



Grassroots-led strategies and actions for changing urban governance: A case of the Community Peace Programme in Mbarara, Uganda.

Tukwasiibwe Moses

Faculty of Development Studies

Mbarara University of Science and Technology

tukwam@yahoo.co.uk

This paper discusses the community peace programme in Mbarara Municipality as an avenue to strengthening grassroots-led strategies and actions for changing the traditional urban governance approach whereby the only body expected to address development needs and challenges faced by the communities was the Municipal council.

The paper analyses the operations, achievements, potentials and limitations of the community peace programme's approach as a grassroots-led strategy for changing urban governance. The programme operates in Mbarara Municipality, a fast growing urban centre with numerous congested slums. There is evidence of a governance gap where the municipal council cannot adequately handle all development needs of the people.

This local conflict management and local governance programme operates with aid of Peace Committees. Peace Committee members include anyone who agrees to help organize and run gatherings according to the Peace making and peace building steps and the Peace making guide.

The programme aims at building individual, organizational and community capacity, especially in marginalized and under-resourced communities by mobilizing local knowledge and commitment around questions of safety and security and supporting local projects that build social and economic capital.

Regardless of challenges faced, the community peace programme has greatly empowered the communities in governance of their own safety and development challenges through enabling them to find their own solutions to the problems they face, exploring their causes in depth, finding solutions and building partnerships with local agencies in development.

INTRODUCTION

The community peace programme was launched in January 2006 under the Faculty of Development studies with an aim of transferring academic knowledge into practice through partnering with neighboring communities in contributing to realization of their development

goals. This was done in collaboration with the School of Government of the University of Western Cape, South-Africa. The community peace programme as a conflict management and local governance model operates with aid of Peace Committees and seeks to build individual, organizational and community capacity, especially in marginalized and under-resourced communities. It does this, first, by mobilizing local knowledge and commitment around questions of safety and security (Peace making); secondly, by extending this facilitative problem-solving approach into supporting local projects that build social and economic capital (Peace building). The Community Peace Programme helps people change their lives and the way in which their communities work. Zwelethemba is the name of the community where this model was first developed in South Africa and thus the model is sometimes referred to as the Zwelethemba model. The model was first developed by a South-African based development practitioners and research group 'ideaswork'.

The community peace programme was adopted in Uganda through 2 the pilot projects in Mbarara Municipality in Kacence and Kizungu cells. The assumption behind adoption of this project type was that it would be adjusted with flexibility to fit the cultures and life conditions of the local people wherever need arose.

Cultures define the ways in which people live, plan and work together. What may be important to some people, may not be as significant to others. Women have different ideas and needs to men, the needs of the youth vary from those of the elderly. Culture also defines how people communicate with one another: who speaks out when and on what subjects (Boabab, 2003). The challenge was to create appropriate spaces for all these aspects to be integrated into the design of development interventions without over-burdening people or interveners.

Understanding the socio-cultural dimension of an intervention aimed and still aims at ensuring that development interventions are designed for and with the people affected, to incorporate and support their social values, behaviors and realities. In this approach to development, the people are the central focus and it is important to hear their voices and integrate them in the programme design.

The community peace programme is a form of Self-help intervention. The approach operates through encouraging an alliance /association of people with a common purpose to improve their situation by joint activities.

It is useful to differentiate between self help organisations in the narrow sense as formalised alliances, and self help groupings as informal alliances. The reasons why people organise in self help organisations are either economic (economies of scale, access to investment, markets, services) or political (protection/ cover, representation of interest) nature. The terms people's organisation, grassroots organisation, and community-based organisation are synonymous (Rahman,2003).

In the context of the community peace programme as a development intervention, the community peace committees are grassroots organisations established and/or maintained by target groups of the development intervention for the purposes of enhancing their productive and creative capacities. The Faculty entered into a partnership with the community in this self-driven initiative as an implementing organization of a development- project or programme.

The community peace programme approach works by mobilizing community members around questions of safety and security. The conflicts that exist among people that live together are used as a tool to bringing them together to address common problems that affect their day to day lives. It is noted that the most common conflicts arise from over congestion, poverty and inadequate access to social services such as water provision and public waste disposal. This is seen through quarrels and fights arising from such issues as

poor disposal of solid waste and garbage without concern for immediate neighbors, struggle for water at water sources, rent defaulting and frequent evictions (Community peace programme,2006).

Project Area Description

Mbarara Municipality is composed of three administrative divisions namely; Kamukuzi, Kakoba and Nyamitanga. The total population is 69,208 comprising of 34,191 males and 35,017 females. Kakoba division is most populous with 34,689 inhabitants followed by Kamukuzi with 22, 840 and the least populated Nyamitanga is 11,697. Mbarara Municipality ranks sixth among the 20 most populous urban centres in Uganda (UBOS, 2006). It is also one of the fastest growing urban centres in the country attracting new manufacturing industries and agro-produce processing factories. Banyankole make up the biggest part of Mbarara Municipality population at 80%, followed by Bakiga at 11%, Baganda and Rwandese at 4% respectively and others at 1%. The main dialect for communication in the Municipality is Runyankore/Rukiga. Mbarara district is generally politically stable and the mainstay of the people is agricultural farming, animal husbandry and commercial trade (Mbarara Municipal Council report, 2006).

The two pilot sites projects in Kacence and Kizungu cells in Kakoba Division of Mbarara Municipality were chosen because they lie in the most populous division in the Municipality which is to a large extent affected by high conflicts rates compared to other divisions. Conflict in this regard is a result of congestion which causes people to fight for their survival and that of their families' in a resource competitive environment. (Community peace programme baseline survey, 2005). The Municipal council budget is not enough to cater for provision of public social services like drainage and sanitation services, access roads, and recreational facilities to all the Municipal residents. The poor people who occupy the slum areas of the Municipality are affected most but the rich who live in affluent housing estates and well planned residential villages have all facilities installed at the expense of the individuals or as a matter of priority by the Municipal council. The community peace programme aims at empowering the poor communities to resolve their conflicts and to mobilize resources for grassroots led development through their existing knowledge and potentials.

Operations and Structures in the Community Peace Programme

Peace Committee Members include anyone who agrees to help organize and run Gatherings according to the Peace making and Peace building steps and the Code of Good Practice. The two main roles of the Peace committees are to facilitate the resolution of neighborhood disputes in accordance with a Code of Good Practice and agreed Steps in Peacemaking and to support appropriate community-building projects out of their Peace building Fund.

Members of Peace Committees agree to conform to the Code of Good Practice in the course of their work as peacemakers. According to the code of good practice, a peace committee is supposed to:

1. Help to create a safe and secure environment in our community
2. Respect the Ugandan Constitution
3. Work within the law
4. Use no force or violence
5. Take no sides in disputes
6. Work in the community as a co-operative team, not as individuals
7. Follow procedures which are open for the community to see

8. Gossip not about our work or about other people
9. Show commitment in what they do
10. Aim at healing and not to hurting

THE PEACEMAKING PROCESS

1. Members of the Peace Committee meet separately with the people involved in order to find out what happened or what the problem seems to be
2. Members encourage them to come together in a Peace Gathering, and discuss with them who else could be invited who might help to find a peaceful and practical solution
3. Peace Committee members (at least two, and no more than six) meet with all these people together in a Peace gathering
4. One member of the Peace Committee facilitates the Gathering (Facilitator), and another fills out the report form for the gathering (Reporter)
5. The Facilitator opens the Peace gathering by explaining why the people are gathered together
6. The Facilitator reads out The Code of Good Practice
7. Each of the people directly involved in the dispute is then invited to say what happened, while the others wait outside. The Reporter notes what each person says.
8. The Disputants are then all invited back into the gathering.
9. The Reporter reads out their statements in the presence of everyone.
10. The disputants may then briefly add to or modify what they said. The purpose is not to find out what actually happened but to find out how the participants see what happened.
11. All the people at the gathering are then given the opportunity to say how they feel about what happened and, if they were affected, what it meant for their lives.
12. The Facilitator makes sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak freely.
13. The Facilitator then encourages the people at the gathering to identify the root causes of the dispute.
14. The Facilitator then makes sure that the people present come up a Plan of Action to create a better tomorrow. This is the most important step in the gathering.
15. The People at the Gathering then decide upon a Plan of Action.
16. This Plan is written down by the Reporter. The Plan must make clear what everybody's role will be in making it work.
17. Everyone then signs the Plan of Action.
18. The Gathering then appoints a person to monitor the Plan of Action.
19. The Gathering is closed in a way that will show that people who participated appreciate and respect has happened at the gathering. This often is done with a prayer or a song or both.

Important to note is that the above guidelines are part of the report form which is filled in for each gathering. The form reminds the Facilitator and the reporter of the steps to be followed. The form must be completed while the gathering is taking place, not afterward.

The role of Peace Committee members is only to facilitate – they should not judge or blame anybody or to make decisions about the Plan of Action.

Starting Peace Committees and participation of the communities

Setting up a new Peace Committee is not simply a matter of teaching people rules that say do this or do that. To set up a Peace Committee we must get people enthusiastic about how Peace Committees can help them and their communities. In doing this, we sought to encourage the communities to participate and own the intervention as their own. Participation is a widely used term which is likely to be misunderstood easily. Participation should mean that people should be the actors in development. To achieve this, the planning process should be designed with the people, including all decision-makers. Merely consulting people is not enough (Boabab,2003).

It was borne in mind from the onset of programme that if one plans without participation of the target groups, plans which are drawn up and implemented to meet the needs of communities yet they have little impact and seem to benefit only a few.

Here are the guidelines followed in starting a Peace committee

1. **Gaining acceptance:** Getting local organizations and individuals enthusiastic about the idea of having Peace Committees in their community. The people brought on board at the beginning are able to help introduce Peace Committees to others. It was upheld as important to always seek and obtain their support and permission.
2. **Holding an introductory community meeting:** This was done by getting some respected local organizations' support at the onset. The major organizations were the local council in the division and the lower local councils in the respective cells. At this meeting, what the committee is, how it operates and what it does is explained with emphasis that Peace Committee members are facilitators, not judges.

If members of an already established Peace committee are available (for example from another area), they are called on to be part of this meeting. Invitations are directed to anyone who is interested in being active in a new Peace committee to come to a smaller follow-up meeting.

3. **Holding a follow-up meeting for interested people.** This is conducted to facilitate people to pro-actively participate
 - The people are further advised that anyone may join a Peace committee provided they are willing to act in accordance with The Code of Good Practice and the Steps and procedures in Peace making and Peace building.
 - The Code is used to create a discussion about the values that Peace Committees believe in.
 - The Peacemaking report form is used to show how these values work in practice.
 - At the end of the meeting people are invited to form a Peace Committee.
4. **Engaging the new members in telling others about the Peace Committee.** We get them to invite people to bring disputes to the Peace Committee. They should advertise that they have set up a Peace committee. This is done in a number of ways. For example:
 - By wearing Peace Committee T-Shirts and Caps.
 - Getting a local Newspaper to write articles about Peace committees.
 - Doing interviews with local Radio stations

- Giving out flyers, with the Code of Good Practice on one side and members' contact details on the other.
5. The first few Peace gatherings are if possible facilitated by a confident person Peace committee and each gearing is followed with a review and discussion.
 6. Peace Committees do not have fixed chairpersons. All members who are willing are given the opportunity to facilitate at a gathering or to write the report of the gathering. The Community Peace Programme helps with training and coaching on how to do this well.

The description of the community peace programme operations above shows that the grassroots people or the community members are the most important partners in this project. This is because they are given a choice to handle conflicts in their own way and to come up with solutions that they deem most appropriate with aid of standard guidelines in order to ensure fairness, accountability and transparency. The area in which the peace committees operate is urban and the involvement of people directly engages them in governance of their own pertinent issues. It should be noted that peace committees operate side by side with local council courts that operate under the local council in the cells. A Local Council (LC) is a form of local elected government within the districts of Uganda. There are five levels of Local Councils. The lowest level is the Local Council one (LC I), and is responsible for a village or, in the case of towns or cities, a cell. Under each of these numerous LC levels, the committee has the mandate to sit as a court and resolve conflicts that arose in the areas of their jurisdiction. The court system under the LCs is called the LC court and these courts exist at three levels of LC I, II and III (Local Government Act, 1997). The local council courts only look to solving people's disputes based on available evidence but the unique approach of the peace committees is that they seek to make peace by involving all people affected by the dispute in the resolution process and at the same time to use the causes of the disputes as entry points to understanding and solving wider social problems. In a bid to create synergy and complementarity, the community peace programme is studying how to best integrate the LC courts into the community peace committees or vice versa.

Peace Building as a key component that promotes grassroots perspectives needs and objectives

The most important way in which the communities participate in determining their objectives is through the peace building process. It is here that the community members participate in determining what plan of action to be undertaken in response to the identified causes of disputes in their locality. Facilitating the resolution of disputes through Peacemaking is only part of the process. A second part is to create Plans of Action to build the communities in which Peace Committees work.

The peace committees do Peace building by:

11. Thinking about the deep causes that have been raised at Peace gatherings.
12. Thinking about what the Community Surveys reveal about what people in their communities are concerned about.
13. Consulting in their neighborhood, through open meetings and discussions with interested organizations, agencies and individuals.

The steps to Peace building that enable this to happen are:

14. Peace Committee members meet to identify the needs in the community by holding a Peace building gathering. They invite people who could help in thinking about what people in the community can do to help themselves. This focus on what the community can do on its own is very important.

15. The gathering must list the things that can be done, in order from the most urgent to the least urgent.
16. The next step is for the gathering to decide which of these things they want to develop a Plan of Action for.
17. They must then create a Peace Building Plan of Action for them.
18. The next step is to decide who in the community can carry out the Plan of Action. This is something that the programme coordinator might have to continue working on after the gathering. It is important that the Peace committee members do not carry out these Plans themselves. Their job in Peace Building is to find the right people to implement the Plan of Action.
19. The Coordinator then prepares a Memorandum of Understanding between the Peace Committee and the people who will implement the Plan of Action. This Memorandum must make clear what outcomes are expected. For example, a certain number of plates of food each week for orphaned children, widows or prisoners, a certain number of performances of a play about alcohol abuse, a given number of school uniforms to be made for needy school children, etc. The Memorandum should also make clear how and when payments will be made.

Benefits sofar from the community peace Programme

The Uganda police are relieved of a substantial burden of enquiries and problems that are outside their professional competence but take up a disproportionate amount of their time and energy (in the first six months of the Kacence and Kizungu Peace Committees, twice as many matters were referred to the Peace Committee as became police cases requiring the opening of a case file. They are thus freed to concentrate on the policing activities for which they are professionally trained and this focus on professional effectiveness improves their morale and their relationship with the community.

Peace Committee members earn a modest but significant income through using their facilitating skills and their knowledge of the community in building peace. Each peace committee is entitled to at least forty five thousand shillings (45,000=) after successfully resolving a conflict. This is known as the peace building fund and the committee saves at least 40% as contribution for community priority projects while the rest is shared between committee members. They also gain confidence and self-respect through performing a service and having their skills recognized, developed and valued in the community.

The community has a practical response to conflict management in the community in response to matters such as theft and public disorder to unpaid loans, domestic disputes and neighborhood disagreements. In addition to this, the community has an improved quality of life, through an increase in peaceful and safe environment in the community and through the effect of projects supported by peace committees through the peace building fund.

Local government has a more stable environment in which to provide services like public health, education, drainage, road works and recreational facilities more effectively and with less disruption. Local government also has a proven grassroots organization with whom to partner in service provision that is guided by community priority needs which are identified from the peace building needs gathering organized by peace committees.

The relevance of the Community Peace Programme in promoting grassroots perspectives, needs and objectives.

The community peace programme approach prioritizes facilitating the peace committees to handle conflicts and look for sustainable solutions from within their means and within the

community. The rationale of this approach is that the intervention should only facilitate the community members to exploit their potential for self-development and do this within the means that are familiar to them. This is actually a channel that promotes grassroots perspectives through identification of own community needs and determining own objectives for self-development. The communities are allowed to determine the course of their operation with guided by the Code of Good Practice.

In a peace building needs gathering, the community members gather to determine the actions that should be adopted to counter the causes of the most recurring conflicts which have been observed overtime in their community. The people are also given a chance to analyze the causes of common conflicts and to propose what appropriate actions. The Peace committee and community members come together to identify the priorities for Peace building. Other people who could come in to find peaceful, practical Peace building solutions are also discussed with the community members.

The facilitator will encourage all participants at the gathering to consider the root causes of problems in the community and Peace building priorities that should be addressed in the next 6 months. These root causes of community problems are noted down and Peace building priorities collectively identified.

The participants are then encouraged to think about existing service providers in the community who can address the top three priorities identified in the Peace building needs gathering. Participants are once again invited to a follow-up Peace building solutions gathering to discuss service providers who may be supported.

The gathering is closed in some way that will show that those involved have committed themselves to the Plan of action that would bring a better tomorrow e.g. everyone at the gathering might wish to hold hands while a prayer is said, shake hands, embrace, sing etc. The community members take charge of the process of determining what to do to be done for community development through identifying priorities for peace building interventions.

Challenges faced by the community peace programme

There are a number of challenges that the community peace programme has faced since its launch. These can be categorized into administrative, financial and operational.

In the administrative category, the project was subjected to delay while awaiting approval from top management of the University and this in return delayed the commencement of operations. When this happened, the community members felt that the University was being unfair in delaying people who have been sensitized and are ready for action. This discouraged some of the community members who could not wait to start off. However, when the project kicked off, the community members were again encouraged to get on board and they did.

In the financial category, the programme's initial funding was withdrawn by the funders¹ claiming that delay in commencement of the project operation would negatively affect the accountability procedures. This was a blow to the sustainability of the project since this initial grant was accounting for over 70% of the project costs. The university managed to raise initial funds for the start and the project continued to operate but within a very strained budget. Currently, we are in a process of sourcing for funds to enable this project to operate in its full capacity.

In the operational category, we have had problems with elite community members who adamantly refuse to participate in this project along with other poorer members of the

¹ Conflict and Governance Facility (CAGE), South-Africa office.

community. This increases tension and suspicion in the community with the poorer accusing the rich of looking down on them and refusing to honor peace committees whenever they are called upon to participate in a case whereby they had a part to play. Since members' participation is voluntary, it is challenging to plead with people to participate where their input is needed.

Promotion of grassroots initiatives

To a large extent the community peace programme has promoted grassroots initiatives in the pilot sites in the Municipality. This is seen through the many cases that have been addressed and resolved by the peace committees. The committees have addressed marital cases, assault, petty theft, fights and substance abuse cases among many others and their effort is greatly appreciated by the community as very helpful.

To quote one of the peace committee members from Kacence, Mr. Mugume, 'The involvement of all the people affected by the conflict or dispute in its resolution enables us to find real lasting solutions based on people's deep understanding of the origin of the disagreement'.

There are of course other cases which they have failed to successfully resolve especially where one of the disputants opted to use other means such as the courts of law. Even when this happens, the disputant is fully advised of the challenges they might face in the formal courts. In addition to this, the communities have got an avenue to channel their needs in the peace building needs gathering sessions that are organized by the peace committees. The causes of the most common disputes in the area are identified, community needs prioritized and all this is done by the community members themselves. It is interesting to note that some of the information gathered here also helps the local government to come in and fund some of the proposed projects since they seek to address the communities' priority development needs.

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