



## **Increasing collaboration in peace building**

**By Jessica Nkuuhe**

*Paper prepared for a TrustAfrica web discussion on  
"Building Sustainable Peace," September 2006.*

### **Introduction**

The African continent is beset by violent conflicts that have devastated many countries, impoverished their populations, and contributed to their underdevelopment. Domestic and international resources in these countries are wasted on these conflicts, while basic services and infrastructure are not attended to, and the quality of life continues to deteriorate. If Africa is to give her children hope in this and succeeding centuries, it is incumbent on its women and men as members of civil society to join hands in activities that will mobilise communities to build sustainable peace and challenge governments to invest more in programmes and policies as well as actions that promote peace. This calls for joint and concerted actions.

Collaboration, the ability to work together for the common good, is very important if peace building work and conflict prevention are going to be sustainable on the African continent. For too long, many individuals and organisations have adopted the Eurocentric individualistic approach to work, anxious to demonstrate individual ability and take credit for any success taking place in the area, little knowing that real success in peace building lies in making strategic linkages, and no one person, group or activity can design and deliver peace on its own. Therefore, it is important for organisations involved in mitigating conflict and seeking to build sustainable peace to strengthen collaboration. How can this best be done?

In order for strong collaboration to take root, the organisations need to realise its importance. It cannot be dictated from above. Therefore, since organisations are only as strong as the individuals that form them, it is important for these individuals to understand the basis of sustainable peace building: the need realise that solutions do not come overnight, and therefore it is imperative to have a critical mass of actors prepared for the long haul, and ready to be interdependent in planning, programming, and implementation of the plans.

Collaboration can be enhanced through the sharing of knowledge, skills, and information and networking in order to strengthen the impact of the activities. It is important to realise the strength that can be derived from different organisations with different expertise coming together to solve a problem. An example is the coalition that Isis-WICCE, a women's resource centre based in Kampala, Uganda, brought together to contribute towards building peace among the scarred communities in the war-torn districts of Uganda. During the process of documentation, it was recognised that peace was impossible for the women

survivors of armed conflict unless they were availed with some psychosocial services, as well as treatment for the most desperate cases. The Isis-WICCE women activists therefore teamed up with surgeons, gynaecologists, psychologists and psychiatrists to design a holistic programme that dealt with the needs of the women survivors of armed conflict, and enabled them to acquire the skills to analyse the conflict they were beset with, and be able to mitigate and transform it. This collaboration has been ongoing since 1998, and has enabled thousands of Ugandan women to be at peace with themselves before participating in community peace building.

Collaboration can also be enhanced through joint lobbying and other advocacy activities. An example is the peace building coalition the women activists of Uganda have established to enable them to build the skills of other women to understand the international, regional, and national legal frameworks for women's participation in building sustainable peace. This coalition includes lawyers, media women, human rights activists and peace builders, and consists of organisations with different missions for the empowerment of women. It organises visits to the affected areas of Uganda, develops audiovisual materials and uses print and electronic media to transmit its messages. Right now, it is organising a peace caravan involving women of different ethnicities.

Joint retreats can also strengthen collaboration. These help in building teams and enable the evaluation of activities and processes in order to better plan for future actions. Regular interaction can help to lessen competition among collaborating groups, which, if not addressed proactively, can lead to organisations undermining one another and regressing into individual effort. It also strengthens the numbers and gives synergy to the peace building initiatives by enabling organisations to avoid duplication of effort. Each group brings its strengths and they benefit the collaboration. Such strengths can be in the area of diverse languages, advocacy skills, proposal writing, legal expertise, psychosocial analysis, social work, and many others.

### **Building a community of actors**

A vibrant community of actors that is able and willing to actively campaign for peace and against war needs to be economically empowered in the first place. A poor community will have many young people with little education and no jobs, and therefore with nothing to lose by going to war. Therefore, sustainable peace goes hand in hand with a level of economic development. There is also need to strengthen civil society organisations and other NGOs working in the area of peace building in the whole of Africa. This can be done through building their capacity to work in teams, as well as refreshing their conflict analysis, management and transformation skills.

More African universities need to be encouraged to set up departments of peace studies, so that today's peace activists, many of whom are driven solely by passion can be equipped with strong research and analytical skills. They can then continuously refresh their skills to run their organisations, projects and networks, as well as those in fundraising.

A vibrant community of actors can be built through participating in joint activities. These activities can be jointly planned and fundraised for, and their success and challenges can be jointly owned. Such a community should be able to manage conflicts, share lessons learnt in a transparent and non-threatening manner, and strengthen future collaborative

action. Peace builders who cannot manage the conflicts in their own organisations and institutions are only peace builders in name.

Most of the vibrant NGOs that are working in the area of peace building are women's NGOs. An effective community of actors in the area of peace building must of necessity consist of women and men working together towards achieving this goal. The challenge is on men to work more effectively in peace building coalitions. This is even more urgent as they make up the majority of the belligerents.

### **Support needed**

Peace building organisations and institutions have been active in the last decade, and are therefore relatively young. They need to be supported to strengthen their capacity to do effective peace building work and to develop effective networks. It is important for them to get support towards strengthening their capacity for research and informed analysis, as this will give them the ability to link conflicts with global politics and economics, and to understand those causes of violent conflict that are external to Africa. They also need skills in communication, writing, conflict analysis, management and transformation, as well as in advocacy, gender analysis, and information management. Many organisations, especially those in rural areas and small towns, use obsolete equipment that does not enable them to access timely and valuable information. There is need to assist such organisations to update their equipment, or purchase more up-to-date types.

They also need assistance to develop and strengthen their human resources to be able to act as effective watchdog institutions that can promote a culture of non-tolerance to bad governance and all forms of corruption.

Organisations and institutions cannot run on their vision alone. They need funds to run their activities and support capable staff. They therefore need to be supported in sharpening their fundraising skills, including proposal writing, as well as the management of funds. Many need financial management skills that are designed for non-financial managers, as well as the ability to monitor and evaluate their projects and programmes.

Specifically, there is need to support women to strengthen their organisations as well as make strategic linkages with men so that their efforts will reach the whole population. The men need to be supported to organise more effectively in peace building practice.

### **What donors can do**

Building sustainable peace is a long-term process. Donors therefore need to fund peace activities for longer time frames to enable them to take root and cause the desired change in communities and nations. They also need to support the advocacy activities of peace building organisations and institutions, and give them the necessary solidarity in their demand for policy change at the national change. Too often, donors have been known to stand on the fence and insist that change comes out of the activities of nationals, while at the same time they continue giving corrupt and war mongering governments the funds that enable them to continue operating.

Donors should also listen to and utilise the findings of NGOs and institutions and make recommendations to governments for peace promoting policies and programmes.

Donors can also assist organisations and institutions to fight poverty, corruption, and underdevelopment, which lie at the root of most of Africa's violent conflicts. Donors should support efforts of civil society organisations, institutions and government towards early warning and conflict prevention.

### **What Trust Africa Can Do**

The birth of Trust Africa is timely in the sense that it coincides with the African Union's attempt to explore African solutions to Africa's problems. Trust Africa should support the organisations on the continent to build their capacity to work in strong coalitions so that their peace building work can show impact. Trust Africa can also participate in the capacity building that is so necessary for the relevant institutions and organisations on the continent. In addition, it should join the efforts to deal with those causes of conflict that are external to Africa.

Finally, organisations and institutions working in the area of peace building will need to recognise the importance of interdependence and strategic linkages if they are going to be effective in building sustainable peace in different countries of Africa. They therefore will need to invest more resources in ensuring that they are strategic in their planning and action. They must mobilise support from the community level to the upper echelons in society, and cultivate strong relationships with one another and with donors to be to move more effectively towards effective peace building.