Mercy Corps

Youth and Conflict

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Mercy Corps believes youth are a force for positive change — the generation that can help transition their countries into productive and secure nations. However, youth are the primary participants in conflict today. The reasons they participate in conflict are multi-dimensional — they lack economic opportunities, political voice and a sense of belonging or connection to their communities. Often the only way young people can imagine changing their predicament is through violence.[1] In our programs, Mercy Corps catalyzes youth's desire for change into positive outlets. For example, in West Bank/Gaza, Kosovo and Kenya, we help youth create economic opportunities and increase their livelihoods. In Timor Leste, we help youth representatives engage the government around youth priorities. And we help integrate youth back into the communities in Nepal, Liberia, and Uganda.

Below is a sample of Youth and Conflict Best Practices and Lessons Learned drawn from Mercy Corps' programs, other agencies, donors, think tanks and researchers. The Best Practices and Lessons Learned presented below are divided into six sections:

- General Program Design and Implementation. This section includes advice on training, as it is a central part of many of our youth programs.
- Economic Engagement
- Political Participation
- Youth-to-Community Connections
- Youth-to-Youth Connections
- Addendum: Lessons from Our Colleagues

Mercy Corps Conflict Management Group (MC CMG) has also created an indicator menu and a Theories of Change document based on the same categories. This set of documents is intended to help with program design, implementation and evaluation.

---

[1] Urdal, H. (2004). The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict: 1940-2000.

General Program Design and Implementation

Apply a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Reduce Youth Participation in Violence

Youth participate in violence for many reasons: lack of hope for the future; limited economic opportunities; traditional structures that neglect the voices of young people; and broken ties with families and communities. These factors contribute to a sense of loss and a lack of belonging. Mercy Corps therefore adopts an integrated approach to preventing young people from joining violent movements and promotes a wide range of economic, public sector, and community engagement opportunities in our youth and conflict programming. For example, in Kosovo youth 1) receive economic training and are placed into private or public sector internships; 2) participate in community development projects with government leaders; and 3) receive negotiation and conflict management training so they can learn how to talk to their former enemies and work together on joint projects.

Promote Youth Leadership and Ownership

Young people need to take the lead in creating their own future.[2] Engaging young people in the project cycle will help nurture and encourage emerging youth leaders to learn, to lead, and to identify areas that may be of interest for future careers. Furthermore, inclusion of youth in project design and implementation provides youth with the self-esteem, connection to peers and communities and a positive self-identity, all of which reduce vulnerability to joining violent movements. The most successful youth programs recognize these factors and give young people a significant role in designing and implementing programs with the guidance and support of adult mentors. In Mercy Corps' Nepal program, young people designed community projects for which they raised money and subsequently built and helped maintain. By including youth in all phases of the project, Mercy Corps enabled youth to see themselves as change agents responsible for their future.[3]

Leverage Youth Interests to Teach Peace-building Skills

Where many conflict management programs fall short is in their tendancy to engage the easiest youth to reach—those in school and/or already engaged with their communities. The youth that pose the largest risk to instability, however, may be those that are difficult to reach for a variety of factors, including earning an income or lack of interest. For example, many youth do not participate in conflict management and youth leadership programs because they are busy trying to provide for themselves and their families. If increasing economic opportunities is a priority, youth will sacrifice participation in leadership and community-based programs in lieu of economic possibilities elsewhere. As a result, Mercy Corps offered stipends in places like Kashmir and Nepal to help young people remain engaged throughout the program. Mercy Corps has also found that sports provide a strong incentive for youth to participate in conflict management trainings. Youth in Liberia were much more likely to remember lessons they learned through sports and were much more likely to finish the training program if there was a sports component.[4]

Provide Youth the Skills to Successfully Transition to Adulthood

Conflict-affected youth often experience interruptions in education and later may be too old to return to the formal education system. At the same time, these young people often lack the basic skills they need to secure jobs once the conflict has ended. Mercy Corps works in a variety of ways to help youth successfully transition into adulthood by bridging this education gap and thus reduce frustrations and disconnectedness that

---

[2] USAID CMM (2005) Youth and Conflict Toolkit.

[3] Also see USAID CMM (2005) Youth and Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention

[4] Mercy Corps (2009) Lessons from Practice: A Post-Impact Investigation of Mercy Corps' Youth Education for Life Skills (YES) and YES to Soccer Programs in Liberia.

contribute to young people's propensity to become involved in conflict. We do this by working within formal education systems but most often through informal education programs and extra-curricular activities. Our post-conflict education programs include vocational training and life-skills education, such as communication, negotiation, public speaking and critical thinking. In addition, Mercy Corps developed a Youth Conflict Management curriculum[5] that teaches youth how to analyze conflicts, negotiate over interests, mediate disputes, and move towards reconciliation and forgiveness. This curriculum is the basis of our sports and conflict programs in Kenya and Sri Lanka. Additionally, to help over 2.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan restart their lives, Mercy Corps utilized Vocational Training Centers to provide training to over 3,000 students, largely youth, in trades such as carpentry, beauty therapy, computer literacy, and health work. Forty percent of graduates were female and over 400 program graduates continued their education to become government-certified practitioners in their new fields.

Consult Parents and Elders to Gain Acceptance

The transition to adulthood is very personal, but it is also deeply influenced by the attitudes of family and community, two particularly important elements in traditional societies. Youth, particularly young women, may look to these groups for permission to participate. Parents and elders may be wary that programs to empower youth will result in inter-generational conflict and that they may lose their status and power relative to youth. If these families and communities are fully aware of potential activities and see them as important and safe and not intended to disrupt social structures, then young people will be much more able to participate and fully embrace the proposed objectives. Furthermore, endorsement of youth activities by the community enhances respect for and self-esteem of young people. These factors will lead to greater sustainability for the projects in the long-term. Therefore, Mercy Corps consults parents and influential community members who often have a major say over their children's decisions.

Special Case of Extremism – Focus on Pull Factors

To combat youth joining extremist groups, program designers need to understand the decision-making process of the individual within her/his social context. According to James Horgan, counterterrorism programs would be more effective by concentrating on "pull factors": lures that attract people to joining a group (e.g., religion, group norms, ideology). This is in contrast of "push factors": forces or conditions that can alienate people or cause them to reject mainstream society (e.g., widespread poverty, high unemployment among youth, endemic corruption and elite impunity, vastly inadequate public-services delivery, or the existence of ungoverned spaces).[6] For example, a lack of access to other ideas and ways of thinking can lead to insularity amongst youth. When youth have no basis for comparison, the singular and direct views of extremism can appear attractive and worthy of support. Therefore, creating programs that introduce youth to other ideas and people different than themselves, such as Mercy Corps' Global Citizen Corps (GCC) program, reduces the risk of youth joining extremist groups. Mercy Corps also adapted these lessons in designing our Yemen program, where we pair young people with positive role models who can keep them involved in productive activities.

Overcoming Education Gaps

In Northern Uganda, where the LRA forcibly recruited many child soldiers and many young people were unable to go to schools for years, Mercy Corps combines life skills and entrepreneurial education with income generating activities to help youth develop the knowledge and skills needed to transition into adulthood. For example, Ocira Kenneth, a cheerful 23-year-old, used his newly developed market assessment skills to leverage a grant to cultivate land into a chicken- rearing business. The new income has allowed Kenneth to purchase urgent medical supplies for his family, as well as pay school fees for two members of his clan. In addition, he purchased two piglets in anticipation of future business endeavors.

---

[5] https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdl/cgibin/library?c=progdev&a=d&gc=2&cl=CL1.31.6.3 - CL1.31.6.3

Economic Engagement

Engage Youth in Meaningful Work

Many programs that provide youth sources of income fall short in reducing violence because they neglect other factors that drive youth towards joining violent movements. Youth are also searching for a sense of purpose and belonging, which can be derived from doing meaningful work that helps their communities.[6] Violent movements often provide youth with both livelihoods and a larger purpose. In Kosovo and West Bank/Gaza, Mercy Corps reduces this risk by providing youth opportunities to engage in meaningful work — employment in areas that provide not only a livelihood, but give youth a positive identity — such as teaching, medical professions, government, accounting and starting their own businesses.

Provide Young People with Practical Experiences

It is not enough to provide youth with financial resources to help increase their income. They need practical experiences, often via internships and apprenticeships, to help them develop the skills to leverage economic opportunities into long-term income generation. In Kosovo, Mercy Corps helps young people gain job skills, work experience, and employment opportunities through internships and apprenticeships that pair youth leaders with local entrepreneurs and public sector employees in the fields where youth believe they can make a difference. Mercy Corps has thus far placed nearly 1,000 youth in internships, with more than 200 in full-time employment.

Conduct Market Analyses with Youth in Mind

According to Making Cents International's *State of the Field in Youth Enterprise, Employment, and Livelihoods Development, 2008,* many market and value chain assessments do not take into consideration the type of sectors and opportunities that are appropriate for youth. Consequently, they may receive vocational training or be encouraged to start small businesses that are unlikely to succeed, breeding a greater sense of hopelessness and frustration. To overcome this problem, at a minimum, it is critical to interview youth when conducting market assessments. For a more participatory process, youth can help conduct the market assessment. This will also help youth develop creativity and entrepreneurship, both of which are necessary in a changing environment. The Women's Commission's *Market Assessment Manual for Vocational Training Providers and Youth*[7] provides tools for conducting participatory market assessments.

For more best practices on youth economic engagement, see Mercy Corps' *Youth Entrepreneurship and Workforce Development Tip Sheet.*[8]

Kicks for Cash!

One of Mercy Corps Kenya's inter-ethnic football team under LEAP Sport demonstrated that combining market analysis, entrepreneurial spirit, and teamwork can create significant opportunities for youth across conflict lines. In Eldoret East district, the Munyaka Football Club capitalized on the hysteria surrounding "Africa's" World Cup by applying for seed money to establish a DSTV viewing venue. By charging minimal entrance fees, the team was able to take in approximately $50/day over the course of the tournament. Now well established as an entertainment venue in the community, the group has expanded beyond sports to showing movies as well. LEAP Sport training on profit management, reinvestment, and savings will enable the business to continue flourish into the future.

---

[6] World Youth Report 2005: http://www0.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wpayconflict.htm

[7] Mercy Corps was one of the contributing organizations in the development of this tool.

[8] Youth Entrepreneurship and Workforce Development Tip Sheet: https://clearspace.mercycorps.org/docs/DOC-11200

Photograph: Miguel Samper for Mercy Corps

Political Participation

Increase Youth Voice at the Local and National-level

Although young people constitute the majority of the population in transitional and fragile states, young people have few constructive avenues to influence local and national governments. As a result, governments do not design policies with youth in mind. Young people also tend to see many governments as corrupt, beset by nepotism and unaccountable to the people they represent. Consequently, this can lead to youth dissillusionment, an avoidance of political involvenemt, and/or increased vulnerablity to recruitment by violent movements. For example, youth who do not feel represented or supported by any political party are two- to three-times more likely to join violent movements, voluntarily or involuntarily.[9] By providing youth with the capabilities and opportunities to engage with governments, Mercy Corps helps young people address their concerns and grievances. In Timor Leste, Mercy Corps reduced youth participation in violence by helping over 5,000 youth representatives in building ties to their community members and local council members. Young leaders participated with government officials in joint workshops on civic educaiton,, which fostered strong relationships after years of isolation. In addition, youth received mentoring and small grants that helped them apply their newly developed skills toward implementing community development activities with the support of local councils. At the end of the program, youth reported that they met with local officials more frequently and vocalized increased confidence in working with government officials, sharing that the government was more apt to listen to youth concerns.

Teach Youth that Politics Involves Building Consensus

Good governance is about incorporating multiple opinions and interests into sound policy. However, many feel if they won an election, their interests should prevail and they can disregard the interests of others. This tendency is particularly strong when there are religious and ethnic divisions. With few avenues for a constructive exchange of ideas, youth become frustrated and believe that violence is the way to influence others, as we saw in the post-election violence in Kenya. Mercy Corps' Global Citizen Corps' (GCC) program

---

[9] Humphreys, Macartan and Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War*, American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 52, No. 2, April 2008, p.447. http://www.stanford.edu/~jweinst/files/AJPS_2008.pdf

helps young people learn to discuss issues with people from different backgrounds and who may see the world differently than themselves. Dialogue between GCC participants within and across countries bridges geographic and cultural divides, challenges stereotypes, and supports information-sharing and relationship-building. Mercy Corps will adapt elements of GCC to help young people build a sense of shared national identity in upcoming programs in Kenya and Kosovo.

Build Trust between Government and Youth

One of the issues that fuels conflict in many societies is young people's distrust in the government. In youth assessments in Yemen, Kosovo, Kenya, Kashmir and Tajikistan, one of young people's top frustrations is the amount of government corruption. Mercy Corps helps bridge this divide by providing young people opportunities to work with governments on community projects. Working with youth groups in Tajikistan to implement community projects, we helped increase youth dialogue with the local government. Through these dialogues, youth designed and implemented projects that provided water to nearly 4,000 individuals and electricity to 1,900 individuals. Additionally, police officials from the Tavildara region reported a 70% decrease in crime during the project, with fewer reports of youth involved in conflicts. In Kosovo, as a result of working with the government on community projects, youth's trust in government rose 63%.

Local Governance through Youth Municipalities

In Lebanon, Mercy Corps is setting an example of how transparent and accountable local governance reduces young people's frustrations with government. The *Local Governance through Youth Municipalities* project seeks to inspire the next generation of leaders to create political systems free from social, economic and political corruption and favoritism. The project cultivates youth leadership and sense of identity by engaging 150 young people in five areas of Lebanon to undergo an election process to create and manage five Youth Municipalities. The Municipalities function as "shadow" city councils and develop comprehensive agendas for youth in their communities.

Youth-to-Community Connections

Strengthen Youth Networks

Personal relationships play an important role in shaping young people's identities, convictions, and belief systems. Mercy Corps helps young people develop mentoring relationships with positive role models through internships, apprenticeships, and enhancing their social networks. Through mentoring and engagement with local councils and community groups, participants develop relationships and networks that keep them grounded in their communities and reduce their vulnerability to recruitment from violent groups or influence from other negative forces. In Nepal, Mercy Corps found that by incentivizing young people to reach out to the community for support on projects, they were able to develop connections to other youth, their community and government, and in turn, were less susceptible to recruitment from violent groups.[10]

Include the Community as Beneficiaries in the Reintegration Processes

Reintegration of child soldiers into their communities after war is much more successful if local community members can draw direct benefits from the programs.[11] For example, in Liberia, youth participated in a community project to run and maintain a guesthouse. Young people made bed bases out of local materials and mattresses were bought with community funds. The guesthouse provides a regular source of income for the community and funds generated from the project have been loaned to community members to pay hospital fees. The guesthouse is even serving as a temporary classroom.

Support Youth in Positively Contributing to their Communities

Youth often are significant proportion of the combatants in many conflicts. One of the reasons youth are attracted to violent movements and violence is that young people can often attain feelings of respect and status that they cannot find in other activities or relationships. Youth-led community service projects provide opportunities for youth to positively contribute to their communities and increase their status in their communities. In Nepal, adults interviewed mentioned repeatedly that watching youth implement service projects increased their confidence in youth to play a positive role in their communities and demonstrated to community members that it is safe to let young people return. That the projects included and benefited adults, rather than worked with youth in isolation, allowed youth to show what a positive force they could be for the whole community.

Helping those Less Fortunate in Nepal

In Nepal, Mercy Corps worked to reduce the likelihood violence would re-emerge after a 10-year civil war between Maoists and the Government. Through program activities, youth from different ethnic groups and castes were brought together through Village Youth Clubs, sports competitions and cultural programs to form bonds after years of divisions. The experience of working together on these activities created strong friendships between the youth. One Youth Club, after completing their first project, decided to help Muslim and Dalit (low caste) youth in their community by raising money to help pay for local school fees.

---

[10] Mercy Corps (2008). Youth Initiatives for Peace and Reconciliation Endline Study. Nepal.
[11] UNDP (2006). Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis.

Youth-to-Youth Connections

Socially Integrate Former Youth Combatants and Hardliners

War and conflict dislocate youth, particularly ex-combatants. As a result, these young people lose connection to their communities and their peers. Reconnecting former youth combatants with their peers who did not fight reduces the ability of militants to re-recruit young people who have left the ranks.[12] Equally important is reconnecting youth who were former enemies. Unfortunately, peacebuilding programs often make one of two mistakes: they either focus exclusively on hardliners or 'at-risk' populations (and have the unintended consequence of rewarding negative behaviors) or they only include people who already support issues like multi-ethnic tolerance (and limit their impact by preaching to youth who already believe in a multi-ethnic society). In Kosovo, Mercy Corps includes both young people who are committed to a multi-ethnic future and those who are more skeptical. This latter group is particularly important since on both the Albanian and Serb sides, many young people who participate in nationalist movements tend to have strong leadership qualities and the respect of their communities.

Reduce Stereotypes through Repeated Interactions

In protracted conflicts, people from the conflicting groups are often segregated from one another, having few relationships across conflict lines. In situations where youth were born into conflict, they may never have met someone from the opposing group(s). Additionally, the majority of their information about others comes through propaganda rather than personal experience. However, many youth peacebuilding programs only organize youth to meet a couple of times over the life of the program, and often in a large group. In Kenya, Mercy Corps' LEAP and LEAP Sport program promotes peace and reconciliation after the 2007 post-election violence by bringing together youth from the Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kisii, Kamba, and other tribes repeatedly over 18 months. Through both programs, youth came together for peacebuilding, life skills and entrepreneurial trainings, lasting a minimum of 10 weeks. Youth also worked together across ethnic lines on cash for work and income generating activities. The evaluation data show that LEAP youth participants now interact more frequently with members of other tribes than at the beginning of the program, and that their levels of trust and willingness to cooperate have increased. As one program participant explained, "I come from the ghetto and every now and then there are conflicts. Now I can try and mediate between parties."

Forgiveness and Reconciliation on the Sports Field

During the post-election violence between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin in Kenya in 2007-8, David Ng'ang'a was shot by an arrow in his chest. Although he recovered from his wound, David became deeply resentful of the tribe of the man who shot him. Mercy Corps' LEAP SPORT program gave David Ng'ang'a the tools and opportunity to move past his anger and engage those he once fought against. By playing on an inter-tribal soccer team, he learned to forgive and work with members of other tribes. He also served an important role in the community by acting as a mediator to help resolve conflicts around him. David is now a group leader with our local partner A-STEP. Click here to see a video about David's experience in the LEAP SPORT program: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCu6Dw6N7kw

---

[12] Humphreys and Weinstein found having friends who were combatants increased the likelihood that people would voluntarily join militant groups. While the converse has not been empirically tested, research has shown that peers have a strong influence on young people's behavior. Therefore if the majority of their peers are non-combatants, they may be less likely to join militant movements. Humphreys, M. & Weinstein, J (2008). Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War. American Journal of Political Science. Vol. 52 (2), pp. 436-455.

Addendum: Lessons from Our Colleagues

In addition to the best practices and lessons learned at Mercy Corps, there is much to be gained from the experiences of our colleagues, including other agencies, donors, think tanks, and researchers. This section serves as a resource to those who are interested in learning about what other organizations are doing in youth and conflict. Organized by the same sections as above, it provides additional information on relevant research, best practices, and lessons learned.

General Program Design and Implementation

Leverage Youth Interests to Teach Peace-building Skills

By integrating peace-building messages into economic generation programs, the American Refugee Committee helped reduce the economic insecurity that led many youth to participate in violence. The micro enterprise training was tailored to vocations with local market potential and integrated anti-violence and reconciliation messages. Youth who received the grants reported a 55% increase in income, a reduction of poverty (from 72% to 62%), a reduced interest in combat (82% to 46%), a reduced participation in violence (21% to 15%) and fewer incidences of known violence (65% to 50%).[13]

Economic Engagement

Provide Young People with Practical Experiences

CHF International's Youth for Change and Conflict Resolution (YCCR) program, funded by USAID's CMM, engaged at-risk youth in Colombia who frequently join armed groups or engage in gang violence due to a lack of livelihood opportunities. YCCR helped youth leverage economic opportunities through matching qualified youth with entry-level positions and by subsidizing business trainings for youth.[14]

Political Participation

Increase Youth Voice at the Local and National-Level

The Reconciliation and Development Programme (REDES), a collaboration between United Nations Development Programme/Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery and the Swedish International Development Agency in Colombia, reduced youth's participation in violence through dialogue activities that promoted an inclusive and participatory process for formulating public policy concerning youth rights. Youth networks participated in the regional development planning activities as well as the allocation of local budgets.[15] To foster dialogue at the national level in Lebanon, Office of Transition Initiatives organized "Hyde Park" debates for young people, which were broadcasted on a leading Lebanese television channel. Reaching more than 750,000 viewers, youth had the opportunity to discuss topics such as political extremism, government accountability and Palestinian refugees with each other and with political leaders. OTI also created a national youth dialogue in parallel with the Lebanese President's National Dialogue.[16]

---

[13] http://www.chfhq.org/files/6166_file_Final_with_cover.pdf

[14] http://www.chfinternational.org/node/21216

[15] http://www.globala.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=118&a=35234&language=en_US

[16] http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/transition_initiatives/country/lebanon2/annrpt0908.html

Teach Youth that Politics Involves Building Consensus

In Kenya, there is a long history of political parties manipulating youth to be their perpetrators of violence. These youth learn that democracy means "winner takes all" rather than a winner's responsibility is to build consensus among multiple parties. As a result, youth learn intolerance and lack an understanding about collaboration in the political processes. To counteract these tendencies and teach youth good governance, National Democratic Institute's Leadership Academy teaches youth the importance of listening to all perspectives before coming to a conclusion, and the value of working together towards a common purpose.[17]

Youth-to-Community Connections

Include Psychosocial Programming as Part of a Community-based Rehabilitation Model

Long-term cooperation across lines of division are difficult to maintain if youth are not able to confront and develop an understanding of the trauma they have experienced. Additionally, unless trauma is addressed, young people can find it extremely difficult to trust and work with others long after conflict has ended, stifling their own societies' development. However, western psychological models alone are often inadequate for helping youth cope with trauma in developing societies. A community-based rehabilitation model can be successful at reducing youth violence if it provides youth opportunities to discuss difficult emotions, gives them opportunities to develop life skills, educates adults about the needs of young people and provides opportunities for youth to positively contribute to the community. In Angola, the Christian Children's Fund implemented a community-based program that, in addition to providing psychosocial support, taught youth life skills, provided peer support and peace education, educated adults about youth, and engaged youth as workers on community development projects.[18] The interventions increased adult awareness of the youth's needs, improved youth-adult relations, increased community planning, and increased community perceptions that youth can make positive contributions.[19]

Youth-to-Youth Connections

Reduce Stereotypes through Repeated Interactions

In order to counteract the negative stereotypes that develop about groups during conflict through segregation and propaganda, the Twinned Peace Sports Schools run by the Peres Center for Peace brings together Palestinian and Israeli youth. Soccer and basketball are used as conduits to encourage mutual understanding, acceptance of cultural differences and to breakdown negative stereotyping between youth. This model for interaction differs from many other sports for peace programming in that the youth from each side of the conflict meet multiple times a week in separate groups to work on stereotypes and cultural differences and then every three weeks these groups meet with their respective Palestinian and Israeli counterparts to solidify the reconciliation skills they have learned. As a result of these sports schools, youth participants are able to see the potential for peace in the midst of a protracted conflict, even when they and family members are being directly affected by the conflict. For example, after the Gaza War in late 2008, the program was able to restart

---

[17] http://www.ndi.org/kenya, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/Final%20-%20Youth%20and%20Politics.pdf

[18] Wessels, M & Monteiro, C. (2006). Psychosocial Assistance for Youth: Toward Reconstruction for Peace in Angola. *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 62 (1) pp. 121-139.

[19] Mercy Corps has two programs that provide psychosocial support: Comfort for Kids, which targets young children, and Moving Forward, which targets youth. Neither of these programs, however, has been implemented in a conflict setting with youth (15-24).

only weeks after the violence ended, with the youth eager to resume activities, including activities that brought Palestinians and Israelis together. [20]

Provide Youth Alternative Models to Violence to Change Social Norms

Recent research suggests that targeting social norms (i.e., socially accepted definitions of how people should behave) may be more effective than targeting personal beliefs in reducing youth violence. Additionally, social interactions, as opposed to individual education, are more powerful agents of reducing prejudiced behavior.[21] Search For Common Ground's programs target both norms and behavior through interactive media and role models to teach youth how to resolve conflicts non-violently. The Génération Grands Lacs (The Great Lakes Generation) radio program, which is simulcasted in Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is co-hosted by two youth journalists from two different countries on a rotating basis. The programs are comprised of pre-produced interviews, reporting packages, portraits, sketches, and testimonies, which complement live Q&A sessions with studio guests and interactive discussions with calls from listeners. The radio programs' themes target norms, while having youth co-hosts from different countries demonstrate how youth can work together across conflict lines.[22] Similarly in the DRC, the Participatory Theatre for Conflict incorporates Forum Theatre techniques to teach conflict transformation. This methodology has proven effective in changing the ways that youth deal with conflict by offering a venue to practice positively transforming a conflict and thus lowering the likelihood of violence as a result of that conflict. During the performance, members of the audience are invited to 'replace' the actors to play out the scenario in ways that more constructively address the conflicts. SFCG's participatory theatre work was awarded the Ashoka-Changemakers 2006 award for 'Innovative on-the-ground strategies for conflict transformation'.[23]

---

[20] http://www.peres-center.org/SectionProject.asp?cc=01160201

[21] Puck, Elizabeth. (2009). What's in a Norm? Sources and Process of Norm Changes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 96(3), 594-600. http://betsylevypaluck.com/Paluck%202009%20JPSP%20Norm.pdf

[22] http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/rwanda/programmes_rwanda.html

[23] http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/drcongo/drcongo_toolbox.html

You must be the change
you wish to see in the world.

~ Gandhi

Be the change