and the flesh is the daily life of young people in the third world for whom life is a hard struggle and often a tunnel with no end as far as dreams go.

In concrete terms, he was born in North-Kivu, and this can be felt in his poetry, given the situation the region has traversed since 1994.

His writing also bears the paradox of the life of the Congolese citizen crouching in misery while the country has immense mineral resources.

His pen expresses the frustrations of a young Albino man in a culture that rejects him.

Lastly, his nib carries the hope of all young people in the third world whose daily lives leave no place for dreaming but whose hopes for a better future are tenacious.

N'kashh also writes for other artistes.

Peace work and the interaction of gender, generational and social justice

By *Rita Schäfer**

Problems and challenges

Many African post-war societies are characterized by an unstable peace. Often this becomes particularly evident before, during and after presidential and parliamentary elections. The escalation of violent conflict that characterizes such periods often sparks the interest of the international public, as was the case in 2011 with regard to Uganda, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Yet the establishment of new powers is met with a rapid decrease in international interest in the simmering conflicts. A closer examination of local, regional and national conflict structures is thus all the more important for avoiding new wars. It is common for causes of conflict to be exceedingly complex: these can include economic problems; poverty; unemployment and lack of prospects; rampant corruption; ethnic, religious or party political patronage; power conflicts amongst elites at local and national levels, for example, between politicians and heads of military; random violence carried out by the military, paramilitary units and police; lack of rights and the expansion of the social divide between winners of war and marginalized ex-military and/or discharged soldiers. Such issues are further complicated by grave gender and generational conflicts as well as social tensions.

Many peace agreements are not worth the paper on which they are signed. Often, peace accords are agreed upon by power and resource

* Freelance academic and advisor to development organizations

hungry representatives of various parties to conflict and provide for political power and the control of resources to be shared amongst those who led the war, and thus do not provide a solution to the widespread propensity to violence.

Warlike images of masculinity must be “disarmed” or violence will continue to rule in a new form. In the words of women and girls in many post-war societies in West, Central and East Africa, “war enters the home”. Gender-specific violence is especially prevalent following the successful negotiation of a peace accord. This includes sexualized and physical violence within, for example, marriages and domestic partnerships, families and households, as well as violence between men of various ages and statuses. Often, sexualized violence is accompanied by high HIV infection rates, the rampant spread of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted teenage pregnancies. In addition to women and girls, rape and sexualized abuse and offense most certainly also affect boys and men. As sexist and homophobic attitudes are confirmed and strengthened, male victims of violence are derided as feminized homosexuals and their masculinity is denied. Moreover, homosexual persons are subject to targeted attacks by perpetrators who perceive them as threats to their militaristic notions of masculinity and self-images. Often homophobia is fueled and justified by politicians and religious fanatics.

Perpetrators apply the conduct they learned in war and successfully used to implement as a fighting strategy to post-war daily life in families, rural and urban settlements. While sexualized violent assaults were formerly regarded as effective strategies for conquest, expulsion, intimidation and indignity, or as acts of revenge, in turbid post-war daily life gender-specific violence is often the single available proof of masculinity.

This applies especially to demobilized and alienated ex-military and discharged soldiers and former guerilla members, as studies in West Africa and in southern Africa have documented. In the expensive and nonetheless often amateurishly implemented disarmament, demobi-

lization and reintegration programs, such persons were indeed required to give up their weapons, and thus their identity as fighters. Their propensity to violence — drilled into and instilled in them before and during the war as a sign of masculine power and strength — is, however, scarcely addressed by the parties responsible for such programs, especially not the masculinity problem. The planners often follow purely technically justified approaches; they do not acknowledge the many socioeconomic and personal problems and insecurity of the ex-combatants. Many were both perpetrators and victims, including of sexualized violence, ordered, for example, by their commandants to humiliate new recruits and to bond their units. The creation of masculine cohesion through sexualized violence against female and male “enemies” is also largely ignored by demobilization and reintegration problems. This violence also served in wars to compensate for the latent and deep fear of death amongst soldiers and guerilla fighters, particularly as they experienced both their own omnipotence as well as the total submission of their victims and their masculine family members. Precisely in this complex lies a structural problem for sustainable peace processes and high rates of sexualized violence in post-war societies.

Prospects for peace

Peace activism is sustainable when it contributes to gender and social justice. *Gender justice should not be one-dimensional and limited to the promotion of women.* Such a conception often gives way to new problems, as men, required to give up their weapons and frustrated as well as insecure in a post-war daily life often characterized by lacking prospects, interpret one-sided programs promoting women as an additional attack on their masculine self-image. The formulation of inclusive gender and generational justice between men of various ages, statuses and levels of property ownership is thus all the more important. Social justice can only be achieved when the problem situations of young men

and women who are economically disadvantaged, socially marginalized and without rights are mitigated. This means, for example, secure land and residence rights for such groups of persons, meaningful education offerings and economic programs set for the middle-term which are intertwined with health offerings, trauma work and the working through of war experiences which consider the cultural context and respect the gender-specific experiences of war and the destabilization of masculinity.

Such progress towards social justice is often prevented by former and new elites' calls for a return to (the old) order. Even when local and national elites emphatically appeal to their culture and ethnic traditions or religion and nation, what is important to them is retaining their power, personal status, exclusive patronage networks and control of resources — at the expense of socially excluded and destitute young men and women who do not belong to patronage networks or influential families.

Development organizations are well advised to be cautious with respect to persons who promote themselves as pioneers of and aides to the reestablishment of order. Frequently, such persons were on the winning side before the outset of war and have profited from the social inequalities that motivated young men — and in some places also young women — to participate in war.

When the interaction of gender, generational and social justice is overlooked, the sustainability of peace processes is debatable. The simple formula, “first peace, freedom or political independence, then justice” has drawbacks, as has been exemplified in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Eritrea. Most “liberation movements” do not maintain their promises of social justice if and when they come to power. Rather, they tolerate violence in society or even use it for their own retention of power. The position according to which ethnic or religious parties to conflict should be pacified first and only thereafter can attention be given to “women’s issues” is similarly shortsighted. Ultimately, many ethnic and religious conflicts are closely intertwined with gender and generational

conflicts and massive social inequalities. Therefore, attention to gender and generational justice helps mitigate ethnic and religious conflicts.

Peace organizations are challenged to integrate these perspectives in their work. It does not suffice to simply assume that women are victims. Participative cooperation, co determination and representative participation of women in the organizations can only be a first step. It is necessary to take into account the complex gender dimensions in wars, especially the way in which militaristic notions of masculinity and violence become instilled. In many regards, men are perpetrators and victims in war. In order to raise consciousness of this fact, donor organizations must fundamentally broaden their understanding of gender and expand their criteria for funding. This would require the development of *a comprehensive notion of gender justice, coupled with youth programs and anti-homophobia work.*

Peace organizations consisting of women are similarly challenged to re-think their concepts. When they conceive of women as a homogenous group of victims or as “innocent angels of peace”, they do not do justice, for example, to the military identity of female child soldiers. Many forced recruits and volunteers have been abused, but they have also killed and tortured. These problems should receive greater consideration, as girls and young women make up to 30% of the combatants in many fighting units. Peacemakers should campaign against hostile treatment of female ex-combatants as prostitutes. In some places, they are engaging in this capacity. In some post-war societies, however, women publicly and privately denounce female ex-combatants. In southern Africa and post-war Eritrea, mothers have forced their sons to separate from their female partners who were ex-combatants. Mothers-in-law and mothers are often hostile towards former female members of the armed forces, as countless personal reports from West, East and Northeast Africa have documented. The young female ex-combatants no longer relate to the narrowly conceived notions of femininity, which many older women uncritically took on and, along with countless men, hold onto after wars. It is thus all the more important that peacemakers

mediate and practice solidarity between women with different experiences of war, which does not come automatically. Moreover, many women are followers and ideologically convinced supporters of masculine milita and soldiers. Peacemakers should be more honest and *not overlook the differences in interests and conflicts amongst women*. Even conflicts between various women's peace advocacy groups should be constructively approached.

A further problem is their stance towards former child soldiers. Viewing them in a maternal manner as "misguided children" obstructs the fact that the young ex-fighters were victims on the one hand, yet like grown men killed and produced children on the other. Many youth and young men emerge from wars with this militaristic masculinity, including and especially towards women and girls. They do not want to re-assume the roles of children who are commanded around and treated poorly. It would make sense to provide women's and peace organizations with platforms to reflect on these problems and challenges. Exchange between innovative organizations would be necessary, as some are attempting to develop constructive solutions that could be made known and discussed. In some African countries, there are men and men's organizations that — in part drawing on Christian conviction or their own conceptions of justice — are attempting to find new orientations for men and boys. Such organizations include Padare in Zimbabwe, the Abatangamuco Light Bearers in Burundi, the Rwanda Men's Resource Center, the Sonke Gender Justice Network in South Africa, MEGEN in Kenya and MAGE in Sierra Leone, which are often not known or in networks extending beyond the local context. In this sense, peace and development cooperation projects would have to make the financial resources available to promote dialogue and new solutions to problems. This would require employees in donor organizations to think about their own concepts of gender, especially about oft uncritical assumptions about women or men, and to not ignore homophobia.

Blue helmet soldiers, employees of civil contingents in peace missions and humanitarian workers are similarly challenged to adhere to

the codes of conduct of the UN and its delegating organizations in their contact with local women and men, girls and boys. Sexual abuse, “transactional sex” and so-called “affairs” not only harm the respective victims or the reputation of the international organization — the reasons for which the former General Secretary of the UN Kofi Annan implemented a zero tolerance policy in the first place. Such conduct is moreover an affront to men of the local population who frequently perceive the arrival in the territory of foreign “bearers of peace” of the UN, the AU and other organizations as an attack on their martially influenced masculinity and do not necessarily react peacefully to this presence. Thus, this variant type of masculine demonstration of power and the hierarchies between men of different statuses also belongs on the agenda of peace politics.

Weblinks:

<http://www.eldis.org>

<http://www.engagingmen.net>

<http://www.engenderhealth.org>

<http://www.femnet.or.ke>

<http://www.genderjustice.org.za>

<http://www.genderjustice.org.za/menengage-africa-case-studies-collection>

http://www.iawg.net/resources/field_manual.html

<http://www.ifor.org/WPP>

<http://www.megenkenya.org>

<http://www.menengage.org>

<http://www.mensresourcesinternational.org>

<http://www.padare.org.zw>

<http://www.preventgbvafrica.org>

<http://www.promundo.org.br>

<http://www.siyanda.org>

Lists of literature on all the problems mentioned can be found on this website: www.frauen-und-kriege-afrika.de (in English and German).

“Before the war, I was a man”: men and masculinities in Eastern DR Congo

By Desiree Lwambo*

Introduction

While “rape as a weapon of war” has become a trademark element of reports on the DRC, the issue is far more complex and embedded into a broader context of unequal gender relations and general violence.¹ As Smits and Cruz point out, the two major donor efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), the DRC Pooled Fund and the Stabilization and Recovery Funding Facility, account for over US\$ 15 million and are accompanied by multi- and bilateral donor strategies and funding modalities targeting different issues related to SGBV.²

While these programs are packaged as “gender-sensitive” they really pursue a women-centred approach. Men (mainly military and local decision-makers) are marginally included in awareness campaigns and gender trainings subsumed under the term *sensitization*. Their predominant focus on women creates antagonisms and thus, new barriers to transforming unequal gender relations. Humanitarian interventions that confuse “gender issues” with “women’s issues” ignore the complex nature of gender and its potential as a tool for social change.³ This is still happening despite an international context of programs working with

1 Baaz, ME.; Stern, M. (2010).

2 Smits, R.; Cruz, S. (2011).

3 Some notable exceptions: the Congolese Men’s Network (COMEN), the Rising Sons of Congo program launched by Light of Africa Network, SOCOODEFI in South Kivu, the leadership program by Women for Women International and the work of some churches like the CBCA.

* CPS researcher on gender and knowledge management, peace worker with HEAL Africa, Goma, DRC

men and boys that are being implemented by international development organizations or small community-based groups.⁴

The study puts the spotlight on men. It focuses on the contradictory relationship between idealized, hegemonic masculinities and the actual realities of men's lives noted in international gender research.⁵ As the study shows, these discrepancies also exist in the Congolese context, resulting in a crisis that creates "failed", dysfunctional and violent masculinities. Based on these findings, the study highlights the importance of well-integrated and gender-balanced development policies in work on sexual and gender-based violence.

In the wake of humanitarian interventions that use the "rape as a weapon of war" narrative, several studies have dealt with the images of militarised masculinity that are at the base of soldier's violent behaviour against women.⁶ While these studies constitute important contributions to knowledge about male identity in DRC, a singular focus on the military places SGBV outside of the broader society from where it arose in the first place. The present study therefore explicitly focuses on the views of civilian men.

1. Gender and masculinity

Gender describes the characteristics and behaviours societies assign to the supposed corporal realities, or biological sexes, of men and women. Through social conditioning, individuals learn to perform gender roles and to imbue them with meaning and order. Projection of male or female characteristics is not only applied to humans, but to virtually all areas of human experience, including political structures, economic activities

⁴ Examples internationally: Sonke Gender Justice Network, MenEngage, CARE International, the One Man Can campaign and *Projet d'appui à la lutte contre le sida en Afrique de l'Ouest/SIDA 3*.

⁵ See Silberschmidt, M. (2001) and Safilios-Rotschild, C. (2000).

⁶ See Baaz, ME. (2009) and Gotschall, J. (2004).

or sexual practices. The process of “gendering” is infused with power, as it serves to create, legitimize and reinforce social hierarchies. Gender analysis is a tool that can be used to dismantle these inequalities and to promote alternative modes of (inter-)action.

One focus in masculinity theory is on the *male sex role*, describing ways men perform the social role of being male. Men and women are viewed as “enacting a general set of expectations which are attached to one’s sex”.⁷ More complex analyses politicise hierarchies of power among men and between the genders by ascribing these to the patriarchal nature of society.⁸

Raewyn Connell is a formative author in articulating the theory of *hegemonic masculinity* which he described in his milestone book “Masculinities” in 1995. According to Connell, “the term hegemony refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life”.⁹ Patriarchal dynamics secure a general lead position for men over women, but they also marginalize all men that do not fulfil normative male attributes. In other words, all men are not equal, but subjected to hierarchies defined by race, class and other identity characteristics.

2. Research design

Field research took place during two cycles between February and June 2010. The research team consisted of the principal investigator Desiree Lwambo, the consultant Dr. Samuel Ngayehembaku of the ULPGI, the two research assistants Jean-Claude Fundi and Guershom Paluku of HEAL Africa.

The sample consists of men and women from urban, semi-urban and rural settings in North Kivu, taking into account ethnic and class

⁷ Connell, RW. (2005), p 22.

⁸ Pleck, J. (1977).

⁹ Connell, RW. (2005), p 77.

differences. In a non-probable selection process, participants from the most dominant groups in each setting were chosen. The selection criteria for these groups were fixed in consultation with local stakeholders and the Ethical Committee of the ULPGL. By random probability sampling, single male focus group participants were chosen for in-depth interviews.

As the study was mainly concerned with social analysis, it used a qualitative design triangulating focus groups, in-depth interviews and observation. Deductive codes were developed and assigned to the data according to four key topics (discussed in the following chapter). The emerging matrices allowed for cross-case analysis by theme.

3. Findings

3.1 *Idealized masculinities vs. social realities*

Wealth is considered as the most important prerequisite of a 'real man' in all social environments, yet the definition of what wealth encompasses varies. Male respondents frequently linked lack of income to lack of personal value and male self-esteem (see text box 1).

While male and female respondents did not question male hegemony, they also insisted that such privilege comes with responsibility. A "real man" in the traditional sense earns his position of authority through sound, non-violent leadership and the capacity to produce, provide and protect.

"Boss is not a title, but a responsibility. See, you can't call anyone boss without responsibility, there must be practice. Someone must be a *mulume*, which in Kinande means both 'man' and 'a person who works hard.' This term can also be applied to women if they take the position of worker and provider".¹⁰

¹⁰ Women lawyers and activists FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010. This example shows how, in translating central concepts from one language to another, important nuances may be lost.

Men's statements equating wealth with personal value and male self-esteem

Text Box 1

"I am a Muslim and according to Muslim teaching it is the man that must feed the woman, while today it's the woman that feeds the family. This reduces the man in front of his wife. If he dares to tell her off, he risks not eating". (*Teacher, Sake*)

"Without money in life, one doesn't mean anything to his family; I want to say that it's money that means everything to a man". (*Teacher, Sake*)

"Without possessions, a man has no meaning". (*State Employee, Goma*)

"You don't represent anything when your wife sees you come home empty-handed". (*State employee, Goma*)

"Without money, everybody leaves you. When you are poor you are not respected by anybody; not even by your own spouse. Money means everything to man". (*Policeman, Kiwanja*)

"Being a good man, that's being able to express ideas and be heard. You may be able to express good ideas but when you are poor, you are ignored. Therefore, it is good to have the financial means that will grant you respect". (*Pastor, Sake*)

The majority of women reinforce these norms through the expectations they place on men. Conversely, men in Eastern Congo exist at the intersections between patriarchal power and the challenged contexts of social inequality, precarious modes of work, insecurity and war. These conditions polarize gender roles at the same time as they limit opportunities to perform them.

Where men are expected to take a leadership role based on delivery of assets and performance of dominant behaviour, at least the performance part must be asserted in order to preserve manhood itself. Performance of strength and dominance can thus turn into violent behav-

our, performance of sexual prowess into sexual aggression and public performance of generosity into abandonment of the private sphere, e.g. the household.

The resulting conflict is most strongly felt at the household level. Manhood, male power and social coherence are achieved through creating and maintaining a homestead on which a family can be raised. These norms have not changed despite displacement and economic circumstances that make the acquisition of a homestead difficult or unlikely for many.

Especially farmers feel that they are no longer able to fulfil their responsibilities, as armed men often occupy their fields, steal their livestock and render roads too insecure for trade. War-related trauma also plays a role in reducing male productivity, as many farmers testify to feeling discouraged, exhausted and even emasculated. A farmer in Kiwanja underlined this when he said: “before the war, I was a man”.

Confronted with the reality that women increasingly take the role of breadwinners, men express sentiments of humiliation and loss of personal value. By rhetoric and behaviour, they do however maintain that the “man must be boss”, clinging to male dominance even where actual gender roles are reversed. This is best exemplified by this statement from a young motorbike chauffeur in Sake:

“Men and women cannot be equal. For example, when a woman has studied and works and both bring home the salary, it is difficult for the woman to respect the man. The tradition that places woman below us helps us (...) to stay strong. Men would be damned if women were equal. Women could leave men, and they would not serve us”.¹¹

According to this man, gender equality threatens to annihilate manhood. This fear of losing male privilege is at the base of men’s reluctance to engage in housework, childcare or fieldwork.

¹¹ Male farmer IDI, Sake, 22.02.2010.

3.2 How to become a man – gender education and social environment

In contemporary gender research, gender is not perceived as an innate quality, but as constructed in the process of conditioning. This process is commonly called “doing gender” and describes the interaction between individuals in which gender is presented, performed and perceived. Gender is thus not a personal quality that is constructed in everyday life. One does not automatically inherit one’s gender but he or she will adapt by means of education and socialisation. Children are thus conditioned for their future roles:

“You learn how to be a good boss from observation. I learned how to be a man through the influence of my father. What he taught me is that the woman comes after me and that she cannot surpass this rule”.¹²

At the same time, youth are exposed to conflicting ideals of masculinity, creating layered identities. For example, the majority of Hunde respondents in the semi-urban environment of Sake cited productive, responsible and faithful masculinity as ideal. Nonetheless, men are simultaneously encouraged to have several sex partners and to spend on alcohol and meat consumption:

“There is a saying in the Hunde language that goes ‘*mulume, mafu, mukati*’. This means a real man is women, beer and meat. This is advice that you frequently hear in the context of the Bushenge, a council of wise men, where serious matters are discussed”.¹³

Considering the importance of early childhood conditioning in the raising of men, the war-induced lack of steady family structures is particularly worrying. Boys often grow up in fractured or dysfunctional

¹² Male state employees FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.

¹³ Male teachers FG, Sake, 18.02.2010.

families due to the impact of war, urbanisation and/or poverty. Younger and middle-aged male respondents were critical of their experiences growing up in Eastern DRC. They reported that they often grew up without positive male role models, as the lion's share of rearing and educating children is placed on women's shoulders, with fathers frequently absent, distant or violent.

The study also reveals how concepts of social order within communities change, leading to a high level of intergenerational conflict and alienation. Younger men lose touch with traditional values, such as respect for women and elders. Hierarchical traditions expect youth to be subordinate as long as they have no family of their own. In their search for material wealth, social recognition and power, male youth are drawn towards "quick fix solutions", making them particularly susceptible to committing socially disruptive or violent acts.

3.3 Masculinity and violence

Violence and aggression is often a sanctioned way of asserting masculinity. In Eastern DRC, militarized masculinity is the most visible and also the most harmful in this regard. However, the distinctions between civilian and military cultures can no longer be so clearly defined in the context of a region that has experienced nearly two decades of ongoing warfare and is home to numerous armed groups. Combatants often operate in their home region, and many civilians are either ex-combatants or family members of combatants. Militarization shapes not just the masculinity of soldiers, but also of civilian men in the regions torn apart by warfare. Forced migration, violence and trauma all challenge notions of manhood. This is why it is difficult to draw the line between "military violence" and "civilian violence".

This holds especially true for SGBV. Rape is intricately linked to war and conflict, both as a weapon of war and as an effect of social disruption that persists among civilians well after conflict has been terminated. In Eastern DRC, sexual coercion is in part normalized and views

of male sexuality as aggressive and forceful are used to justify rape.¹⁴ In addition, views regarding women's bodies as a tradable commodity encourage men to demand sex for services, goods and favours, thus discourage valuing consent from a female partner.

Sexual violence is not isolated, but coexists with other forms of gender-based violence. Female respondents reported domestic violence as a general rule. They related this to the relative lack of economic assets and the resulting lack of social status experienced by women, as well as cultural ideals that favour male dominion.

“A woman has nothing, she must follow her husband. Only material possessions can grant her power. A husband that beats his wife is not punished. They say ‘he educates his wife,’ and they see nothing at all wrong with that. It’s a way for men to affirm their masculinity”.¹⁵

“Men do not ever want to be challenged in their decisions. The men make us suffer because they know that we have nowhere to go”.¹⁶

In order to understand violence against women it is crucial to see it in the context of this general violence. In a lot of cases, violence against women emerges from dynamics of violence among men, such as power imbalances, unequal distribution of economic resources, impunity, and the need to assert hierarchical structures and preserve privilege. On the community level, the general climate of corruption and legal impunity is a major stumbling block to fulfilling male responsibilities. Corruption, fraud and theft have turned into chronic ills across all social classes, though the ones most negatively affected are resource poor or otherwise underprivileged men and women.

Respondents named the state as the primary source of violence in DRC, claiming that: “the state is the main obstacle. If the state would be respectable, men would also be respected”.¹⁷ Institutions of the state are

¹⁴ Candeias, S. (Ed. unpublished).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Market women FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.

¹⁷ Businessmen FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.

seen to both enable and enact violence and crime, with the most prominent example being rape and extortion by members of the armed forces and police. Military, political and economic power are often co-opted by “strong men”, while most other men frequently suffer experiences of disempowerment:

“Those who rule do not accept advice and do as they see fit. Those who have capital believe that they are more elevated than those that do not have means. From the governor of the province to the principal of the school, no one respects the opinion of others. [...] Only those that have money obtain justice”.¹⁸

As Congolese men seek to enact hegemonic masculinity under increasingly pressured circumstances, the observation that violence is used to control threats to masculinity is particularly trenchant.¹⁹ Respondents drew a direct connection between men’s sense of failure and unhealthy outlets for asserting masculinity, such as alcohol abuse, irresponsible behaviour towards one’s family and peers, lack of productivity and violence. This affects women and children in particular, as they bear the brunt of aggressive assertions of male authority.

While it is important to understand these dynamics, the association between failed masculinity and violent masculinity should not be confused with a cause-effect relationship.²⁰ For instance, treating rape as a “natural” or “understandable” effect of male disempowerment suggests that rape could be excused. If violence is viewed as a choice, then men can be motivated to make different choices.

3.4 Humanitarian interventions as seen by men

The research could not confirm that sensitisations on gender equality have the desired impact on changing men’s attitudes towards women.

¹⁸ Pastors FG, Sake, 18.02.2010.

¹⁹ See Connell RW. (2005).

²⁰ Moffett, H. (2006).

The reason is that most sensitisations are one sided and impractical from the viewpoint of Congolese men. Sensitization programs fail to recognize men's specific interests and needs, offering little information on alternative ways of affirming male identity (see Text Box 2).

Men feel put on the defendant's bench, as most sensitisations are based on the assumption that men are the perpetrators, not the victims, of violence. While it is true that a great majority of individuals suffering from SGBV are female, a single focus on this group renders the equality aspect of programs obsolete. Male respondents strongly criticised humanitarian interventions aimed at women's socio-economic empowerment that offer training and microcredit exclusively to women, often without the consent of their male family members. Moreover, male respondents stressed that they, too, were victims of wartime and other forms of violence and needed protection as well as psychosocial and medical help.

Gender equality is best understood by men if it is integrated into a broader discourse of community development. The great majority of respondents praised NGOs that provide practical, hands-on information, for example on community hygiene, nutrition, income-generating activities and savings. If humanitarian interventions focus on meeting men's needs to perform as providers, then men are more likely to lend an open ear to concerns around SGBV and gender equality.

The importance of multidimensional training and sensitisation that is specifically tailored to men's needs is evidenced by the work of certain churches. Churches are part of civil society and many clerics and pastors are also activists. Some churches have created special divisions that deal with men and family issues. They communicate Christian ideals of how to be good men, such as respectful and non-violent behaviour towards others. They organise series of seminars that deal with different issues and allow men to communicate in a safe setting. Issues range from family finances to sexuality, allowing participants to broaden their horizon in an integrated way, without a singular focus on topics related to gender issues.

Men's opinions about sensitisations on gender issues

Text Box 2

"Messages about masculinity are rare except in church when they preach about good behaviour within the household". (*Nurse, Kiwanja*)

"I've never heard a sensitization about men, only about women and children". (*Hairdresser, Butembo*)

"You hear a lot about women and the rights of women, but about men, there is very little about men". (*Electrician, Goma*)

"The messages of NGOs are everywhere, but there is nothing about men". (*Owner of a motorbike taxi, Goma*)

"Men are always accused. We have never seen an NGO that does work on men". (*Student, Goma*)

"Everything is said as if men were condemned; this is why some will even turn off their radios". (*Elder, Kiwanja*)

Looking at communication channels, respondents pointed out that mass events and radio messages alone are not sufficient to induce behaviour change. They suggested that sensitization should take place in a *barza*-style setting, meaning an intimate platform for men to address conflict and problems, engage in debate and in peer-to-peer education. Male respondents claimed that they were most likely to internalize content communicated in this setting, as it allows them to weigh different options and actively participate in discussions with other men whom they know and trust. Where a message should reach a greater public, it may make more sense to send male activists on door-to-door communication missions so that people have a chance to encounter other men who communicate with them directly.

Conclusions

Gender is interdependent and interactive, showing that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, as gender equality can only be reached by consensus, not through competition or antagonism. As this study has illustrated, the hegemonic model of masculinity has negative effects on both genders. It places extreme pressure on men and has a high potential for social disruption. Men's relations with women and other men are often marked by stress and hostility. Intergenerational conflicts and erosion of values are an omnipresent discourse in people's narratives about their lives. The cultural shifts that result from changing gender norms and roles lead to resistance from men that can erupt into violent backlash. Therefore, focusing on women alone cannot solve the root causes of SGBV.

Congolese men and women are integrated into, and influenced by, social networks that form their identity and provide them with a framework of knowledge, beliefs, values, rights and obligations. This means that a new consciousness is needed that regards equality as a win-win situation: "to realize men's interests in change, a majority of men and boys must be persuaded that the benefits under the current gender order (...) are less valuable than many now think — or that they come at too high a cost. Moving towards gender equality requires a basic shift from a gender consciousness built on dichotomy and privilege to a gender consciousness built on diversity and reciprocity. There are many positive trends in this direction, and many men who support them".²¹

References

- Baaz, ME. (2009). "Why do soldiers rape? Gender, Violence and Sexuality in the DRC Armed Forces". In: *International Studies Quarterly* 53, pp 495–518.
- Baaz, ME.; Stern M. (2010). *The Complexity of Violence: A critical analysis of*

²¹ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2003), p 11.

- sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*. Sida Working Paper on Gender based Violence in Cooperation with Nordic Africa Institute.
- Barker, G.; Ricardo, C. (2005). *Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict, and Violence*. World Bank Social Development Papers: Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction. Paper No 26.
- Candeias, S. (Ed. unpublished), "Etude anthropologique sur les mecanismes extra-juridictionnels de reponse aux violences sexuelles a l'Est de la RDC". Ministere de la Justice et Rejusco.
- Connell, RW. (2005). *Masculinities (2nd Edition)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gotschall, J. (2004). "Explaining Wartime Rape". In: *Journal of Sex Research* 41/2, pp 129–136.
- Moffett, H. (2006). "'These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them': Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa". In: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32(1), pp 129–144.
- Pleck, J. (1977). "Men's power with women, other men, and society: a men's movement analysis". In (Ed.): *Men in difficult times: Masculinity today and tomorrow*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, pp 234–244.
- Safilios-Rotschild, C. (2000). "The negative side of development interventions and gender transitions: impoverished male roles threaten peace". In: Breines, I.; Connell RW. and Eide, I. (Eds.). *Male roles, masculinities and violence: a culture of peace perspectives*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Silberschmidt, M. (2001). "Disempowerment of Men in Rural and Urban East Africa: Implications for Male Identity and Sexual Behavior". In: *World Development* 29(4): pp 657–671.
- Smits R.; Cruz, S. (2011). *Increasing Security in DR Congo: Gender-Responsive Strategies for Combating Sexual Violence*. The Hague: CRU Policy Brief No 17.
- United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2003). *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality: Report of the Expert Group Meeting Brasilia, Brazil 21 to 24 October 2003*.

Peace work and gender issues: the view from Sierra Leone

*By Shecku Kawusu Mansaray**

The general belief of the majority of citizens living within the political boundaries of the states of Sierra Leone and Liberia is that: “But for the intervention of the west through the United Nations, Britain, USA and their allies, there would have no longer been states in the Mano River Region”.

Between 1991 and 2011, the level of hostilities manifested in the forms of civil rebel wars in the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone, political violence in the cases of Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea Conakry, had a huge potential to render the region ungovernable.

There were the interventions of the International Community but in actual fact they could and can not address the basic causes of violent conflict and war. Peace comes from within a community, a country, a region. Different forms of discrimination have been noted among the numerous causes of the recently concluded conflicts, including marginalization of minority tribes, marginalisation of the children of persons originating from neighbouring countries, discrimination on grounds of poverty, illiteracy, not least on grounds of gender. In the last decade, Civil Society organizations with the support of their international partners have been applying great efforts to reduce or eliminate gender and other forms of discrimination that have the potential for undermining peace or creating downright violent conflict. In the following inter-

* National Co-ordinator, Civil Peace Service Partners’ Network in Sierra Leone

views, the author seeks the impressions or opinions of respondents on the question: **How has the peace building work of civil society organisation groups, in particular, civil peace service partners, in your community, town, country or the region affected gender and other forms of discrimination during and/or after the war?**

The question was put to respondents in their community languages (Krio or other prevalent community languages) and the responses recorded and translated into English by the interviewer.

The exercise was conducted around the country in January 2012. Here are some extracts:

1. Pa Antony Lebbie – Retired sea fairer living in Eastern Freetown:

The Peace workers have helped to change our outlook on life in many ways. I remember the popular saying on the clandestine radio that was setup by the government in exile during the war: “that bullets do not discriminate — whether you are a man or woman, child or adult, poor or rich, democrat or rebel collaborator as long as you live in this country, your life is in danger — you can be killed by enemy or friendly fire”. That peace message has changed the way I see and relate to other people ever since. I have realized that respect for other people is very important to peaceful co-existence. I have come to accept that peace for others is peace for me.

2. Alfred Harding 53 years old – A metal worker living in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone:

During the war, there was no need for a skilled person like me. No one needed a metal worker because there was no electricity for metal work. Life became so hard for me and my family that I lost my status as the breadwinner. My wife learnt how to make soap. She taught me and the children. I did the mixing and she calculated and added the right

quantities of caustic and palm oil. We sold the soap to the displaced people then living in the camps. That was how we survived the war days. I developed sincere admiration for my wife's resourcefulness, creativity and resilience. When the peacebuilders visited our community talking against domestic violence and violence against women and children, I was the first to agree wholeheartedly. I share my lessons with others: men and women are equally endowed with talents, but women are sometimes shy to exhibit their capabilities due to traditional beliefs that women are only there to serve the needs of men.

3. Lahai Morba, Chiel, Southern Sierra Leone:

I wish to start by thanking God that I am alive to enjoy the peace thousands of other Sierra Leoneans died for. May the souls of the dead Sierra Leoneans, Nigerians and all others who died for the peace we now enjoy, rest in peace.

I also remember the people who went the extra mile to send their money and food for Sierra Leoneans to survive the war.

As a chief, I have learnt that the beliefs of the old generation relating to women and children are gradually changing. The old belief system that gave men the absolute right and power to discipline and control women and children is now frowned upon as a violation of their rights. Please do not ask me which is better for our society. All I can say is that I belong to the old belief system and have the misfortune to operate in the present. We cannot continue living in the past, only time will tell whether the traditionalists are right or wrong.

It is a reality that peace work by civil society is gradually changing the ways we relate to women and children. The emerging belief system gives boys and girls, men and women equal opportunities to achieve in life. The result is that boys do not grow-up feeling that they need to be responsible for their family members. Girls grow-up with the desire to be regarded as equal to men and also equal to their husbands, leaving no one as the head of the family. Where this belief system is heading to

is anybody's guess – Prosperity? Greater unity in Sierra Leone? Gender conflict? Generational conflict?

The emerging belief system also seems to favour equality of all — all humans are born equal. The other day, the son of a town crier wanted to be chief. By virtue of his education, knowledge about and long association with the chieftaincy the fellow tried to contest for chieftaincy. He eloquently defended his right as a “member” of the ruling house. His parents and grandparents had served as town criers and the trumpet blowers for the late chief. The real children of the chief were less articulate, commanded less respect and had little popularity. The thing was that the “blood children” of the late chief never regarded their “cousin” as an outsider but the society did. How do you see that? The Man lost the election. That is discrimination, but a good one, I feel.

4. Chernor Bah – a devout Muslim and trader in Freetown:

The peace workers consoled those of us who lost our merchandise during the war — The trauma of the war sent our elders back home to Guinea — to die there in frustration. The younger ones who stayed behind were detraumatized by peace workers. We learnt to be forward looking. We have tried to put the past behind us. We have learnt that we must live according to the rules. The rules for peaceful living together — God did not allocate less respect and value to some tribes and more to other tribes.

Every human being deserves the same respect. During the war, all tribes were equal to the gun.

The gun would kill any tribe without discriminating. To enjoy peace, we must learn to respect everyone. The other day, my old uncle told me that he gets very little support from the four boys he educated and sent abroad. His main source of support is from his daughter. She sponsored her mother to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. She and her husband always support them with food and money.

I have learnt to believe that contrary to our tribal belief that the girl child need not go to school, both sexes should be given equal opportu-

nities and access to education. The girls can marry when they meet the man they love — It is not so helpful to force them into marrying the choice of parents while still in school.

5. Mohamed Koroma, 39 years old, a father for four girls living in Peri-Urban Freetown:

Allah has blessed me with four golden ladies in an era that favours the girl child and promotes women. We will show appreciation for the gift of Allah by raising them to be responsible women and live to fulfilling their dreams.

We will be at peace with them if we respect their wishes and feelings as young women born in the 21st century.

Civil society has been very helpful in educating parents about the ills of gender based violence and decimation also, we now know about the bad results of exposing our family members to domestic violence and excessive labour. We try in our little corner to minimize these practices. It is hard to eliminate them completely, but we keep within the law.

We are happy in spite of the hardship visiting all parents in the forms of high school charges, high cost essential commodities. We have learnt to express our anger in conflict in other ways other than turning violent.

6. Delphine Decker, Age: 48, Location: 92 Kissy Road, Freetown:

As a woman and mother in this nation, I want to remind you that post war Sierra Leone was so uncertain after the destruction of the little infrastructure and basic facilities we had before the war. The work of peace builders introduced the practice of women and men working together for a quick social and economic recovery.

Our youths especially school going children and students of universities were exposed to all types of inhuman behaviours like rape, maim-

ing, stealing, destructions of public property, disrespect for elders: they saw it all happen.

The peace partners helped greatly to bring together all the different sorts of people to listen to some peace messages in the form of concerts, music, banners, drawings etc.

Some of these youths and students have now formed different sensitization groups in schools, colleges, churches and mosques to preach peace to their peers. The CPS program helps to settle discriminations between neighbourhoods, different tribes and ethnic groups. It sends messages to the different political parties so as to avoid violence and mal-practices.

7. Michael E. Garrick, Age: 54 years, Location: Bonthe Municipality:

As a Christian, father and husband/elderly states man, the ongoing work of civil society groups and civil peace partners have positively affected gender in the sense that women have widely been included in decision making, government, administrative and the job market of the country.

Secondly a good number of the husbands and wives (families) see themselves as partners in running their homes and work side by side in development and decision making instead of the traditional or cultural practice of men dominance.

People use the knowledge acquired through sensitization or other means to/mediate and resolve conflicts in societies peacefully. This has yielded much fruits in promoting peace, harmony, tolerance, freedom of speech both at national and local community levels.

On the other hand, it has negatively affected communities/societies by devaluing some of our traditional/cultural values, norms and practices that held them together.

There is a great deal of decline in respect for elders and authorities in societies, particularly among young people.

8. *Alfred Samboh, Age: 22, Location: Brook Fields, Freetown:*

As a youth, I find the civil peace service partners in Sierra Leone and Liberia have positively affected gender and all other forms of discrimination in our post conflict societies. In Sierra Leone we have seen many women, children, Christian, Muslim organisations address gender issues like the fifty-fifty legalization of customary marriages, issuing chieftaincy symbols to women for local elections and presidential elections. And also the youth have been given the opportunity to express themselves in different ways in the community. Finally there is a law, if a man and a woman have lived together for five years, the relationship is to be recognized as husband and wife so if the man dies the properties of the man will be shared with the woman. This one is a result of the work of civil society and peace building groups in Sierra Leone.

9. *Olive A.T. Johnbull, Age: 25, Location: Kenema:*

As a Pastor I want to clearly state that the civil society has greatly contributed in promoting gender equality in both Sierra Leone and Liberia so that not only men but also many women are now actively involved in jobs hitherto dominated by men — for example in politics. Women are also holding other prominent positions in top level offices in these countries which were not common in the past before the war.

On the other hand, the advent of gender equality has also brought about some problems in our society that have really affected homes as women do no longer want to be submissive to their husbands who are rightfully the head of the home and the bread winner. It is our right to be regarded as partners to men but also our responsibility to be equally productive.

10. *Susan Gbenday, Age: 27, Location: Pujehun*

As a young woman, I believe civil society have build peace in my life. The work of CPS has helped me to learn about the demerits of gender discrimination and violence. It has helped me to know what I must do and not do as a woman to live happily with others,

Civil society also called the Government's attention to the disabled people asking our decision makers to encourage them to take part in polities. Government has to provide income, shelter, food, education, and cloth for them. We should not discriminate them because they are disabled, they can do everything we do, they are important in our community.

The gender approach: peace work and the fight against discrimination

*By Laura Anyola Tufon**

Most approaches to peace work, peacemaking and peace building have basically ignored or marginalized concerns of women in particular and gender in general. In Cameroon and particularly in the North West Region of the country where violent conflicts continue to attract local, national and international concern, women remain a minority of participants in peace building policies. This real or perceived exclusion is associated with the fragile peace building efforts that are not only cosmetic in appearance but remain a process rife with contradictions and tensions. Addressing the issue of discrimination, inequality and human rights is a fundamental challenge in the peace building process.

The basic principle of non-discrimination was established more than 63 years ago following World War II, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (cf Articles 2 & 7). Discrimination and exclusion occur through social, economic and political structures and actions. These include formal institutions such as parliamentary, government and legal systems, as well as informal institutions such as the norms and traditions that influence gender roles in society. Much has been said and written about gender roles in conflict and peace building processes but how do women live this public debate? The very educated and concerned women who promote gender equality, who are seen to be spearheading the fight against gender-based violence, who advocate for massive inclusion of women in governing and decision making positions and the like, are the victims of what they preach and stand for. They are victims of gender-based violence they preach against; hardly ever attain

* Coordinator Justice and Peace Commission, Bamenda, Cameroon

leadership positions in government and other related power institutions; the very women they work hard to empower stand fiercely against them. What is the intrinsic value in the continuous fight against discrimination and the promotion of gender equality?

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, to 1995 Beijing Platform for action, Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals, United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; the creation of enabling governmental institutions to address specific concerns of women and the family and many more still leave much to be desired in the course of addressing the plight of women in peace building processes. This may seem pessimistic though not intended to. What remains fundamental is how to translate all these literature and debates to a veritable action for the benefit of the woman and in the promotion of gender equality.

Gender inequality is usually not considered as a key cause of conflict and addressing it is often seen as a lower priority. For instance the most important resource for rural women is land but despite their role and contribution to agriculture, rural development, and food security, they are discriminated in terms of their access to, ownership of and control over land. Women's ability to access land and to claim, use and defend rights to land and other natural resources is weakened by their status within the communities as well as discriminatory customary or statutory laws. Their situation becomes even more delicate in times of conflict as they lose their farmlands and consequently their principal means of livelihood. Our work with local institutions in the promotion of gender equality has gone a long way to prove that responding to gender inequalities early enough is a crucial element of peace building. We concentrate our efforts at the first instance to transform the mindset of our communities through trainings in transformational leadership for peace, providing assistance and carrying out advocacy efforts for a complete systemic change of people's attitudes towards violent conflicts

with the involvement of women in the process. We have far reaching results in local institutions within our sphere of influence and assist them to develop social policies where women take leadership positions under the leadership of the traditional leadership, the Fons/Chiefs as the case maybe. It is in promoting gender equality at local levels where fundamental changes can generate formal institutional change that we think the concerns of discriminatory practices in peace work can actually translate the erstwhile global literature and debate on gender mainstreaming in peace building processes to reality.

The construction of womanhood and its impact on the current socio-economic situation of women in Northern Cameroon

By Viviane Tassi Bela*

Long confined to the roles of mother, spouse and sister as defined by traditional laws which, though invisible, are strong enough to be transmitted from generation to generation and survive over time, the women of Cameroon in general and of Northern Cameroon in particular have often been excluded from the political scene. Considered by some as unfit to take an interest in politics and by others as outsiders to a field long reserved for men, for a long time the women from this Central African country suffered in silence from this exclusion, against which no new ideology seemed to have an influence.

*“In our society, a woman’s place is in the family (...). She is responsible for it alongside her husband. She helps her husband to overcome the challenges the family encounters and her principal activities should be related to her decisive role as educator (...)”*¹. This was stated publicly at Mokolo² on 16 April 2011 at the Diocesan Women’s Day organised by the CDD in Maroua. Hundreds of people and representations from NGOs from all over Northern Cameroon met to exchange ideas on the socio-economic situation of women and define unanimous strategies aimed at improving women’s living conditions.

¹ Comments made on 16 April 2011 at the Diocesan Women’s Day at Mokolo (North Cameroon)

² Mokolo is a town situated in the department of Mayo Tsanaga in North Cameroon

* CPS peace worker on Gender & Human and Women’s Rights, Saare Tabitha, Maroua, Cameroon

Women, whose “social portrait”, according to the official description given by the electoral platform of Women from the Far North (March 2007, p. 4), still seems to be: *“Illiterate, ignorant of her rights, traumatised at being married between the ages of 9 and 16 without a marriage certificate, victim of all forms of violence perpetrated on people of the female sex, struggling alone for the subsistence of her children, economically powerless”*.

A social portrait of women in Cameroon that Jean Claude Barbier (1985, p. 14) had already described decades earlier. *“Through maternity, which is her specific role, woman ensures the biological reproduction of society (...) Sometimes betrothed from birth, often married very young without her opinion always being asked, she should be submissive towards her husband and his family, and any hankering for divorce will come up against the necessity of refunding a matrimonial indemnity, the amount of which is sometimes very high.”*

And yet Cameroon is ostensibly the Central African country that has ratified the majority of international conventions relating to the promotion of Human and Women’s Rights and is today one of the references often quoted by NGOs on the question of the importance of respecting Human and Women’s Rights in Central Africa³.

- ◆ *The preamble of the Cameroon Constitution which posits the principle of equality and includes it in the constitutionality section;*
- ◆ *Article 45 of the Cameroon Constitution, the formulation of which enshrines the adoption of the single-tier system with primacy of international law;*
- ◆ *The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (articles 3, 4, and 7 in particular) (1994);*
- ◆ *The Millennium Declaration (2000) that defines the Millennium Development Goals for 2015, and fixes at 30% the critical mass of women’s*

³ http://morewomeninpolitics.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46%3Aacceuil&Itemid=54 (viewed on 01.09.2011)

participation that would trigger significant and sustainable development at national level;

- ◆ *The Solemn Declaration of the Heads of State of the African Union on Equality between men and women in Africa (2004);*
- ◆ *The Protocol of the African Charter on Women's Rights called the Maputo Protocol (2009);*
- ◆ *The Relevant recommendation of the CEDAW Committee (2009) on the participation of women in politics and the public sphere.⁴*

On a national level, some efforts (although still inadequate) are being made in parallel by the current government, following pressure from numerous quarters, including civil society in Cameroon and a growing female population aware of the necessity of reinforcing their socio-economic, political and legal status.

The women of Cameroon and of Africa in general therefore seem to be more active than ever in their societies and aware of their role as socio-economic and political driving forces. They also visibly “(...) *did not wait for the advent of feminist thought and the global decades 1975 to 2005 to take part in political action.*” To use the terms of Fatou Sow from the French CNRS in her article on women and politics in West Africa (March 2005).

But these slight advances on a national scale do not in any way reflect the regional disparities observed on the ground. The OECD statistics published in 2010 announce, for example, that on average, 40% of girls in Cameroon are not schooled. Approximately one woman out of two is apparently still illiterate in a global context whose common socio-political goal is purportedly the reduction of poverty by half through actions such as promoting equal opportunities for both sexes and the empowerment of women⁵ by 2015. “*In 2005, a report from non governmental organisation the Equal Rights and Opportunity Forum (EROF), based in*

4 http://morewomeninpolitics.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46%3Aaccueil&Itemid=54 (viewed on 01.09.2011)

5 <http://www.un.org/fr/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml> (viewed on 02.09.2011)

Yaoundé⁶, estimated that out of 1.7 million children who have no access to primary school in Cameroon, 1.3 million are girls (...)⁷

These figures or rates of non-enrolment of the young female population would seem to be rising in the Northern regions of Cameroon, where more and more young girls and women are deprived of education and access to occupational training.

$\frac{3}{4}$ or 75% of girls and women from Mindif, for example, cannot read or write, according to the data gathered as part of actions conducted by the Awareness raising and Advocacy Programme (AAP) of Saare Tabitha (AAP/Mindif – 2011).

Faced with these regional disparities and the continuing marginalisation of girls and women, it is very important, within the scope of this article, to critically analyse the bases of the construction of womanhood in Northern Cameroon and to see to what extent these traditional and socio-cultural values and norms constitute the foundations of the discrimination that persists in this part of the country.

Why focus on women in Northern Cameroon?

According to the 2007 CEDAW report⁸, Northern Cameroon is still today the region with the lowest rate of school enrolment in the entire country. Girls bear a disproportionate burden of this disparity. The report published by the Salamaan foundation based in North Cameroon confirms: *“in the North young girls have always been considered ‘domestic’. By woman here, we mean those who are not entitled to a certain amount of liberty. She must live her life in a ‘saré’ where she is forced to cook, draw water from the well and perform other household tasks. Parents give priority to boys, who are expected to earn their living and help*

6 Yaoundé is the capital of Cameroon. See here: <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaound%C3%A9> (viewed on 29.08.2011)

7 <http://www.ipsnouvelles.be/news.php?idnews=8053> (viewed on 01.09.2011)

8 <http://www.fao.org/gender/landrights/fr/report/?country=CM> (viewed on 17.09.2011)

them when they are old, to the detriment of girls who are expected to get married and leave home sooner or later”.

The report of 08 July 2006 indicates, from a concern to illustrate this problem of the non-enrolment of young girls/women in Northern Cameroon:

- ◆ The enrolment rate for girls is 56% whereas for boys it is 89%. It is important to stress that this rate is not girls originating from the area only, but also outsiders who inflate the numbers (statistics from the former Provincial Delegation of the National Education authority for the North, 2003–2004);
- ◆ The girls’ primary school dropout rate is 76%, broken down as follows:
 - Due to marriage, 44%;
 - Of their own accord, 20%;
 - Expelled, 12%.

The remaining 34% concerns girls leaving school for multiple reasons (statistics from the Provincial Delegation of Secondary Education for the North).

Access to drinking water is also a major challenge for many people in this part of the country. Women walk tens of kilometres a day with a child on their back and the sun in their eyes in search of this rare commodity. Water-related diseases are claiming an increasing number of victims. Women and children, in the majority affected by extreme poverty and victims of the lack of information on hygiene and other vital measures, pay the cost of this state of affairs:

“The population in the East and North of Cameroon find it difficult to gain access to a minimum of basic services — drinking water, health care, education — (...) In 2010, flooding and cholera claimed high numbers of victims in the north, further compromising the already insecure existence of many women and children”.⁹

⁹ http://www.unicef.org/french/hac2011/hac_cameroon.php?q=printme (viewed on 14.09.2011)

Another problem facing the local elites and civil society is the practice of excision in this part of Cameroon. In spite of the laws prohibiting excision in Cameroon, 20% of girls and young women in the regions of the North are still victims of this practice, which has dramatic consequences.

“According to a recent survey conducted by the ministry for the promotion of women and the family (MINPROFF), almost 20% of the female population of the three northern regions of Cameroon and in the Southwest are victims of FGM. The psychological and physiological consequences are often irreversible, exposing the victims to multiple harmful effects: heavy bleeding, permanent frustration, trauma, frigidity and prostitution in women, risk of infection that may even prove fatal as these operations are not always carried out in sterile conditions. This is a violation of women’s physical integrity, for medical necessity is the sole legal exemption from the principle of the inalienability of the human body.”¹⁰

The social construction of Womanhood in Northern Cameroon: Examples of Women from the Fulani, Tupuri and Mafa communities

The *pagne*¹¹ seems to be the accessory common to all the girls and women from Northern Cameroon. Indigo, floral or with precise traditional motifs, young girls learn from an early age to tie them around their hips with simplicity and indescribable elegance.

The foundations of womanhood are therefore consciously or unconsciously laid down by a patriarchal society that fixes the rules. The complexity in the choice of this accessory does not seem to frighten any member of the female sex. To be a woman in this area means to master the art of tying the *pagne*. The way it is worn defines the North-

¹⁰ <http://www.journalducameroun.com/article.php?aid=7907> (viewed on 17.09.2011)

¹¹ The *pagne* is a piece of cotton cloth manufactured locally or imported, used as the basis for dressing by women in Northern Cameroon and in the Sahel countries

ern Cameroonian woman's allegiance to a social, religious and ethnic group.

The Fula woman, for example, should cover herself fully with this accessory and hide the body that does not really belong to her. She will take care in adding a fine veil called *Suddaare* which hides her hair, expresses her religious allegiance and protects her from staring eyes and any desire of which she could become the object.

Whenever she appears in public, the Tupuri woman takes care to make sure part of the cloth also covers her shoulder. This way, she earns the social respect owed to her rank. Her hair is always covered by a scarf with the same pattern as the cloth tied round her hips, called *Sillabi* in the Tupuri language.

Young Mafa girls tie two *pagnes* around their hips to draw attention to her youthfulness and her single status. The Mafa woman makes sure she has one *pagne* tied around her hips and another one covering her shoulders, which lends gravity to her social status.

As aesthetic as this art of tying the *pagne* may seem, it first and foremost expresses the socio-cultural and traditional expectations about the image woman should represent in the conservative societies in this part of Cameroon. A social image reinforced by identity-related values that make women subservient and are rigorously defended by men, the absolute masters of the traditional system in place.

The *pagne* is therefore the basis of womanhood in Northern Cameroon. Trousers (solely reserved for men) and other "western" accessories have no social place for the majority of women. "A woman who wears trousers here is not respected. She is either a *Gadamayo*¹² or she is a prostitute..." was the explanation given.

A classification that is highly marginalising for all the other women who decide to express their womanhood and socio-cultural allegiances in a different way. Their choices and fundamental liberties seem to come at a price: that of scorn.

¹² Gadamayo means people from the South of Cameroon

Nonetheless, in Gazawa, one woman seems to call all these discriminatory realities into question. Appointed 1st Female Sub Prefect in February 2011, Mrs Djeinabou Abdou is one of the rare women who have swapped their *pagne* for a pair of trousers and are convinced this is the right choice.

When we met in September 2011, she said, *“Taking up my appointment here was not easy. The men are not used to taking orders from a woman. What is more, for official outings, I wear trousers. An accessory that breaks with the image of woman they have here in this part of Cameroon.”* A region where, to use the words of the Lamido of Gazawa on the 15 October 2011: *“Two women equal one man (...)”*

Has Djeinabou Abdou lost her womanhood for all that? Far from it. This mother of three, her hair hidden by the *“Suddaare”*, complies with some socio-cultural and religious constraints but also succeeds in rejecting any attitude that runs counter to the respect of her Rights and Liberties.

“Women in our community are responsible for the children’s education and the well-being of the family. From an early age, she learns to run a household and to understand the importance of marriage. As soon as she becomes a woman at around 13 years old, we have to marry her. Otherwise it brings shame to us, the parents. Men have to work and earn money to feed their family. This is our tradition!” I was told during my visit to the men’s community of Hina on 15 October 2011.

A predominantly Muslim and Mafa community, which lays particular importance on the early marriage of girls. Girls who are trained from very early on to serve men. They learn from birth the foundations of womanhood, the art of tying the *pagne*, of running a household and submitting to the thoughts of men. We don’t see many of them in the often empty streets of Hina. The ones we do see on market day are protected and accompanied by a male family member or else they come from a neighbouring location. *“A serious girl and a married woman with self-respect do not go out any old way here...”*, I was told by Brother Dieudonné from the Catholic Mission of Hina.

In the public primary and secondary schools, they represent approximately a quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$) of the enrolled pupils. The reasons given for their absence are primarily economic. *“The parents are poor around here! They don’t have the money to send all their children to school and they often have to choose their sons. Girls will get married and will profit from the advantages of having an educated husband...”* (AAP/Hina Report – 2011)

So the husband is supposedly solely entitled to the education rights of his future spouse? In this case, he would be solely entitled to their other “shared” rights and liberties and would give generously of them if “his” woman were to express the need?

This is not, however, always the case, as shown by the experiences of my team and myself, within the framework of our AAP actions at Saare Tabitha¹³, during various mediation interventions in family and community conflicts. The women for the most part found themselves deprived of the right to work in 80% of cases (in the Muslim and Christian communities). A husband who deprives a woman of the right to engage in an occupational or income-generating activity is in violation of the right to work and therefore committing a criminal offence that a good number of them seem to underestimate.

The reasons put forward to justify such a refusal are generally socio-cultural.

The man (however educated he may be) is traditionally responsible for the economic activity of his family. Isn’t he recognised by all the existing institutions and laws in force in Cameroon as the “head of the family”? (See also article 213 of the Cameroon Civil Code). What can be said of single parent families run solely by women? This is a new trend in this area and increasingly prevalent in urban zones. More and more widows and young divorced women (because they were forced to marry too young) are starting to stand out in the social landscape of Northern

¹³ The AAP is an Awareness-raising and Advocacy programme run by Saare Tabitha/UEBC, which operates in 7 intervention zones in Northern Cameroon. The programme began in 2011 and is managed by Viviane Tassi Bela in cooperation with the Management of the centre.

Cameroon. Don't they also have the right to work, due to their social status as "head of the family", and exchange their *pagne* for trousers without being considered either a Gadamayo, a prostitute or a loose woman?

Working and being in charge of the family's income is therefore an important aspect of masculinity, reinforced by the socio-cultural realities and legal constraints in place.

"Being a real man means being able to work to feed your family. When the woman works, people think the husband is not capable of managing the family's financial commitments. This gives a bad image of the husband! This is why our men here set off all year round to neighbouring Nigeria, Chad or to the south of Cameroon to look for work. We, the women, are alone all year round, we work in the fields to feed our families and wait for our husbands to send a little money." (Comments made during an intervention with the women's communities of Mustkar – Session held on 01 and 02 October 2011 with approximately 300 Women)

In the Mafa communities *"The husband alone decides about everything concerning the life of the family. He decides what age his daughter should be married at and the person he wishes to give his daughter's hand to. In our community, we marry our girls at around 14–15 years old. They must be strong and work hard in the fields. A real woman should also be capable of excelling in the preparation of Bil bil and raising live-stock..."*¹⁴ (Interview dated 21.01.2012 with Fadimatou, 44, a woman from Koza)

Faced with these highly controversial values which play an important role for the identity of all the people in these communities, it is nonetheless important to stress their discriminatory power and their impact in the current socio-economic situation of women in North Cameroon.

A woman who is recognised in the constitution as a human being with the same rights as men, in the traditional, conservative regions often finds herself deprived of her most basic rights for the reasons mentioned above.

¹⁴ A local alcoholic drink made from millet.

The conventional basic education she receives — 38% of girls in the far North of Cameroon receive it — (see report CEDAW/C/CMR/3 p. 74) does not consistently stress this aspect of things. The traditional education, on the other hand, reinforces her status as future spouse submitting to the service of a man and his family. The liberties she is entitled to are subject to the exclusive will of the man she is handed over to at a very young age for the majority of them. Her rights can only be claimed within the framework authorised by her husband. Work is not part of her field of social action. Except for farming and breeding for family consumption. For trading, very often she will need her husband's permission. This is also what it means to be “a real woman” around here!

In his book entitled “Identity and culture in North Cameroon” (2008, p. 27), Dili Palai, from Northern Cameroon, evokes the following realities: *“A woman, when giving a drink to man, is supposed to squat (...). The young girl who does not comply with this practice is therefore stigmatised and socially sanctioned. In addition to the Fula people, this posture is also adopted in several other peoples. The Guiziga, the Moundang, the Toupouri, the Mafa, the Guidar, etc. (...) The young girl learns these habits from an early age and applies them as she grows up.”*

A social attitude that the patriarchal system requires of women in the name of respect and honour. Are they not constitutionally equal to men in terms of rights and liberties?

How can the situation be made to evolve when this seems to be so deeply rooted in the mentalities and rigorously defended by invisible laws?

How can we relinquish women's contribution in this way in areas where there is such extreme poverty? They represent more than 50% of the population and remain greatly excluded from the world of formal work. In the informal sector, their economic activities are limited to low-income trade (the sale of fruit and vegetables, small-scale catering). High income activities (trading in large livestock, for example) are exclusively concentrated in the hands of men.

Some of the women we meet during our awareness raising actions are convinced this is right. The traditional education they have received and their current social status as “submissive” is apparently an ideal they learn to defend vigorously in the name of certain men during exchange forums for the purpose. The result of socio-cultural influence for those who remain carefully locked up in a reality with static values or a personal conviction objectively acquired through years of experience and living?

We shall probably never know. However, defending abuse, scorn and violations perpetrated on women in the name of tradition and discriminatory values is a crime no-one can justify.

A look at the role and place of women and girls in Cameroon society

By Stephanie Knott*

“I’m always right, because I’m a man and men are superior to women”, explains a taxi driver in Douala.

Don’t be mistaken! The taxi driver wasn’t joking, all the men in Cameroon, with very few exceptions, believe that men are generally superior to women. This is in fact the result of the prevailing patriarchal system in which the preference for the male sex is the social norm. This system is encouraged, in the first instance, by the national legal framework itself. In spite of the fact that Cameroon has ratified various treaties on the promotion of women’s rights and the campaign against discrimination, the law still contains provisions that discriminate against women. For example, according to the laws governing matrimonial regimes in Cameroon (Civil Code and Ordinance of 1981 relative to the civil registry), men enjoy a number of privileges, including: the man is the head of the family and consequently, the sole administrator of joint property (art. 213 of the Civil Code); he has the right to choose the conjugal home; he may, in the interests of the family and the children, prohibit his adult wife from exercising her right to work (articles 223 of the civil code and 74 of the ordinance of 29 June 1981); the law is interpreted by many as if men are entitled to take as many wives as they want; the minimal age for marriage for men is 18 years while for women it is 15; fines and other forms of compensation payable

* CPS peace worker, Department of the Cameroon Union of Christian Women (DUFC), Duala, Cameroon

incurred by the man are collected from joint property, whereas the collection of those incurred by the woman can only be taken from the bare ownership of her personal property as long as their joint estate lasts (article 1564 of the civil code). In addition to these provisions that are written into the law, there are several customs (a significant source of law in Cameroon) applicable in the courts and tribunals that discriminate against women and girls regarding inheritance and land ownership rights. Generally, these customs consider that the woman, who marries outside the family, cannot combine the heritage of her husband with that of her father, which belongs to male descendants, with whom she cannot discuss the attribution or the enjoyment of inherited property.

All these privileges, construed to serve phallocratic power, have several consequences on the lives of women. Even within the family they are victims of several forms of violence. In the first instance, there is sexual violence. Several women from various parts of Cameroon have told me they are forced to have sexual relations with their husbands whenever the husband wants, and the husband uses the label of head of the family and the infamous “cohabitation duty” enshrined in law, which is quickly transformed into an “obligation of consumption” for women. This is a social construct that the popular imagination has accepted, which is also expressed in hit songs such as those of Cameroonian musician Mathématique de Petit Pays who says: “If you love your man hug him tight”, or Lady Ponce who sings “Man is a belly and a groin”.

Then there are other forms of violence related to pernicious customary practices, in particular widowhood rites, breast ironing, forced and early marriage and excision. Regarding widowhood rites, “several of their aspects continue to resemble inhuman and degrading treatment: debasement, negation of dignity, damage to physical and moral integrity through inflicted suffering, deprivation, humiliation, bullying, purification rites against a background of culpability”¹. Several

¹ See the study by the International Circle for the promotion of Creation (CIPCRE) “Dot et rites de veuvage: pratiques sociales et souffrances féminines”, 2006

widows confided in me that they had been forced to shave their heads and private parts, to stand naked in public, to eat from the same plate for months without washing it, to not being allowed to wash themselves or their private parts for months on end, having to sleep on the ground on banana leaves and undergo severe exculpation trials. Concerning breast ironing, this is a very painful ritual that is supposed to prevent young girls from attracting the attention of boys when their breasts start to develop early. This is done by ironing the chest with a hot stone or pestle as soon as the first signs of breast development appear. Thanks to awareness raising and demystification campaigns, this cruel, inhumane ritual is not practiced as much as in the past, but there are still areas of resistance in certain parts of the country. Regarding forced or early marriage, this practice is intimately linked to the abusive constraint of the dowry which is similar to a kind of commoditisation of young girls. Against their will and despite their very young age, young girls are married to the highest bidder without taking into account the age difference with the suitor, which can sometimes be as much as 50 years. Many young girls who are victims of this system live their marital relations in total captivity, as they are deprived of liberty and must serve the selfish libido of their so-called husband. Many who escape from this situation end up homeless for fear of returning to their families and suffering retribution from their parents and the whole community. They quickly fall foul of pimps who turn them into prostitutes. Lastly, excision is another painful practice intended to prevent a woman from feeling sexual pleasure by removing her clitoris. This is another form of male domination, of men seeking to reduce women to the status of object to satisfy their own sexual pulsions. It should be noted that, like breast ironing, the practice of excision has almost disappeared in the majority of customs.

In addition to all these forms of violence, women are confined to the lowliest social roles: in the family, they are only good for cooking, working in the fields or teaching the children; in society they are housewives, doughnut vendors, “Bayam salam” (from “buy & sell”, people who buy

produce and resell it for a profit), “Callbox” operators, secretaries, cooks and cleaners. Another example: when I wanted to test a new fast food restaurant, I asked the man behind the till what kind of sauce there was on the hamburger. With a confident and imposing air, the man answered in a loud voice: “How can you ask me a question like that? I’m not a woman, I don’t work in the kitchen!”

In short, the patriarchal society in Cameroon devalues women and prevents them from developing their talents, for we know the capacity women have for good leadership when they have a job with responsibility.

Within the framework of my work as a peace worker in Cameroon, I am always impressed by the women leaders I meet. It’s true there are not many of them compared to male leaders, but the way they express themselves, behave and act is often very special in my opinion. They often have charisma and a personality that imposes respect, and exceptional skills that inspire confidence. In every case, when I meet women like this I remember them for a lot longer than most of the men I meet. The women are, in general, very good managers, even in the family. On an economic level, I have noticed that the majority of them are members of at least one tontine (traditional cooperative banking system) in which they save as a group to cope better with unexpected expenses such as an illness in the family. Despite the fact that these families are generally very large with lots of children to be fed, cared for and sent to school, the women always seem to “make ends meet”. I always wonder why company managers don’t try to take more advantage of these qualities of wife-mother-sister. Maybe they know and fear that these qualities could work miracles?

Despite all these burdens, we have to acknowledge the progress made towards the emancipation of Cameroonian women.

First of all, proper appreciation should be accorded to the Government’s ratification of several international agreements, in particular the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) which states: “...*the full and complete development of*

*a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields.*² There is also the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted by the 2nd ordinary session of the African Union Conference in Maputo in July 2003. Article 9 stipulates that “women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of State policies and development programmes” and “States Parties shall ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making.”³

On an internal level, the principle of equality is clearly asserted by the Constitution and several other national laws such as the Code of Criminal Law and the Labour Code. In addition, the concern with gender is increasingly taken into account in most national strategy documents, such as Vision 2035 and the Strategy Document for Growth and Employment.

Furthermore, in political life in Cameroon, the situation of women's integration has changed considerably compared to the very first government formed on 16 May 1957, in which there were no women at all, and the second one, formed on 20 February 1959⁴. Today, the National Assembly comprises 13.89% women. Among positions such as mayor (339), the representation of women is still very slight (2.9%) but for deputy mayors, the situation has evolved somewhat: for 1st deputies of mayors, for example, the percentage of women is 10.9%. In terms of leadership, 1.1% of women are sub-prefects but there are no female Governors, Prefects or District Chiefs.⁵

It should also be mentioned that in the 2011 presidential elections,

² See the Women Watch website:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/fconvention.htm>

³ See the website of the African commission on human and peoples' rights:

http://www.achpr.org/francais/_info/women_fr.html

⁴ “Femme” supplement to Cameroon tribune, January 2012, page 14

⁵ “Femme” supplement to Cameroon tribune, January 2012, pages 2 and 3

there were three women candidates, one of whom, Mrs Edith Walla Kahbang, reached 6th place out of 23 candidates.

Despite an improvement in the situation of women in Cameroon since the 1950s, a gender balance has not yet been achieved and this is not a goal that can be met quickly, but rather a long-term path to be walked. This concerns not only politics, but also the economy and the Churches, which play an important role in Cameroon. Sunday congregations in the Churches are more than $\frac{2}{3}$ female, but in the positions of power in the Churches there are often no women at all. Women are often grouped together in a women's department.

On 8 December 2004, the Ministry for the promotion of women and the family (MINPROFF) was created in Cameroon.⁶ In addition, the women in Cameroon play an active part in various one-day events aimed at improving their living conditions. For instance there is "International Women's Day (08 March)" and there are days for the "Family (15 May)", "Widows (23 June)", "African Women (31 July)", "Rural Women (15 October)", "to combat violence against women (25 November)", "Handicapped Women (03 December)" and "Human Rights (10 December)".

All these efforts are laudable but can only be useful if a number of challenges are met. The first challenge concerns achieving awareness in women themselves. They must deconstruct the idea that they are inferior to men in their own minds. "*You can never win against a man, a woman can't beat a man*" my friend explained to me one day when she was playing table tennis with a man. I tried in vain to explain to her that table tennis is a game of skill and has nothing to do with a person's female or male attributes. This is why many women have very little confidence in themselves and are often afraid to dare. Next, men also have to become aware that they cannot build Cameroon on their own, and that they need the contribution of women who have the same potential as they do for playing an active part.

⁶ See the website of the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon: http://www.prc.cm/index_fr.php?link=promotion_de_la_femme

Another major challenge for improving women's situation in Cameroon is to combat jealousy among the women themselves. I've often noticed that instead of being delighted when another woman succeeds socially, many women react jealously and denigrate the successful one, even if she is a member of their family. This situation is a destabilising factor that makes people lose their self-confidence and waste their time solving or escaping from futile conflicts. It is therefore important that women pull together and support each other to become stronger and play their real role in society.

Another challenge is to combat sexual abuse against women, who most of the time are forced to grant favours to men in order to find or keep a job. One of my friends, for example, who worked in a large company, lost her job because she refused her boss's immoral propositions. Running a search on this issue, I came upon a number of similar stories. Whether deliberately or not, sex has become a weapon of defence and attack in several life situations in Cameroon, be it for money, a job, to win a contract or to pass an exam. For instance, on the pretext of poverty, many women and girls are forced to sell their bodies in the prostitution circuit run by wealthy, well-dressed fathers and grandfathers who do not hesitate to pay a lot of money to satisfy their sexual appetite on children who have scarcely reached puberty. One evening, as I was leaving the house, I discussed this subject with my taxi driver. He told me a lot of facts about the life of prostitutes in Douala. Like many men, he was used to frequenting their hangouts. So I asked him to drive me around the places in question to show me what the situation is really like. I was shocked to find that among these girls there were countless who looked very young, especially in the Dakar and Elf district, at the crossroads that bears the infamous name of "*J'ai raté ma vie*" ("*I'm a failure in life*"). The taxi driver told me that the price of a trick starts at 300 CFA francs (less than €0.50). If they use a condom (3 for 100 CFA francs), their profit will be approximately 270 CFA Francs (approximately €0.40). The other places, such as "*la rue de la joie*" in Deido are a little more expensive. There, a young woman sells her body for between 1,000 and

3,000 CFA Francs (approximately €1.50 and €4.50). Apparently, the most up-market place is Akwa, where a very beautiful prostitute can earn between 5,000 and 50,000 CFA Francs (approximately €4.50 and €76). More than 30% of prostitutes in Cameroon are HIV-positive⁷.

It is therefore very important to develop financial opportunities for girls and women in Cameroon, to give them the possibility of making their own choices, if they really wish to stay with a man without being forced to do so because of lack of means.

The first step is to send girls to school and then teach them an occupation. Among all the percentages of education level, the greatest percentage of women (29.9%) has no schooling at all, but for men, the greatest percentage has completed a part of primary school. In rural areas, the level is generally much lower than in urban areas⁸. One reason for this disparity in levels is the fact that many women become pregnant while attending school and are sometimes forced to leave to get married. In a conversation with a teacher from a large junior secondary school in Douala, he talked of the rules of his establishment in the following terms: *“If a pupil falls pregnant and she is not married, she must leave the school straight away. If she is married she can carry on at school. We are a serious institution.”* This made me wonder if the boy or the teacher who made the girl pregnant without marrying her should also leave the school. Obviously this is not the case! These practices must therefore be combated and girls’ education encouraged to better prepare their integration into working life.

Another major challenge to be met to improve the socioeconomic status of women is unemployment. In Cameroon, as in many other African countries, it is not always easy for young people to find jobs. With population growth of 2.3% and an infant mortality rate that has declined considerably, the situation is still explosive regarding increasingly rare job opportunities. Because of this, many young people want

⁷ Source: AIDS Epidemic Update 2009 – Fact Sheet Sub-Saharan Africa

⁸ “Femme” supplement to Cameroon tribune, January 2012, pages 2 and 3

to leave Cameroon and start a new life in Europe, either as students or through illegal immigration. This situation is favoured by the pre-conceived ideas of a “European Eldorado” encouraged by pictures on television and the sometimes illusory signs of wealth of certain Cameroonians who have lived or still live in Europe. Of course, the Europeans themselves also project an image of a standard of living that is very high compared to the local population, with their large cars and opulent houses. “*Even fire won’t stop me, I’m a man*”, I was told by a boy who was leaving Cameroon to go to Spain by road and sea. Unfortunately, he has not yet been able to make his dream come true as he was blocked in Algeria, along with a lot of his compatriots who are in the same situation. Strategies should therefore be developed to avoid this situation which is still likely to lead to rebellion, as was the case in 2008 at the time of what many called the “hunger strike”.

It is therefore appropriate to congratulate Ecam (*Cameroon Board of Enterprises*) for its promise, in November 2011, of “100,000 jobs by 2015”. Furthermore, the preamble of this project indicates that “*employment concerns business, youth, development, families, social peace and the future. It is from the perspective of this spirit of compensating the problems of our time that employment has emerged very naturally as one of the priority targets of Ecam’s action, even though the issue is a complex one.*”⁹

To summarise, I am convinced that despite discrimination against women and girls that exists in Cameroon and which prevents them from achieving their potential and making a contribution to the country’s development, there are real areas of leverage which can be activated to bring about change. The first area of leverage is female solidarity, which should lead women to help each other and provide each other with mutual support to allow their talents to blossom and develop. The second area of leverage is that of women’s own awareness of their potential

⁹ See the website of the Cameroon Express:
http://www.camerounexpress.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3120:travail-ecam-propose-100000-emplois-a-lhorizon-en-2015-&catid=86:conomie&Itemid=421

in terms of numbers (50.5% of the total population), social responsibility (mothers of children, mothers of humanity) and management skills. A third area of leverage concerns the will of the State to ensure the promotion of women and girls through commitments and actions at both national and international level. A last area of leverage concerns the necessity of reinventing the multiple customs which are current in Cameroon to remove from them all their dehumanising and discriminating aspects and keep only the positive and symbolic aspects that express the veritable humanity of Africans, who are respectful of rights and of the individual. It is only by activating these sources of leverage that men and women can coexist and act jointly, no longer in the sense of subservience but rather in the sense of a social partnership that is reciprocally beneficial and forward-looking. This requires a change in mentalities and paradigms, active participation on the part of women and men in the development process, and the preservation of peace, governance and leadership. In fact, what is required is a cross-wise vision of gender that encompasses social, economic, cultural, political and religious components.

Douala, February 2012

My aunt, life, Churches and “Doing Good”

By *Flaubert Djateng**

Here in my native Cameroon they say “doing good” is universal. “What is good is good”, people like to repeat. A way of recognising that we don’t need to belong to a group, a class, an ethnic community, a race, etc. to know the meaning of doing good. People who do good can be found in all the communities in the world. Doing good here means an act towards others to offer assistance; support or to reduce suffering. An act that helps someone to overcome a difficult situation and improve their lot. Doing good may quite simply mean giving food to someone who is hungry, water to drink, or caring for them. It can also mean preventing an injustice, reassuring someone, facilitating their struggle to overcome a problem, protecting them, allowing them to obtain a new status, a new situation such as a job or the possibility of earning a living. Doing good encompasses multiple dimensions: behaviour, attitude, a service, one-off help or help over the long term.

From my earliest youth I have found myself in the dilemma of not knowing whether it was the imported (Christian) church or the traditional church that did good. The traditional church in Cameroon is often reduced to ancestor worship. My people venerate their ancestors, they worship them, and to put this into practice we have priests and priestesses. But the religion is not everything; there is a whole body of knowledge that governs the lives of those who believe in ancestor worship. Acknowledging the ancestors also entitles one to services and opens up the perspective of better health, greater happiness, more pro-

* Bafoussam, Cameroon, CPS/EED mobile team for Africa

tection and blessings. I think one of the pillars of the vitality of the Bamiléké people is to be found in their traditional religion.

I spent my early childhood with my aunt, Megni Nguéda, a tall, beautiful, elegant woman with a strong personality. Megni Nguéda was a priestess of the traditional religion. She was not married and had no children. I was one of her children, for in our culture a woman can take her sister's children into her home and care for them as if they were her own. The fact that she was not married was not due to a prescription of traditional religion, but it was simply a social reality. According to my mother's explanations, women like my aunt can't find men on their level. Presiding over ceremonies of traditional worship confers on them a power due to their place in society, and their position as priestess gives them the supernatural gifts of clairvoyance and vision. My mother believed that very few men are prepared to live with such powerful women. The most difficult aspect is to cohabit without secrets, for a priestess sees everything and is all-knowing. In front of her, you are "transparent".

My "mother" Megni Nguéda received 10 to 30 visits a day from sick people she provided with care. She worked six days a week, never on a Sunday. Most of her patients were children and their complaints were often diseases that modern medicine has not been able to cure. She made her own potions, and gathered the herbs she needed for her remedies. Certain types of bark and amulets she bought from special merchants who sold their wares exclusively to priests and priestesses.

Megni Nguéda had a sacred place in her home with a spring which only dried up when she died. Some of the phases of treatment were carried out on this spot, where she gave people a drink of the spring water in snail shells for cups. This water was always very refreshing and had a special taste. Sometimes for difficult cases, Megni Nguéda would work in the "sacred forest" of the patient's family. Before the advent of "modernism", families all had their sacred forest, a place where they worshipped their ancestors. To hold a ceremony in this place, people enlisted the head of the family, or the services of a priest or priestess.

Megni Nguéda cared for countless people and healed hundreds of children. I witnessed her releasing several men and women from spells and possessions. She welcomed people in difficulty, without distinction, rich and poor, dignitaries and simple citizens. Megni Nguéda had no hierarchy to consult with, no superior to answer to. She believed she was doing what “God”, who had chosen her, wanted her to do. The only person she took orders from was the Village Chief, who was also the spiritual leader.

Then one day I found myself in junior secondary school and in the catechism lesson the teacher told me that everything Megni Nguéda did came from the “devil”. She and several other teachers tried to convince me that Megni was the fruit of “sin”, and that she was in the service of evil. I have chosen to be christened, I am a Christian, but even today I cannot see Megni Nguéda as someone who perpetrated evil.

When I look at all the ills of our current society, I still today find myself in deep doubt over the role of the Christian Churches. When I listen to a priest or a pastor, who take themselves for and are sometimes designated as the representative of God on earth, but who in reality have no education and no ethics, spouting forth nonsense from their pulpit to the thousands of faithful who have come to listen, I wonder who really does good? Most worrying is that mainly the institutions of the different Christian Churches seem to set this attitude in stone and turn it into a system that is contemptuous towards our culture, traditions and roots. And yet our traditional religions possess treasures of wisdom and spirituality that anyone aspiring towards good, any Christian, should wish to assimilate and value.

In Africa, a step backward on human rights

Desmond Tutu on homophobia in Africa*

Hate has no place in the house of God. No one should be excluded from our love, our compassion or our concern because of race or gender, faith or ethnicity — or because of their sexual orientation. Nor should anyone be excluded from health care on any of these grounds. In my country of South Africa, we struggled for years against the evil system of apartheid that divided human beings, children of the same God, by racial classification and then denied many of them fundamental human rights. We knew this was wrong. Thankfully, the world supported us in our struggle for freedom and dignity.

It is time to stand up against another wrong.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people are part of so many families. They are part of the human family. They are part of God's family. And of course they are part of the African family. But a wave of hate is spreading across my beloved continent. People are again being denied their fundamental rights and freedoms. Men have been falsely charged and imprisoned in Senegal, and health services for these men and their community have suffered. In Malawi, men have been jailed and humiliated for expressing their partnerships with other men. Just this month, mobs in Mtwapa Township, Kenya, attacked men they suspected of being gay. Kenyan religious leaders, I am ashamed to say, threatened an HIV clinic there for providing counseling services to all members of that community, because the clerics wanted gay men excluded.

* The writer is archbishop emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984.

Uganda's parliament is debating legislation that would make homosexuality punishable by life imprisonment, and more discriminatory legislation has been debated in Rwanda and Burundi.

These are terrible backward steps for human rights in Africa.

Our lesbian and gay brothers and sisters across Africa are living in fear.

And they are living in hiding — away from care, away from the protection the state should offer to every citizen and away from health care in the AIDS era, when all of us, especially Africans, need access to essential HIV services. That this pandering to intolerance is being done by politicians looking for scapegoats for their failures is not surprising. But it is a great wrong. An even larger offense is that it is being done in the name of God. Show me where Christ said “Love thy fellow man, except for the gay ones.” Gay people, too, are made in my God's image. I would never worship a homophobic God.

“But they are sinners,” I can hear the preachers and politicians say. “They are choosing a life of sin for which they must be punished.” My scientist and medical friends have shared with me a reality that so many gay people have confirmed, I now know it in my heart to be true. No one chooses to be gay. Sexual orientation, like skin color, is another feature of our diversity as a human family. Isn't it amazing that we are all made in God's image, and yet there is so much diversity among his people? Does God love his dark- or his light-skinned children less? The brave more than the timid? And does any of us know the mind of God so well that we can decide for him who is included, and who is excluded, from the circle of his love?

The wave of hate must stop. Politicians who profit from exploiting this hate, from fanning it, must not be tempted by this easy way to profit from fear and misunderstanding. And my fellow clerics, of all faiths, must stand up for the principles of universal dignity and fellowship. Exclusion is never the way forward on our shared paths to freedom and justice.

Religions and homosexuality: the situation in Cameroon

Workshop on the topic of Human rights
and sexual minorities in Cameroon

*Organised by the SID'ADO Association**

Communication by Rev. Jean-Blaise Kenmogne

Prerequisites

To broach the question of homosexuality from the point of view of religion, it is important to posit three prerequisites.

The first prerequisite is to be aware of something that may seem obvious: religions are *undulating and diverse* in their historical developments and in the way they occupy human space. This means that on any human problem, it is impossible to extract a unique vision and absolute answer that could be brandished like a universal seal, always and everywhere. In their development and in the way they fit into social space, they do not proclaim a monolithic and immutable truth. Religions change, struggle, contradict themselves, rectify their perception of the world, change their interpretations of their founding intuitions and texts. They are therefore dependent on the moment, on the prevailing cultural atmosphere, dominant values and hegemonic interests that prevent us from reducing them to a common denominator on a question as sensitive as homosexuality in Cameroon society. What is more, it is not certain that religions as they are today will still be pertinent regarding the problems of tomorrow. They should innovate in their perception of reality and invent solutions which would have nothing to

* Doctor ès Human Rights, Director General of CIPCRE

do with our current vision of the world. They are therefore anchored in the concrete reality of historical changes where they invent themselves and reinvent a meaning for themselves in the immensity of the questions confronting present day societies.

The second prerequisite I would like to draw your attention to, is that each individual person and each people possesses a critical space from which they are capable of calling into question the assertions and stances of a given religion on a given problem. This happens when we realise that these stances go against certain vital principles we believe to be inviolable and fundamental for humanity. The French philosopher Jean Nabert calls this capacity for discernment *the criteriology of the divine*, that is to say the basic ethical criterion starting from which we can say that what a religion asserts betrays the human instead of strengthening and enriching it. A concrete example: when biblical texts firmly assert that God orders the massacre of peoples and approves of genocide, the criteriology of the divine obliges us to say that these scriptures are human manipulations and that God, if he is God, cannot be an “exterminator” and a “perpetrator of genocide”. If, even today, a high-standing member of the Church orders recourse to human sacrifices in our society in the name of God, something within us will spontaneously say no, because we understand the complexity of straight away that the divine is betrayed.

The third prerequisite is understanding the complexity of the phenomenon of homosexuality in Cameroon. In the ancient and recent history of our country, the term homosexuality has not always designated the same experience of sexuality. In the past and today, homosexuality may be practised as a sexual orientation or a means of subjugating others for political, mystical or spiritual ends.

In proposing these thoughts on religions and homosexuality, I follow these three prerequisites and I use them as guides in an honest and realistic approach to understanding the question we are broaching here.

Religions are undulating and diverse regarding homosexuality

Today, when we speak of religions, we have a tendency to believe that the central pole of humanity's religious dynamics is that of Judaism, Christianity and Islam — the three Abrahamic religions. We think that the stances taken by these religions on certain problems are absolute and that what they say is an immutable revelation of God's thoughts and will. It is on this basis that certain virulent assertions against homosexuality in the founding texts of the Abrahamic religions are deemed absolute, without trying to find out what they mean and what their reach is. Not only as texts written in a historical context, but regarding the full revelation they contain in its most humane and humanising signification from the point of view of the fundamental values of human existence.

We forget that before the Abrahamic religions became the predominant tradition in the spiritual life of humanity, there had been religious dynamics of the orgiastic, Dionysian, carnally festive type, with periods of erotic exuberance and main cultural trends in which homosexuality was never a problem. We forget that in some cultures, the spirit of the times incorporated religion into an emotional paradigm in which sexuality as a place of love was lived by “equal” men, whereas sexual relations between men and woman were a mere constraint for procreation. We even want to forget that the whole Abrahamic ethic often evoked to condemn homosexuality spiritually never really defeated the orgiastic and Dionysian religiosities that it drove underground, where they continued to act as a groundswell movement in the religious lives of esoteric communities related to Gnosis. It is curious to observe that in the debate about homosexuality in Cameroon, we forget there is nothing new under the sun and that homosexuality has always been, in some cultures, an integral part of human life, accepted and valued by certain religious dynamics.

The weakness of this forgetfulness is to reduce religion to the dominant spiritual formations during a given period in human history and

to render this domination absolute as if it were a revelation from God. Today, we are witnessing the cultural weakening of these dominant religions and their reinterpretation according to the new spirit of the times which is that of the westernisation of the world through globalisation. Now, this westernisation is no longer associated with the long-dominant religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It declares itself to be post-religious, at the heart of a postmodernity whose basic structures, to use the words of Michel Maffesoli, lead to a new paganism very close to the orgiastic and Dionysian religiosities, a framework in which homosexuality is no longer a problem and once more becomes a visible cultural practice that is accepted and acknowledged within a new cultural paradigm.

When, within this new paradigm which includes sexual experience, we have recourse to the former Abrahamic domination to handle homosexuality, we are mistaking the era and using the wrong paradigm. Today, the Abrahamic tradition has lost its normative power over the spirit of the age. It can no longer, spiritually speaking, be purely and simply evoked like the benchmark for assessing sexuality and its practices in the world. We must take note of this cultural element and understand that as long as the westernisation of the world continues through globalisation, judging problems on the basis of Abrahamic norms will not be the most appropriate way of understanding certain practices such as homosexuality. This is a factual judgment and not a value judgement. What I mean is that even before we ask the question of whether or not religions are for or against homosexuality, we must be aware of the cultural context and of whether or not the question itself is relevant or fruitful.

In the light of these considerations I can give my first baseline regarding the relations between religions and homosexuality. This baseline is the following: in the current context of Neopagan spiritual domination, homosexuality does not pose any problems. Homosexuality is a cultural fact that spiritual Neopaganism, in its most positive sense, supports, glorifies and separates from the old Abrahamic paradigm. To fail

to grasp this and continue to oppose sexual practices by quoting the religions of the Book, is tantamount to pedalling in mid-air. The Abrahamic dogs may bark, but the caravan of pagan-erotic globalisation will pass. I take note of this before I ask the question of whether this situation is good for humanity or not.

I also take note of another phenomenon. Even within the Abrahamic interpretations, the radical line of condemning homosexuality is increasingly losing ground and backbone. If I stay within the confines of theological debate in Churches in the West and increasingly in Africa (in South Africa, for example), and the changing mentalities in Islam and Judaism, I have the feeling that today we are witnessing the rediscovery of the distinction between the fundamental intuition of a religion and the legal and peripheral stances taken on a given social issue. What I mean is, currently we understand that the profound force of religion is to build a world of love and human solidarity beyond the burden of the violence that destroys the humane. If this is the fundamental, we should look at homosexuality not from the point of view of the assertions of such and such a sacred verse, but as a way of being, of living and assuming one's sexuality without destroying the humanity of the other in any way. To state this in Christian terms, there is a kind of new spiritual awareness that states that God will not judge us on whether we are homosexual or heterosexual, but on the strength of our love and commitment to making our world a world based on the values of love, generosity, solidarity and human authenticity. This is at the heart of the fundamental spirituality of the Abrahamic religions, that believers will increasingly discover and that will enable them to understand that in a Neopagan context, a spiritual combat must be waged on the fundamental requirements of faith instead of losing oneself in the periphery of problems which are not problems at all for faith.

This being said, I can now express my second baseline regarding the relations between religions and homosexuality. This line consists in stating that today, even under an Abrahamic religious regime, there is no basic spiritual problem, except for fundamentalists and extremists

who want to fight rearguard actions, on which public opinion can see there is no reason to mobilise moral or spiritual energies. When I compare the indignation aroused by the issue of paedophile priests and the global indifference about the choice of sexual orientation, I understand that the agitation in Cameroon around homosexuality is not spiritual in nature and it should not be conceived of as part of the framework of the relations between religions and homosexuality. The problem lies elsewhere and it should be discussed and approached in its veritable situation.

The problem is elsewhere

When some Christians and Muslims in Cameroon take a stance against homosexuality in the name of their faith, they are not always evidencing powers of discernment. Or, to be more precise: they do not see where the real combat that should be waged in the name of faith lies. In Cameroon, the basis of the problem is not whether or not we have the spiritual right to be homosexual as an emotional orientation. On this point, “the Mass is ended”, so to speak. I don’t believe I will ever meet a Cameroonian whose emotional orientation is homosexual and who is suffering the inner torments of a sinner fearing hellfire. Even though he may have difficulties asserting his identity visibly in society, he already knows that mentalities are changing and that the erotic Westernisation of the world is in his favour, in the more or less short term. He also knows that theologians and men of the Church no longer have the same interpretation of the scriptures and this shows an uncertainty which also benefits him. He also knows that Cameroon legislation is hypocritical on the subject of homosexuality and that some lawmakers are themselves of a homosexual erotic orientation, or at least bisexual, which is already a significant choice.

If such is the situation, the problem should be moved from the religious field to be considered a socio-political choice. What poses a prob-

lem is that in Cameroon, homosexuality has become a problem of domination and violence. It is displayed as a power principle that condemns those who are not of a homosexual orientation to submit to practises they disapprove of. Thus we create subsistence homosexuals, homosexual playthings of the powerful, or homosexuals who experience the practise as pure and simple rape, in the context of new esoterisms or political-mystical-spiritual cooptation. It is when homosexuality becomes violence and erotic slavery, as is the case in Cameroon today, that it must be combated spiritually. In this case, it is not a particular sexual orientation that is being combated, but the denial of the right to liberty, dignity and a peaceful human life.

On the basis of this analysis, I would now like to give you the third baseline of my thoughts on the relations between religions and homosexuality. I think that faith in God is a liberating force and should commit itself to combating not for or against homosexuality, but in favour of the liberation of the men and women who are today condemned to sexual slavery in an orientation not freely chosen. As this is the real fight, it should be dissociated from the confusion that reigns today between homosexuality and sexual slavery. To the extent that erotic neopaganism is incapable of understanding this distinction and favours the amplitude of slave homosexuality, it poses a problem and should be combated as a betrayal of the human.

The combat I recommend takes the form of in-depth education of the faithful and, beyond this, of the population towards an understanding of homosexuality, with the ambition of clearly discerning, within this issue, the instrumentalisation of homosexuality, which should be denounced and condemned, and what is of the order of a sexual orientation, which should be understood. People whose sexual orientation is homosexuality are none the lesser for it. As such, they have inalienable rights that must be protected. To the extent that mentalities are not yet mature and the social and legal environment bends under the yoke of multiple burdens, such education on tolerance is far from easy. It is a long-term process which is demanding in terms of both methodology and contents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to state clearly that the problem homosexuality poses in Cameroon should not be approached from a falsely religious angle, in factitious and specious antagonisms between religions and sexual orientations. It is a problem of liberation. And it must be approached today in this socio-political dimension that addresses the human conscience in its entirety and not just religious conscience. If we want to use religious arguments to reject homosexuality altogether, *divine criteriology* forces us to distance ourselves from such a manipulation of religion and re-assert the basic option of the power of love as a fundamental ethical intuition to understand what humanity's religious dynamics should really be used for. When, on the other hand, we remain motionless and indifferent to slavery disguised as homosexual practices, that same divine criteriology obliges us to engage the spiritual powers of our religious faith to defend the human. Such is, in our opinion, the relation between religions and homosexuality in Cameroon today.

Douala, 19th October 2011

DIRECTION GENERALE: B.P. 1256 Bafoussam-Cameroon

Phone (237) 33 44 66 68; Fax (237) 33 44 66 69; 99 91 10 14; 77 88 00 03

Email: cipcre.dg@cipcre.org

Website: <http://www.cipcre.org>

Divide and Rule

*By Nicole Poissonier**

“Divide and Rule” — a very ancient but still effective maxim for those who wish to maintain power and exert influence in the world. The propaganda of distinction, division and exclusion has been the source of wars, killings and massacres which first and foremost profited its proponents. In the meantime, the population, exacerbated by suspicion and hatred, no longer recognises the extent to which it is used, manipulated and even worse: the extent to which it could have a better life by resisting such an ideology and cohabiting in peace. Along with its partners, EIRENE International Christian Service for peace contributes to the struggle against divisive tactics with weapons such as dialogue and mediation.

The Southern part of South-Kivu, Fizi territory, has been the cradle of two wars in DRC and is still today the arena of ethnic hatred propagated by certain warlords. One of EIRENE’s partners, the Peace Actions Coordination Committee (CCAP)¹ has elected to fight exclusion here and work towards peace, good cohabitation, informing the population and counteracting manipulation.

¹ The experiences related here took place during the period from 2008 to 2010 or were collected from CCAP member organisations.

* The author: Dr Nicole Poissonier has been working for EIRENE International within the framework of the Civil Peace Service in DRC since 2008. Until 2010, she was an advisor to the partner organisation CCAP and accompanied processes initiated by them, to establish dialogue for the demobilisation of armed groups. Currently, Nicole Poissonier is working in the town of Bukavu in Eastern DRC where she advises two Congolese NGO’s, OGP and PAD, in promoting the self-organisation of people in three mining areas and in their engagement to improve the management of mineral resources.

During the recurring wars, especially in Eastern DRC, the main conflicts were between the Babembe and Banyamulenge communities who fought each other in the Fizi-Itombwe regions. After the war, the two communities were so divided it was difficult for them to communicate. In this atmosphere, in 2002 the CCAP took the initiative of creating a network of NGOs and Churches to rebuild trust between the different communities. Starting with themselves and to give more weight to their prayer, all activities were conducted in mixed synergy, incorporating the two communities. In the Executive Secretariat, as in the Board of Administration, the two communities work together.

This initiative was taken by two organisations who were able to rally 15 founding members; the entourage of the CCAP was initially astonished by this cooperation and people did not believe it could last. To lead the two communities towards dialogue, several meetings had to be organised in Nairobi, on “neutral” ground. The founding members at that time were even accused of being traitors for conversing with “the enemy”. Even today, some people would still prefer to see the CCAP fail and be dissolved. The frequent meetings and discussions around pacification strategies nonetheless created bonds between the members of the communities. This exercise and experience of dialogue within the network also guides the CCAP in its activities that consist in facilitating, reinstating or improving dialogue between the communities.

Conflicts within and between communities remained after the official end of the war and led to segregation and discrimination. Armed groups were set up everywhere for what was deemed self defence and are still operational today. These groups try to voice their interests through force. In the absence of personnel from the state and local authorities that care about the population, these groups succeed in cooperating with certain political personalities who seek their own profit and therefore inflict their actions on the population. For example, the water line from the Moyens Plateaux of Bibokoboko that supplies the town of Baraka in the coastal area was cut off by several Banyamulenge armed groups. They refused to repair it unless their interests were taken into

account. While the positions opposing the armed groups and the government became entrenched, the people of Baraka, deprived of drinking water, fell ill and died of cholera. A first delegation from the British NGO TEARFUND was massacred during a mission trying to negotiate with the group. To put an end to the futile suffering of the population, the CCAP sent a delegation of some of its members, Babembe and Banyamulenge included, to advocate on behalf of the population towards the military. After several days of hard negotiations, the leadership of the militia groups ordered the water line to be repaired. The CCAP believes it was able to convince the armed men through its strategy of showing how dialogue and cooperation can sometimes achieve a goal better than power struggles.

In this context, even conflicts that seem to be purely within families are instrumentalised to play the different communities off against each other. During the war, many people, including the heirs of the traditional chiefs of the region, took refuge in Tanzania or elsewhere. Their return to the country often creates conflicts, since their leadership position has most of the time already been taken over by a replacement from the same family. When the legal heir returns, the replacement does not want to give up the position claimed by the returning party. The fact that the local authorities have to approve the traditional leader aggravates the conflict, since they often take advantage of the situation by claiming favours from both parties by making promises to each of them.

These differences within a family expand because the opponents seek and assemble around them people to support them who then become opposing parties. In our case in Fizi territory, shepherds cross disputed areas of land when taking their flocks to pasture; this situation can therefore seriously affect relations between the communities. If one of the heirs has negotiated the passage of the flocks, another may refuse because he has not received a share of the payment. The shepherds come into conflict with these authorities and with at least part of the sedentary population. A seemingly ethnic conflict may therefore have its roots in a conflict of interests in which the parties instrumentalise the com-

munity dimension for their own ends. Following this analysis, the CCAP sent agents from member organisation SOCOODEFI², who ran workshops on the laws of succession with the adverse parties in three places. They explained to the population that this conflict situation mainly profited the authorities while the problems were entirely their own. But also that it was necessary to reconcile customary law with state law to find a satisfactory solution that could bring peace to everyone.

During the workshops, the team discovered that the young generation especially got worked up about the candidates but with no knowledge of the law. By letting the elders speak, we were able to learn of the rules of succession and in two of the cases, the heir to the throne was actually identified during the workshop. In one case, he was invested a few weeks later.

According to the population living in these places, the situation has become much more calm and they are subject to fewer demands for arbitrary taxes from the single customary chief than when there were two of them.

Another case clearly shows the mechanisms that can generate conflict between communities through a feeling of injustice being experienced on all sides. After the Ngovi bridge on the road between Uvira and Baraka was destroyed during heavy rain, the young people from the neighbouring village, Swima, built a footbridge on the same spot. This footbridge, which had become the only crossing, became an ideal place for making the population pay for the right of way. The young racketeers, certainly unhappy about their disadvantaged situation in Swima, and jealous of the good fortune they believed other people had, demanded a toll depending on community membership. Thus the Babembe, from the same community as the youths, paid the least amount. The Banyamulenge, reputed for their wealth in livestock, had to pay more and the Bashi, assumed to be wealthy traders and outsiders to the territory, had to pay the highest amount. This discrimination was supported by some

² Société de Coopération pour le Développement de Fizi

of the local authorities who, in the worst cases, demanded a share of the toll or in other cases showed their tacit acceptance. In this way, it became an affair of the authorities and not of the youths themselves who should have been taught better. Once again, economic interests were the source of what could very well have turned into a conflict between communities.

This complicity among racketeers and the authorities was dissolved by a meeting to discuss and inform, organised by members of the CCAP, FESA³ and CAF⁴ inviting everyone concerned and informing the hierarchy of their Sector as well as Bukavu and Baraka. Until today, this passage has remained free for everyone.

Another organisation that is a member of CCAP, SOFIBEF⁵, devoted a lot of energy in 2008 and 2009 to the reconciliation of women and girls marginalised in their community for having been associated with armed groups at some point in their lives. They and their children are often accused of every possible evil, and called “women or children of enemies”, “witches”, “impossible”, “trouble makers” etc.

Many of these women and girls were suffering from trauma due to the time they spent in a military environment, added to the rejection they experienced when they returned to a host environment or back home. Most of them were fixated on the idea of vengeance and counter-violence as a way to free themselves and therefore unconsciously gave even more weight to the armed groups and their power to divide the population with their propaganda, in order to survive better themselves.

SOFIBEF therefore invested efforts in educating and raising the awareness of the communities about the situation of these women and girls which they found themselves in involuntarily. But also about the obligation and responsibility of the communities to respect their rights. These awareness raising sessions in the form of participatory community theatre allowed members of the community to realise what they

3 Une Femme en soulève une autre/One woman lifts up the other

4 Centre de Coopération Alimentaire de Fizi

5 Solidarité des Femmes pour le Bien Etre Familial

were doing and change their behaviour of excluding the women. These sessions supported mediation between the women and girls, their families and their home communities.

Currently around 103 of them are living peacefully with their families and members of the community thanks to these activities. Some others, although they have not had the benefit of this assistance, have recovered their dignity and freedom in their community thanks to positive changes in behaviour and mindsets.

In order to give these gender activities a long term impact, the members of the CCAP work together with local organisations such as the “peace teams” who take care of daily work, including mediation between the families, communities etc. Often, these organisations also evidence the CCAP strategy of having different communities cooperate. Thanks to the work of these peace teams, in many villages on the coast, Banyamulenge children can live again with Babembe families during term time, as it was common before the war. These organisations also don’t hesitate to contact and talk with the local authorities, members of the armed groups, or soldiers from the FARDC if they have wronged civilians. The aim is always dialogue, understanding and reconciliation.

The CCAP, along with its member organisations, by its mere presence and example of daily cooperation, makes a major contribution towards reconciliation and restoring confidence in the population. Few organisations adhered to this idea of *rapprochement* in the beginning, but through time, many people have observed the work of the CCAP and have followed their example to boldly establish dialogue with “the other”. More and more organisations took an interest in joining the process and the network expanded to include 28 members plus a multitude of membership requests. Many of the CCAP member organisations now employ agents from the two communities.

Through the wide diversity of the members of the CCAP, united in the common goal of combating discrimination and fostering peaceful cohabitation, the network has the capacity to act on a large number of topics at the same time. The CCAP has pursued a multiple approach,

involving itself in the highly complex conflict situations of the region. Depending on the topic, experts are to be found in the different member organisations, people trained in conflict transformation, legal practitioners, political scientists, economists, agricultural engineers, pastors, etc.

EIRENE International supports this multiple approach work carried out by the members of the CCAP, financially, through skills transfer and through daily cooperation. The work context is complex, difficult and sometimes discouraging. The people who seek to divide the population to obscure their vision and prevent them from rebelling against structural injustice are numerous and exist everywhere. Through dialogue and *rapprochement*, we try to encourage people to extend a hand to others; we try to support them in handling their differences in a cooperative and non-violent manner and in resisting propaganda, rumours and manipulation.

CCAP Member Organisations

37^e CADC

3^e Eglise

5^e CELPA

ADED	Appui au Développement de l'enfant en détresse (Support for the development of children in distress)
ADIF	Association du Développement Intégral de Fizi
AFEC	Association des femmes Chrétiennes (Christian Women's Association)
AFIP	Association des Femmes pour les Initiatives de Paix (Women's Association for Peace Initiatives)
AJESS	Association Jeunesse et Enfant sans Soutien (Youth and Children without Support)

AMIPAIX	Association pour le Développement Intégré et Intégral de Fizi
ARTHUM	Artists for Humanity
CAF	Centre de Coopération Alimentaire de Fizi (Fizi Food Cooepration Centre)
CEADHO	Centre pour l'Education, Animation et Défense des Droits de l'Homme
CEEPACE	Communauté des Eglises Evangéliques de Pentecôte en Afrique (Community of Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches in Africa)
CEMVC	Communauté des Eglises Message de la Vie au Congo
CEPAF	Centre Paysan d'Autopromotion de Fizi
CEPROCOPE	Centre d'Etudes pour la Promotion de la Paix, la Coopération et la Promotion de l'Ecologie
CEPROF	Centre de Promotion Féminine
CEOOKAL	Entreprise Coopérative de Kalebelembe
FESA	Femme qui en soulève une autre
GASAP	Groupe Action Agro Pastoral
GEADES	Groupe d'Etudes et d'Actions Pour le Développement Economique et Social
HALTE AFRICA	
MINECO	
MINEVAM	
SEDI	Solidarité – Echange pour le Développement Intégral, Sud Kivu
SOCOODEFI	Société de Coopération pour le Développement de Fizi
SOFIBEF	Solidarité des Femmes pour le Bien Etre Familial
UGEAFI	Union des Groupe d'Etudes et d'Action de Fizi-Itombwe

Young Congolese in the turmoil of conflict

By *Tharcisse Kayira**

Young people have the future! But what kind of future are we talking about? The context in which children grow up has a great impact on their lives, for example growing up in the countryside or a large city, in the slums or in the upper-class neighborhood, in war time or peace, with loving parents or as an orphan street kid. The bottom line is that young people are still in the process of growing up and this means that they are not always able to think and behave independently and are thus easily influenced by the context and by other people.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) many youngsters grow up with conflict, traumatizing events, and a lack of basic human needs. DRC is officially a post-war country, but especially in the Eastern part of the country conflict between different groups are persistent. This is often conflict along ethnic lines, but considering the widespread availability of natural resources in the form of minerals in the area, economic interests continue to be part of the existing problems. Due to the overall insecurity and conflict in DRC, hundreds of thousands of people flee from their homes every year. Among them are many children and young people. Especially these internally displaced people (IDP) are vulnerable and lack access to healthcare, education and in most cases food and safe drinking water. Additionally, many experienced rape, see their family members killed and other atrocities. The government of DRC and the international community does try to control the conflicts and the resulting displacement of large amounts of refugees, but they lack the financial resources and capacity to intervene effectively. As is often the

* researcher and facilitator of the NGO ADEPAI in South Kivu, DRC

case, young people are most vulnerable and one might ask what kind of future will be in store for this specific group, that is if they survive the ordeal. One possible future in Congo is “employment” either as sex slaves or they are recruited by the local militia, for example the FDLR or Mai Mai, to be the soldiers of tomorrow. Particularly those children who lost their families are easily recruited, not only as soldiers, but also to work in the artisanal exploitation of minerals, abundant in the Eastern part of DRC. But even parents send their own children to work in the mines, to get a little income for the family or, as is often the case, to pay off debts.

Conflict occurs throughout the vast area that covers DRC, but there are some difference between the countryside and the towns and cities. Bukavu, for example, is a border town situated on the southern side of Lake Kivu, just a few minutes away from Rwanda. This town has a beer brewery, some medicine manufacturers, but mostly small scale economic activities. Here one can find schools, universities, and hospitals. Because of the urban environment, there is a significant amount of children going to schools. However, once the youngsters are educated, what will they do in a society that cannot offer them much but a struggle for survival? Here we have a generation of young people that is scarred by experience and hardship; nationals of a country of which the government cannot provide basic services to most of their citizens. In Bukavu it is not unlikely to find youngsters with a Master diploma working as chauffeur or security guard for \$100 per month, if they are lucky. Especially for the educated among the youngsters, returning to their parents’ villages is often not an option, because the opportunities there are to be found in subsistence farming. Feelings of insecurity also play an important role; the countryside is simply not a secure environment to start a life.

The young men and women in DRC are as much victims as they play a part in the current crisis. In other words they are targets of violence and conflict as they are perpetrators. In a context of vulnerability and poverty the youth of Congo are likely to be sucked in by conflict. DRC

is a society where it pays off to engage in illegal activities and violence, it is a way to survive. The failure to address young people can be disastrous for the future of DRC. Apart from providing basic human needs to infants and children, the young Congolese should be a specific target group of the national government and the international programs. The government and NGO's should provide alternatives and opportunities so the youth of today can have a real choice; either to live with conflict, war, insecurity and underdevelopment, or to take part in a movement of change towards a better future. In the last decades we have seen the power of young people who are the catalyzers in generating change, such as student uprisings all over the world, and a more recent example in the Arab world where young men have taken back the streets from their oppressors. In DRC this means young people can be the engine of change to play an active role in the promotion of a peaceful society, good governance (or at least better governance), and durable development. To ignore the youngsters, is to surrender Congo to the law of the jungle.

Entertaining, explaining, sensitising – a radio play promotes peaceful coexistence

SLADEA strikes out in new directions

*By Iris Liethmann**

What can be done about renewed violence in Sierra Leone? The small West African country is still struggling to recover from the consequences of a brutal civil war that radically affected the lives of its five million citizens between 1991 and 2002. True, the country has garnered high praise from the international community for its efforts. “Sierra Leone is one of the world’s most successful examples of reconstruction, peacekeeping and peace-building in the wake of conflict,” said the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon during his visit in 2010. But this peace is fragile. Particularly during the run-up to this year’s elections, the country has repeatedly seen high levels of tension and fierce confrontations between opposing political camps.

An increase in violent confrontations

This escalation of violent confrontations is alarming members of Sierra Leone’s civil society. “With only ten months to go before national and municipal elections, we are facing a herculean task,” says Shecku K. Mansaray, executive secretary of SLADEA. There are clearly good reasons for active engagement in the attempt to ensure peaceful elections. However, it is far from easy to inform and educate people in a society in which three out of four people cannot read or write.

* CPS peace worker, journalist, SLADEA, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Radio, the most popular and accessible medium

Radio offers an important medium in this respect, not only because Sierra Leoneans are enthusiastic listeners but because in many parts of the country radio represents the only source of information. This situation has given rise to a unique project: the development and production of a radio play devoted to the theme of peace. It is only the third radio play to be produced in Sierra Leone. Its uniqueness derives in large part from the fact that it is not the work of a single author but of thirty participants, who spent six days almost continuously working on their story — and in the process learned a great deal about radio.

Collaboration with EED partners on location

In collaboration with the EED (Church Development Service) partner Culture Radio and led by members of the Freetong Players International, a popular and internationally renowned music and theatre group, participants from all over the country learned how a radio play is conceived, developed and produced.

“Konkoromah”

So far four episodes have been produced of “Konkormah”, the title of this collective production, which roughly translates as “confusion”. The setting for the series is a village community that mirrors Sierra Leonean society as a whole: violence, corruption, girls who are sold to village elders and politicians whose only goal is winning the next election form the background to the story told by the radio play. “Our aim is to use the experiences of participants as the basis of the plot. This allows us to take fundamental situations from the life of the society and present them in a form that employs burlesque, humour and wit,” explains Charlie

Haffner, founder of the Freetong Players International. “If they are to be encouraged to reflect, listeners need to be able to identify with the story, which means it has to be authentic and immediate.”

From village square to radio studio

Apart from providing entertainment, theatre in Africa has a social and didactic function and is used as a means of stabilizing communities. In many dramatic productions the entire community is drawn into the theatrical event. “Konkoromah” continues this tradition while also employing the tools offered by modern technology. The play deals with everyday grievances and the main characters are clearly defined types. It explores characteristic forms of behaviour, needs and problems as well as ways they can be solved. At the core of “Konkoromah” is the issue of violence: how it breaks out, who is affected, what happens when no one calls a halt to it, what sort of cultural and structural conditions can easily give rise to it, and how peace and justice can be promoted.

Peaceful elections, a peaceful country

Currently radio stations throughout Sierra Leone are carrying advertisements for “Konkoromah”. Freetong Players International have also written and recorded a song to increase listener interest in the radio production. This title song begins with the line: “Elections or not, we’ve had enough of ‘Konkoromah’ and violence.” From 1 March, “Konkoromah” will be broadcast nationally. After every episode, listeners will have the opportunity to discuss the content with the people who actually created and recorded the radio play. “This gives us a chance to talk to people and offers a wonderful opportunity to promote peaceful elections and peaceful coexistence,” says Shecku K. Mansaray. Charlie Haffner is firmly convinced that “Konkoromah” will be a resounding success:

“I know our people, and when they hear this, they will not want to listen just once a day but several times.”

Pride in their work

Participants in the project have worked for six days from early in the morning until late at night writing down their own stories, reworking them into dramatic form, thinking about the causes of violence and studying the results of peace research. The fact that they have all done their part to educate and inform has engendered a sense of pride. “I know now that if I want someone to listen to me, I need to tell a story,” says one young woman. “This workshop has opened my eyes to the possibilities of radio,” says one young man. Another young man wants to take his experiences in the project back to his own village and work with other theatre-makers there to develop stories around similar themes. And another young woman comments, “I’ve developed so much self-confidence through the workshop that I now feel I’m really ready to do more radio.” Everyone agrees that “Konkoramah” has to continue. “We still have a long, hard road to travel before we achieve a positive peace.” There is still a lot to do in Sierra Leone. When words are not enough to express happiness, pride and self-confidence, dancing is called for. And that is precisely what the participants in the radio workshops did at the end of their project. To be continued.

Youth and the Traditional Authorities: advocacy for dialogue between the generations, a prerequisite for harmony and sustainable peace

*Joint WDYP Article**

Taking youth into consideration and having young people take part in the management of traditional power are two major dimensions of the Intergenerational Dialogue project initiated by the *World Dynamic of Young People* (WDYP). The ultimate aim is to prevent social conflict and keep the peace in the traditional communities in Western and Central Cameroon. The purpose of this initiative is to improve social relations between young people and adults, in particular the traditional elders, through the practice of communication and active listening. As Caroline Claire Yankep, the President of the WDYP, repeats: “*constructive dialogue between young people and the traditional elders can considerably reduce marginalisation and the structural discrimination against youth in Cameroon*”.

All over the world, we hear talk of the necessity, urgency or even the obligation of “involving” the young generation or “taking them into account” in the decision-making process at different levels of our societies. This is intended to incite young people to take part in public affairs in their locality. In Cameroon, young people should aspire more and more to enter the spheres of decision-making: on the one hand, youth constitutes the largest category of the population; on the other hand, young people are the most underprivileged category and the worst

* Ronald Mueller, Caroline Claire Yankep, Piemi Njdomo Brigitte Milliance, Petchueko Tetang Leyauteys II, Marlyse Tchonang, Marcelle Guienjouo, Michel Fokou, Fabrice Pokam Wedom, Valery Demba, and Lenneke Tange Christiane

hit by unemployment, hardship and poverty. Paradoxically, the general impression that arises from their behaviour is that young people seem to have no interest in public affairs. We have the feeling that they are more interested in their own survival... We believe this attitude adopted by some young people is due to a lack of political culture. The reality of the facts is that young people are governed by the reflexes of a certain culture of submission or even domination, imprinted by a social standing in which youths are social juniors who have nothing to offer and who still have to be taught and given everything. To this should be added the fact that the generalised practice of favouritism has considerably discouraged young people, as the principle of equal opportunity is not respected. The most common opinion is that entrance exams to prestigious schools and the granting of jobs are never based on merit. Rather, they are obtained through a relation or are bought. This increases the frustration of large numbers who have no-one to turn to to express their dissatisfaction. Back in February 2008, the street was the forum for expression of the discontent of the young generation. Between opposition to any changes to the constitution and denunciation of the high cost of living, through public demonstrations young people wanted to press for their civil and political rights in the first instance, and their socio- economic rights in the second instance. The brutally violent repression they were met with all but killed their will and determination to become involved in public life. Fear of repression overwhelmed them, reinforcing the feeling of exclusion and of the negation of the legitimacy of their claims.

Within the framework of the “Public Investment Budget Monitoring” project (Suivi BIP), the *World Dynamic of Young People (WDYP)* started by encouraging young people to participate in the budgetary control process in the department of Mefou and Akono, to combat their marginalisation in the management of public affairs. The young people had ended up believing that subjects such as the State budget concerned only a precise category of individuals and that any framework in which such subjects were debated was closed to them because they wouldn't

understand anything. WDYP's approach consists in deconstructing this scheme of thought.

During its activities, WDYP realised that young people are under-represented not only in the upper echelons of government, but also in the social context relative to their participation in traditional power. The first capital lesson to be drawn from this is that *“even if there is no open conflict marked by violence between the young generation and their adult elders, this does not mean that peace reigns in our traditional societies. The conflict of generations that appears from the outset in the field of employment in Cameroon takes other forms when we try to understand in depth the relations between youth and traditional power in the West or Centre of the country, when it becomes all too clear that the peace in our traditional societies is precarious”*¹.

WDYP then examined the relation between young people and traditional power and observed that there is no real dialogue in the *chiefdoms* between the traditional authorities and youth. These distances disrupt the way the *chiefdom* operates in one way or another and consequently the possibilities of putting into practice the traditional methods of conflict resolution. In most cases, the traditional authorities complain that young men and women are arrogant, lazy and only interested in easy gain. For their part, young people criticize the dignitaries for being conservative, not listening to young people, and for shrouding themselves in myth and protocols to discourage anyone from trying to approach them. At the same time, there is also a limit to the possibilities for young people to become actively involved in daily life. Access to resources such as land is difficult, the methods of work in the fields are harsh and outlets for selling meagre harvests are remote and inaccessible.

The project for dialogue between the generations initiated by WDYP in four chiefdoms in the Central region and three in the West of Cam-

¹ Lesson drawn by Dupleix K.; Executive Secretary of WDYP, after the mission reports had been examined

eroon made it possible to observe in several localities that the situation in the chiefdoms creates a social context which does not offer many opportunities for young people's development. By law, the chiefs have no political power (in the strict sense of the word) in daily life; on the other hand, their influence can be immense, especially in the regions where there is a long tradition of traditional power. This is the case of Noun in West Cameroon.

Decree No. 77/245 of 15 July 1977 on the organisation of traditional chiefdoms² stipulates that the traditional chiefs are, in particular, in charge of:

- ◆ transmitting to the population the directives of the administrative authorities and measuring their execution;
- ◆ assisting, under the direction of the competent administrative authorities, in keeping the peace and in the economic, social and cultural development of their unit of command
- ◆ collecting taxes for the State and other public organisations according to the regulations in force³.

In addition to these tasks, the traditional Chiefs are required to accomplish any other missions conferred on them by the administrative authority. It should be noted that these responsibilities only take into account the interests of the administration of which they are the auxiliaries⁴. Consequently, the Chiefs who cooperate with us feel that they are answerable to no-one and have no orders to take from anyone other than the nearest administrative authority. As an impact of this attitude, there is a lack of opportunity and the subjective feeling of powerlessness in young people who would like to have been able to tell their chiefs about the problems and suffering they experience, as well as their ambitions and hopes.

² Decree amended and completed by Decree no. 82/241 of 24 June 1982

³ This last provision is obsolete since the head tax no longer exists. This also suggests an update of the legislation on chiefdom organisation.

⁴ A temporary or secondary help. Someone who provides assistance

Of the three chiefdoms, Mbankomo, Bikok and Ngoumou, in the department of Mefou and Akono, our survey showed that regular contact has been established between the chief and the young people in only one chiefdom. In this locality, the young people feel included in the work of the chiefdom. In the other chiefdoms, however, the situation shows that there is no real place for discussion between the elders and the young people. In one particularly striking case, all the young people take the chief for a witch doctor and avoid him as much as possible. As these results were compiled in the Central region where the system of traditional power is recent, WDYP decided to work on this topic some more, focusing on the Western region which has a long tradition and history of traditional power.

Action research in the Western region

The following chiefdoms were selected: the Bati chiefdom in Bamboutous department, Galim district, Bangangté and Bahoc in the department of Ndé and the Bamoun kingdom (Foumban) in the department of Noun.

In November 2011, WDYP carried our research to gather data on the degree of integration and participation of young people in the management of traditional power. At the same time, an initial exchange between young people and the traditional authorities was organised in the localities where links were not fully established between the two groups. WDYP's three teams engaged on the ground in the three chiefdoms mentioned above brought back quite different results from one community to another, but there were also several similarities and common points.

In the three traditional chiefdoms of Bati, Bangangté and Bahoc, the research was rather easy compared to Foumban. For in fact, at Foumban, the WDYP team found the following in place: One 1st degree chief, Eight 2nd degree chiefs and more than thirty 3rd degree chiefs. Accord-

ing to decree no. 77/245 of 15 July 1977 on the organisation of traditional chiefdoms, amended and completed by decree no. 82/241 of 24 June 1982, the traditional authorities are organised into chiefdoms, on a territorial basis. They are organised in three echelons: 1st degree chiefdoms, 2nd degree chiefdoms and 3rd degree chiefdoms. The 3rd degree chiefdoms correspond to the villages or districts in rural areas and to districts in urban areas. The 1st degree chiefdoms are created by decree by the Prime Minister, 2nd degree chiefdoms are created by the Minister of Territorial Administration and those of 3rd degree by the Prefect.

The research that aimed to improve understanding of the mechanisms of traditional power as well as the role young people play in the management of traditional power and consensus building in their local community gave the following results:

1. Different perceptions resulting from preconceived ideas and stereotypes

In our survey, young people, chiefs and elders were asked to describe how each group perceived the others. The perceptions of one or other of the groups were essentially negative. For example, the elders from one chiefdom saw the young people from the village as:

- ◆ lazy
- ◆ delinquent
- ◆ lacking respect for their elders
- ◆ perverted and doomed to depraved morals
- ◆ unwilling to engage in dialogue
- ◆ selfish, refusing to help their elders

When questioned about these answers, the young people from this locality literally refused to think about these impressions. They said they weren't true and gave concrete examples to disprove these perceptions. They saw themselves as persevering workers, loving their village and inclined towards solidarity. As proof of this, they pointed out the

fields they cultivate, the sports and cultural activities they organise, etc., without the support of their elders.

In another example, the young people from another chiefdom gave the following perceptions of their chief:

“The chiefdom is like a dictatorship; it has too much influence on youth, slows down youth projects with measures taken without discussing it with them”. Which is to say, “What is done for young people, without young people, is necessarily against young people”. However, the chief of this locality has a totally different idea of himself. In general, our research showed a whole medley of false perceptions, misunderstandings and suspicion that distances the young from their elders, because there is no communication, or there is poor communication or communication in one direction only. Following this logic, the groups are closed towards each other, maintaining a climate of involuntary exclusion, the logical consequence of which is mutual marginalisation.

2. Management methods with no reference to regulations that could open the way to all sorts of authorities and contestations

The traditional Chiefdom in Cameroon is integrated into the administration. As previously stated, the Chiefs are auxiliaries of the administration. But the management of daily life in a Chiefdom is not regulated by a government law. For this reason, the management rules are a mixture of the history of the chiefdom, and of the identity and personal stature of each chief and his elders depending on the reality in place. The research showed great differences in the management of the chiefdoms. Some were deeply anchored in tradition, with ancient rules, while others were very modern, with a major trend towards development. Organisation ranged from family type structure to State-like structure, etc. With this observation, we cannot easily speak of “the chiefdom” but rather of chiefdoms.

3. Conflicts of values continually and as an outlook

In all the chiefdoms, there is a continuous natural conflict between the chief and his elders, on the one hand, who follow tradition and, on the other hand, the young people, who bring modernity. But this is not to say conflict is always a bad thing. It can be a source of new ideas. The important question is how to settle the conflict to make it beneficial. We also noted specific cases in this respect. For example, at Fouban, there is a chief who told us that *“the influence of Europe and modernity are responsible for the bad behaviour of youth, who don’t want to work, but only want money without having to work for it and have no respect for tradition or their elders. The moped taxis are synonymous with all that. The young person only has respect for his moped”*. Another chief asked us if WDYP also finances projects, because the youth group in his chiefdom wanted to create a small moped-taxi company or cooperative and wanted to buy mopeds.

This chief realised that he can’t oppose modernism in his chiefdom, otherwise he will expose himself to the strong feelings of the young. It is in his interest to accept modernity and rather seek to draw a maximum profit from it and its impact. By doing so, he includes young people in the chiefdom and shows an interest in their problems. Thanks to this thoughtful approach, several young people have found work (driving moped taxis). More than this, this chief can easily influence young people on how to use their moped in terms of respecting the highway code in order to avoid problems with the police. He can use the potential of modernity to develop his chiefdom and at the same time, control the influence of modernity. This is possible for the simple reason that the climate of dialogue allows mutual understanding.

In general, we can say that the involvement of young people in many chiefdoms is not adequate and the dialogue between youth and chiefs is often poor or non-existent. There are many chiefs who do not see the potential of the young generation for developing their chiefdom and

there are also many young people who are not interested in traditional power and who do not see the potential of the chieftdom for improving their daily lives. But, almost all the chiefs and the majority of young people are motivated to improve the situation. This general observation put WDYP on the track of communication as a driving force for participation, with dialogue as the key to this communication.

WDYP's interventions in favour of dialogue and communication between young people and traditional power

1. *Dialogue*

The first trip down to the West was not only for research. It was action-research. Alongside research, WDYP directly planned a meeting between young people and their chiefs and elders. At Foubman, a meeting was organised for several chieftdoms between different chiefs and young people. Dialogue was sometimes controversial, but very fruitful. During the meeting, many chiefs discovered the young generation's reality. And the young people also realised the importance of the chieftdom in their lives. For example, the young people of Foubman answered the question of the importance of traditional power for young people as follows: according to the young people, the traditional chieftdoms are important for:

- ◆ orienting and guiding the young people
- ◆ as a depositary of culture
- ◆ sphere of assembly
- ◆ maintaining order
- ◆ resolving disputes
- ◆ instruction (history of the village)
- ◆ representing the administration towards the population
- ◆ honour
- ◆ individual identity

- ◆ empowerment of youth.
- ◆ maintaining culture
- ◆ indefatigable builder for youth

In the three chiefdoms, more than 40 chiefs and elders and over a hundred young people took part, discussed and sought together what was needed to improve dialogue. Hence the necessity of training the two groups on communication.

2. *Communication training*

The first need identified by young people and elders alike was to improve communication. To meet this challenge, WDYP organised communication training during the second trip to each locality for young people, chiefs and their elders. WDYP presented several communication models that can be used to identify problems and misunderstandings. WDYP also presented methods for improving and clarifying communication.

Other ideas for intervention within the framework of the youth-traditional power dialogue also emerged. For example, regular exchanges on the subject of the values of the chiefdom and their changes in the past, present and future, a search for “good practices” in the integration of young people into the chiefdom had the effect of mutual learning. Also included will be the question of improving the capacities of chiefs who are young. There is still much work to be done by WDYP in the dialogue between generations. However, there are real difficulties to be noted.

The difficulties

1. *Who is young?*

In Cameroon, according to the law, a young person is someone who is no older than 35. But in the exchanges with the chiefs, the statements they make give the impression that a young person, for many chiefs, is

someone from 20 upwards. For example, in one of the chiefdoms, a chief introduced a young elder with grey hair and we had the impression he was around fifty years old, but for the seventy year old chief, he was young. This corresponds to the common expression that says “we are young from 7 to 77”. For this reason it was always difficult to identify, along with the chiefs, our target group, young people under 35, who are the young people who are not very well integrated.

2. The position of young women

When we identified the group of young people who are marginalised, we found within this group young women who were twice marginalised and structurally discriminated against. Young women are marginalised because they are young and female. For example, when we found young people who were well integrated into the structure of the chiefdoms, they were all male and not female. In spite of the considerable efforts applied, the participation of young women was under 20%. For this reason, it is important to consider, throughout the process, how to improve the integration of young women. WDYP should show the example by building teams of 50% women and 50% men. Certainly, it would be quite difficult at the beginning to ask, for example, that a young woman run the training for chiefs of a certain age and for men; but this is a process to show the chiefs the potential of young women who could improve the development of their chiefdom.

3. The potential for dialogue between young people and traditional elders

The aim of our first visit to the West as part of this intergeneration dialogue project was very clear. Improve understanding of the mechanisms of traditional power as well as the role young people play in the management of traditional power and consensus building in their local community. The observations from our research were also clear. In certain chiefdoms there were different problems such as the low involve-

ment of young people in the management of traditional power, the lack of a framework for exchanges, lack of consensus between the traditional authorities and young people, poor communication and cohesion between the young people. This shows, as a consequence, the need for youth-traditional elder dialogue to improve stable peace.

4. The Chief as mediator between young people and the administration

In the research, almost all the traditional chiefs described themselves as auxiliaries of government administration. Until now, the Chiefs understood this as being an agent of the administration. When the chiefs understand the needs of their young people with good participation in traditional power, they can be mediators between these young people and the administration. The advantages are:

- ◆ the administration knows the problems and needs of young people and cannot easily ignore them when the chief is also on the side of his young people
- ◆ young people want to become involved in traditional power, because they see the advantages
- ◆ growing respect for the chief and traditional power when a majority of young people participate in and respect traditional power

5. The young chief is a “local capacity for peace”

In many methods for assessing a project within the framework of peace, we seek “local capacities for peace”. But what does that mean? “Local capacities for peace” are institutions, people, histories and all the local instances that can help to extend peace. In the WDYP project, we identified a very large and good one. The chiefs who are still young, under 35 years old. They combine two very important characteristics. They are young, which means they are familiar with the problems and the realities of young people. They are also familiar with their needs and the young chiefs are most often accepted by other young people. Secondly,

they are like chiefs, advocates of the tradition they defend. For this, they are respected by the older generation and by the elders, because they are chiefs.

These young chiefs are people who are respected by other young people and by the older generation and elders, and can easily facilitate dialogue between youth, elders and traditional power. In this respect, young chiefs have a great capacity to spread peace and when we work to support these traditional young leaders we can improve peace. For WDYP, this work constitutes peace advocacy at community level, where young people are considered as having nothing to contribute to the smooth running of the community.

The psychological consequences of the exclusion of street children

*By Prof André Masiala ma Solo**

After several years of awareness raising, information and training of the Congolese elite on the strategic importance of the use of gender as an approach and way of reducing inequalities between individuals and social groups, with a view to building a new balanced, peaceful society, the almost chronic magnitude of the “street children” phenomenon is a revealing sign that an educational project is still falling short of achieving the desired effects.

It is not our intention here to present a midterm assessment of this gender capacity-building project, in which a large number of national and international organizations have invested their efforts. As contributors to the national effort to manage the phenomenon of “street children” in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1986, we merely wish to sketch, as an illustration, the psychological consequences this scourge has on individuals and the community, following the exclusion this category of citizen is subjected to.

It is appropriate to state, in the first instance, that it is the law of difference from other people that creates, fosters and aggravates social exclusion. In this context, the multiple crises affecting Congolese society for several decades continues to widen the gap between the rich minority and the poor majority. This disparity has upset the balance of the fabric of families run by parents incapable of meeting their own subsistence needs or those of their children, who are exposed to homelessness, despair and uncertainty.

* initiator of the NGO CCEF in Kinshasa, DRC

It is therefore the vulnerability and precariousness maintained by politicians and practices of social inequalities that favour, to the highest degree, the exclusion of so-called street children from school, access to health care, apprenticeships and the satisfaction of even their most basic needs. In a word, they are excluded from well-being.

This exclusion is also a result of internal situations experienced by the children in their family microcosms, in particular physical and verbal abuse, sexual abuse, cramped accommodation and parental separation.

Combined with the living conditions in the street, these exclusion factors are sources of psychological suffering experienced by the children as atrocious subjective pain. This pain is aggravated by the difficulties of adapting and reintegrating society.

The psychological consequences that result appear as a dehumanising clinical picture which is reflected in the children's bodies, their thoughts, their emotional world and their behaviour.

Indeed, eccentric ways of dressing are associated with indescribable organic peculiarities which easily expose the body to outbreaks of infection and disease. Faced with the impossibility of accessing health care structures, the child's distress is such that it may even be fatal. Furthermore, isolation, sadness and loss of social usefulness slowly lead to depression.

Some children are inhabited by explosive rage, a source of aggression. Attracted by their peers, they live in groups and organise themselves in gangs called "kuluna" to break things, pillage, injure and kill people wherever they go.

The exclusion of which they are victims is also a factor in their loss of self-confidence and self-esteem and reinforces their isolation.

Faced with their perception of a bleak future, they nurture suicidal intentions which often end regrettably: in their disappearance or death.

These psychological consequences have an incidence on society. Once they reach adulthood, the young people who did not receive a

normal education join the ranks of those who can't read or write, a factor that increases the illiteracy rate in Congolese society. The phenomenon has reached the dimension of whole "street families".

We can deduce from this that the exclusion of street children engenders socially disorientated young people and adults. The social exclusion of these children has increased the delinquency in Congolese society and has increased child prostitution, alcoholism, drug abuse, the number of child mothers and parentless children.

Ills that reflect the image of a society in crisis that is crying out for courageous reforms to achieve recovery. For the children, the first society to be reformed is the family. Governments and associations have the obligation to reread and apply the laws governing the sector. School and Church must undertake reforms at the level of school curricula and educational and catechetical practices. This is the price to pay for peace and human survival.

Creative work with street children...

By Wassy Kambale Bahitirye

The Union of Young Artistes, Draftsmen and Painters (UJAPD) is a not for profit group set up by young artistes in Goma in 2005, working towards raising awareness on peace and development issues through the arts. Along with several humanitarian organisations working in eastern DRC, it produces and develops materials including posters, cartoons, plays and videos. UJADP has, in particular, acquired a very good reputation for introducing children to a variety of artistic disciplines: drawing, painting, music, theatre, dance and acrobatics...

Goma, street children learning art...

The “Art school” programme initiated by UJADP supervises the children in a number of artistic disciplines. It is geared towards teaching school children during holidays, but also children who live on the streets.

During the two month holiday period, every year around 60 school children take part in workshops that always end with an exhibition of the children’s work on subjects as diverse as “Children and non-violence”, “Children and HIV AIDS”, “Children taking part in decision-making”, “The heroes of DRC in children’s eyes”...

In January 2011, UJADP organised a special programme putting the spotlight on children living on the street... the programme lasted 10 months, and did not fully meet its objectives, but the approach used remains valid and can still inspire new initiatives.

* HEAL Africa, Goma DRC

Big Rasta – Little Rasta approach

In the town of Goma, UJADP worked with 15 street children, providing accommodation for them on its premises.

As it did not possess the necessary infrastructure for hosting girls and boys at the same time, only boys were admitted to the programme.

In the first week, the children learnt some theoretical aspects of music and drawing, and watched the performances of young artistes from UJADP in these different domains. This was an opportunity for them to acquire a taste for art, and to choose the domain they wished to explore themselves.

Every morning, from Monday to Friday, the young plastic artists and musicians opened their workshops at 8:30, the children from the art school helped them with their different performances, each in their own domain; for example, the children who chose music watched the young musicians rehearse, those who chose the painting workshop saw how the young painters handled their brushes, and those in the drawing group were able to witness the production of pictures and posters created by the young artistes.

At 11:00, the young artists made way for the children and helped them in their turn, guiding their attempts at imitation. The children then had hands on lessons which they discussed the next day in their various groups. These discussions focussed more on positive than on negative points, and so the children were all encouraged to invest their efforts and exploit their talent.

On Saturdays the work of the groups was shared in an activity called “Ocean rendezvous”.

“Ocean Rendezvous” is an amateur show and exhibition open to all, and the young people from Goma take part and show their artistic work...

On this occasion, the young artistes from UJADP and the children from the art school jointly showcase the songs, drawings and paintings produced in the course of the week.

In most cases, the children draw their inspiration from the street.

“Most of the songs they improvise at Ocean Rendezvous are from major Congolese artistes such as Werra Son, JB Mpiana, Koffi Olomide... songs they probably picked up in the street”, says Moise Wahem’s, young artist and music coach, who adds: *“the Ocean Rendezvous shows allow the children to understand that they too have talents that the public can appreciate...”*.

The “School of art for street children” programme set itself the following goal: develop the latent talents of the children in music, painting and drawing to allow them to feel useful to themselves and to society, in order to break the spiral of stigmatisation of which they are often the victims.

Several studies conducted on the street children in Goma reveal that a large number of these children have already stayed in a shelter or a children’s centre at least once.

There are around ten such shelters in Goma for children in difficulty.

During a survey conducted by UJADP at the beginning of 2011, one of these children revealed that the life of the centre was subject to strict regulations, preventing them from earning income to become independent.

The Big Rasta—Little Rasta approach was therefore an attempt to remedy this situation. It followed two main guidelines:

Freedom

Street children have a long experience of liberty, and when subjected to very rigid conditions, they feel uncomfortable. They should be offered a framework in which they feel at ease, a little as if they were at home.

The street children’s encounter with the young UJADP artistes in the art school endowed these children with a new identity. They came to consider themselves more as UJADP children than street children.

This is how the big Rasta-little Rasta concept emerged...

To show their respect for the young UJADP artistes, the children gave them the nickname of “Big Rasta”.

In their jargon, Big Rasta means big brother. They were the little Rastas, the little brothers.

At the art school, the little Rastas spent the mornings with the big Rastas, and in the afternoon, they were free. In the evening, they came home and told the big Rastas all about their adventures. The Rasta relation is one of fraternity, the big Rastas are considered like big brothers who work for the younger ones, and give them advice and lessons. They are a role model.

The little Rastas have a hierarchy, the smallest is the leader, miraculously, and is accepted as a leader. He tells the big Rastas about the demands of the little Rastas. He ensures order, and if a little Rasta makes a mistake or is insubordinate, he decides on the punishment, which is very often violent. One day, the big Rastas caught the little Rastas trying to hang one of their own, because he had wet the bed...

Learning through assistance

The little Rastas are for the big Rastas like companions, future masters to whom you should teach your secrets, who will perpetuate ideas and carry the torch.

The big Rastas have some small income-generating activities, producing banners, posters, paintings, portraits, etc. and the little Rastas help, for they know that these activities allow the big Rastas to earn money, to pay for their food and clothes. In this way, they have first hand experience of their way of life...

They then become aware that if they were able to do what the big Rastas do, they, too could make a living from art, and feel useful, by providing a service and receiving something in return. They acquire a taste for art, and begin to practice it.

On average, a big Rasta can earn between \$50 and \$60 a month for working on the production of promotional materials for NGOs or private organisations.

The limits of the approach:
a history of violence and responsibility.

The little Rastas have lived in a violent world: the street.

And in most cases, they only seem to understand the language of violence, encouraged by drug consumption.

In the evening, despite the prohibition on drugs that is binding for the little Rastas, they are constantly inventing new ways of hiding drugs which, unfortunately, push them to commit violent acts.

“One day, they took some drugs and then accused us of having hidden a magic stone that spoke to them from time to time, they smashed everything, and the next day they came and apologised”, confesses Justin Kasereka, big Rasta and artistic director of UJADP.

“For these children, violence is kind of a way of life... We are artists, we teach them what we know about art, but for the development of children like them, we need educators capable of following their moral situation step by step ...”, added Justin Kasereka.

Sometimes, when the little Rastas enrolled in the “art school” programme come back in the evening, they bring other kids with them, and UJADP can't take everyone in. The big Rastas feel overwhelmed, they have financial problems, the work they do generates less and less income, but the little Rastas find a solution, they are willing to crowd themselves into a small room that serves as a dormitory. Then they make small contributions and cook their own food, and so the big Rastas don't seem to be playing their role properly, the big brothers no longer take care of the needs of the little brothers. The little Rastas become ever more demanding, ask for more responsibilities from their big Rasta, and sometimes they use their language: violence.

How can we empower the little Rastas in a non-violent way on the one hand, and at the same time preserve the mentoring and authority of the big Rastas? In parallel, we have to resolve the problems of the continuing existence of this important work.

At the moment, this programme has been suspended, the children are back on the street, only two of them agreed to go back to their families.

What kind of future is there for these children?

To this question, Thierry Vahwere Croco, big Rasta and UJADP coordinator answers: *“At the speed things are going, we have to let fate take over, the street will decide...”*

The little Rastas repeat their wish to return to their art school, but aware of the lack of resources, UJADP is reluctant to start up the programme again. In spite of this, the big Rastas still have good relations with the little Rastas.

“A month ago, one of the members of UJADP had an accident, and was taken to hospital, I don't know how those kids found out, but they had a whip round and brought the patient a snack; I was really moved by this gesture,” Thierry Croco told us.

Despite the fact that the programme is on hold, UJADP has never ceased to start creative initiatives with the little Rastas, and a documentary film has just been made with them.

UJADP still jealously guards an artistic vestige as a souvenir: on the small façade of what was the little Rastas' dormitory, there is a painting on which they have painted a sun around which the children revolve. One can always hope, as they say. ... Who knows?

