



# Unobstructed Future

Vol 1 October 2014

## EMPOWERING Youth as Leaders for PEACE and RECONCILIATION

### Editorial

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the first edition of our Newsletter. In this Newsletter you can find a collection of stories, activities, pictures and knowledge that we assembled during our SAFE Project. SAFE stands for Supporting Access to Justice, Fostering Peace and Equity.

This project aims at “engaging and empowering youth leaders, youth at risk, and youth as game changers for peace and reconciliation” with support from USAID. The various stories in the brochure explain the roles the youth play and what should be done to involve the youth in leadership, peace building and crime reduction within their communities.

It is clear that the struggle to involve youth in peace building is multifaceted and therefore requires a youth-specific approach to leadership and peace building. It is critical for all of us to appreciate that we are all players in community development. Due to that we need to remain united and focused all the time. May this newsletter encourage the youth to participate in leadership, peace building and crime reduction, not only in Uganda and Africa, but also globally.



### The rebirth of hope in leadership



“When I wasn’t busy studying at my local primary school or helping around the house I would visit the Lalogi Sub-County Headquarters to listen to the community meetings taking place. I admired the Local Chairpersons who took on the hard challenges facing the community. I noted their ability to mobilize people and inspire people to take action; I saw the qualities that allowed them to make the hard decisions. I dreamed of one day standing in their place passionately explaining the issues to my peers and leading my community to a brighter future. My dream was shattered on a clear afternoon when the LRA invaded my village. I was forced to watch my mother and father be murdered at the hands of the rebels. Even though I was still physically breathing, I felt like my life had ended. I felt the destruction of my community, family, and myself. I

was fortunately taken in to live with my auntie, who encouraged me to continue with my education. Over time, I found myself drawn to the issues facing my community and I joined a local youth group.” Atim was approached by AYINET and was invited to attend a 3-day Leadership Training. She immersed herself in the three-day peace building and leadership training. “I learned about leadership, peace building and the ability to effectively negotiate and mediate conflict-sensitive situations. I participated in debates regarding controversial issues that directly affect my community, and came up with realistic resolutions to these issues with my peers. By the end of the training, I had proven myself a true leader and had developed a project plan to take back to my community.”

Back in Lalogi Sub-County, Atim found herself

standing in front of her group members and other members of the community. There was even a young girl in attendance, looking up at Atim with admiration, much the same way that Atim had many years ago. Atim shared the skills that she had garnered from the training with her community. The original chairperson of the youth group informed Atim that he and the community now saw all of the characteristics of a true leader in her. He resigned as the chair and nominated Atim to replace him as the group’s chairperson.

After only four months, the progress that Atim had made in her community was evident and she was quickly promoted to be the overall chairperson for all of the residing youth groups in Lalogi Sub County.



## Letter from a youth

Dear readers of AYINET Newsletter,

Greetings to all. I am a youth and it feels good to speak about peace, to encourage ourselves to love and accept one another. I am conveying my message with confidence because I know that I am not alone in this struggle."

Uganda and the Northern region in particular are trying to recover from the turmoil of violence, inhumanity, grief and tragedy, that have been present here for too long.

Therefore, it is my appeal that we embrace peace, justice, and reconciliation through peaceful means.

This will entail taking action as youth in policies and programs that protect our right to everlasting peace, eliminate discrimination and generation gaps, stereotypes, prejudices, harmful practices and allow us to speak out freely about our desires without fear.

My objective with this message is to encourage youths to raise their voice in participation, protection and responsibility, and to remind the entire public of our roles in building peace through leadership with great confidence and self-esteem.

I also urge the citizens to consider the following thoughts: why shout when you can explain?, why an eye for an eye when you can forgive, reconcile and allow peace to prevail?, why tomorrow and not today?, why watch when you can act? These questions entail the keys to an open society and to justice, peace and equality.

Did you know that we, you and I, have a vital role in capacity building and that we have a right to learn in a stable country, free from marginalization, where there is equal opportunity for all?

I remain committed to you and hope that you will join me in guiding our youth to be responsible citizens of tomorrow.

Finally, I appreciate everyone who contributed to bringing out this informative magazine, which shows how the youth can leave a mark in the history of this country and climb the ladder of leadership through embracing peace, reconciliation and harmony.

Enjoy reading - Walter Aguma

## PEACE AND RECONCILIATION



Excited youth leaders from different sub-counties after completing a five-day peace building training in Lira



Amolo Jennifer speaking out during a community dialogue in Aromo Sub-county, Lira District

"We should strive to create a harmony between the head, the heart and the body. Through this harmony comes the revelation that peace is the very source of our good lives."

The means we use to reach an end goal are often more important than the ends themselves. Hopefully

your "means" are kind and non-destructive. In your daily routines and personal interactions, being kind is more important than proving you are right. When it is critical that you prove your point, remember to intertwine wisdom with compassion.

"Peace is an essential human quality, for we are all equal. We should treat each person as a true sister or brother; without forgiveness it is impossible to build a just society, a solid and lasting peace. Reconciliation is the foundation and the first pathway to peace." SAFE Team

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP



It is widely acknowledged that youth in Uganda are facing multiple obstacles when trying to engage in leadership roles, such as: low self-esteem, limited opportunities, lack of support and cooperation among the youth themselves, limited access to education, traditionalism and negative perception about youth leadership.

Akwerajok Grace from Paibona, Awach Sub-county

## WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUTH LEADERSHIP?

Sometimes it is perceived that to be a leader...

- you should have attained a high level of education.
- you should be financially stable.
- you should wait for tomorrow as it's usually said that "youth are the leaders of tomorrow."
- You must be a political leader, while other forms of leadership, such as school, family, cultural/ clan, church or community leadership do not matter, etc.

These skills, when acquired, can help one to be a better leader of high morals in the society, however, the stereotypes of leadership are not necessarily accurate.

Contrary to the stereotypes listed above, leaders...

- do not need to have a high degree of formal education. What truly embodies a leader is a positive attitude, self-respect, trustworthiness, integrity, honesty and public presentation.
- do not only come in the form of political leaders, but in a variety of roles in a community.
- are defined by their ability, quality and interests.
- interact with community members on all levels.
- have strong morals and values, which open doors to leadership.

Youth leadership begins today and it is the youth's responsibility to engage in leadership at all levels to prevent people from saying that youth are leaders of tomorrow only.

**If we stay silent, others will make decisions on our behalf. Youth should wake up and start speaking up for themselves.**



Youth group in Odek sub-county preparing to perform at AYINET Community Dialogue



"To enjoy freedom and to be happy in a society, we need to accept each other regardless of what happened in the past," says Mugisha John Chris, Gulu District youth counselor IV

Mugisha John Chris, Gulu District youth counselor IV during a stakeholders meeting in Gulu District



"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

Nelson Mandela

# INTERNATIONAL VIEWS ON LEADERSHIP AND PEACE BUILDING

## Interview with Spela Kunej:



“Hello. My name is Spela, I am 26, and I come from a small country in Central Europe called Slovenia. I am a lawyer, specialized in the law of armed conflict and international human rights law. At the moment I am volunteering with AYINET, working mostly

on transitional justice issues.”

### Why is youth leadership important in peace building?

Young people who have experienced conflict, maybe since the day they were born, who had their lives dominated by external factors like rebel activity or international aid, were deprived of numerous opportunities to make choices and to control their own lives. Even if choices and sacrifices were made, there was no guarantee that any effort would pay off. Not being in control and doing things without seeing results can lead to feelings of hopelessness, apathy and loss of interest for anything or anyone.

If, after conflict, old elites retain all the power in their hands, young people can keep holding on to these feelings of resentment leading, in a worst case scenario, to alcohol abuse and crime.

Youth leadership, on the other hand, can change those feelings. Young people need to be given the opportunity to see that if one invests time and energy into a project in peace-time it will lead to positive results. A greater number of positive experiences must necessarily lead to more positive thinking, more energy and agency.

Leadership is also closely correlated with responsibility – you cannot be a leader without thinking about consequences for your community. Responsibility for one’s own life and for the lives of others demands active and creative thinking, which again, oppose feelings of apathy and resignation.



### How can youth get involved in leadership and peace building?

The immediate surroundings are the best starting point. One can develop and prove leadership skills by contributing to his or her family’s existence or by taking charge of various tasks (for example, helping a younger brother or sister with their homework). Such small-scale activities will engage a creative mind and if he or she sees problems in how things are being handled in his or her own family (and most likely

all families in the same community), he or she will eventually start looking for bigger-scale solutions.

In order to become a leader, maybe even taking over an elected position at some point, one needs trust of his or her surrounding: trust of the family, who can support their son or daughter in taking over a bigger responsibility in the community, trust of the community to try to reach out to an entire region. Trust can only develop and grow organically, so instead of thinking: what do I need to do to become a Prime Minister, one should first start with: how do I improve the lives of the people around me today.



Youth drama group participating in AYINET event

### What are the major obstacles to youth participation in leadership and peace building?

I believe that there are mutually reinforcing problems of older people clinging to power, distrust in young people and youth’s apathy and resignation. The latter can lead to crime and alcohol abuse, strengthening the distrust of the old, who will feel legitimised in their wish to stay in power, while this will, in turn, enforce feelings of apathy, resignation and maybe even anger and hate.

I believe that part of the problem is also that many young people have not had the opportunity to go to school, don’t want to return many years later, or feel that school is useless, because it will not automatically lead to a job. However, school teaches more than just math and correct spelling: it teaches that any success will take a long time to achieve, that any problem can be solved if one truly puts his or her mind to it. It teaches patience and discipline, and even math and proper spelling are extremely powerful tools for anyone who wants to stand out and direct a community. Education, in itself, is power, however, it also brings respect and teaches values, which can hardly be taught otherwise.

### In your view what can be done to address the above problems?

I think that mutual efforts by both elders to involve the young people more and by young people to actively engage in their families’ and communities’ lives will organically resolve part of the problem. Preventing (older) people from clinging to power is difficult; however, persistent and peaceful pressure has proved effective time and time again in history.

In order not to raise further generations of power-corrupted people, schools could include lessons on peace, democracy and the rule of law into school curriculums and convey the message that leaders need to be elected and that they need to enjoy the trust of



the community, and that if the opposite happens in real life, it’s an anomaly, rather than the way things should be.

Finally, young people and their parents must do everything possible to make sure that children stay in school and perform to the best of their abilities. Parents should convey to their children that knowledge is power and that it is in itself desirable, that knowledge can never be taken from someone, no matter what, that it will empower them on their search for a successful life. There should be no excuses for dropping out of school (like an unwanted pregnancy) and if a problem, like a pregnancy, occurs, the family and the community should help the girl in raising her child so that she can continue her education.

‘As a youth, it is important to ensure that your voice is heard’

### What advice would you give to youth on leadership and peace building?

I think based on the answers above, my advice is pretty straight-forward.

1. Go to school, no matter what happens, no matter what obstacle you face, stay in school.
2. Start developing a sense of responsibility for your family, your brothers and sisters, your community. Think about how you can make small and positive changes.
3. Be patient. This does not mean that you should be weak or submissive; it only means that change does not happen overnight, but comes gradually. Give yourself time to see the impact your actions have.
4. Do not resort to crime. Never!
5. Do not resort to thinking of “us” versus “them.” Any progress can only be achieved by cooperation and often you will need to see beyond ethnic, cultural or linguistic divides to be able to cooperate with people and achieve progress. Do not call anyone your enemy based on historic disputes or any other allegiance and try to accept everyone for what he or she is: a human, like you.
6. Do not accept any rhetoric that tells you that war and violence are unavoidable or necessary. It is not. Never accept that anything other than peace and prosperity is the normal order of things.
7. Stay in school! I know I have said this already, but it is too important not to stress it again. Study hard, discover something new every day. Stay in school.



“This project came at the right time when the youth face a lot of issues, such as increased involvement in crime, low level of participation in leadership, an increase of cases of conflicts and violence, and increased moral decay. I am glad that just few months after your activities on ground in the sub-county, there is a slight increase in youth productivity evidenced by increased registration of new youth groups involved in IGAs, reduced alcoholism among the youth, and increased youth participation in community meetings. I believe that by the end of your project there will be a trendmeous change in behavior and attitude of the youth, and also perception of the community towards the youth not only within my sub county but even beyond”

Gladys Alela, Parish Chief of Palaro in Odek



“While in captivity, many of my friends and I were given guns and were recruited into LRA’s combat operations. We carried out a series of operations and were rewarded by Joseph Kony, the commander of the LRA. When the Government announced the amnesties, we surrendered and returned home. We were promised education and we imagined that were going to study in the best schools, leading a comfortable life. Surprisingly, however, we were given only vocational training (tailoring and carpentry), providing many of us with identical skills. This resulted in many among us not fulfilling our dream of becoming role models within our society. Some of my friends cannot speak English. After the vocational training, we were not even given a sewing machine or carpentry tools. It hurts me to see that nothing is being done to help the youth who are formed abductees. Many have turned to alcoholism, drug abuse, gambling, theft, armed robbery, defilement and murder. I request the Government and other stakeholders to help us rebuild our lives and realize our potential.”

A youth from Aromo Sub-county, Lira District



# CRIMINALITY

Youth make up the majority of Uganda's population. They also commit most crimes in the country and most inmates in Uganda's prison system are young people. The reasons why many youth are involved in criminality include: the desire for quick cash, lack of white-collar jobs, poverty, unemployment, permissiveness, idleness, drug and alcohol abuse, and peer pressure.

However, if youth focus on the following activities it can change their perceptions and mindsets and create a positive change:

- pursue further knowledge through education in all forms. This will enable you to find better jobs and become better people.
- seek out peers who are supportive so that you can mentor each other. This will help you to be productive and supportive.
- respect each other. By respecting and supporting your fellow youth you will garner respect from your community at large. Criminality will thus reduce as youth will cherish community spirit over short-term gains.
- engage in dialogue and co-operation, aiming at creating and sustaining a peaceful environment.
- involve yourself in income generating activities (IGAs). This will ensure your livelihood and also contribute to reducing the problem of unemployment.
- encourage your community to mentor and nurture you and fellow youth with good morals, thus enabling harmonious cohabitation.
- get involved and participate in community initiatives.
- invite community leaders to engage youth in peace building processes, leadership, and crime prevention activities.



Youth of Agweng Sub-county, listening to elders during a forum organized by AYINET



Retired Col. Tony Ottoa explains that the man next to him was his teacher, who inspired him to become the leader he is today

## Message

### To elders:

Let's make development of our communities, youth leadership, peace, justice and reduction in criminality part of who we are all. Young people are most affected by crime and it takes a joint effort to overcome that.

This is based on an assessment of the number and percentage of youth in various prisons around the country.

The youth are misunderstood and they need to be listened to.

Elders, did you know that you support the youth substantially? 63% live with support of an elder. We must consider the inter-relatedness of the challenges facing youth and the need for cross-sectorial policies and programs that attend to the needs of youth in a holistic manner, irrespective of race, ethnicity color, sex, language, religion, political, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status.

I urge you to give all the necessary support to the youth and keep them away from anything that may lead them to a life of crime. Help them be better citizens.

### To the youth:

Life is too short to wake up with regrets. Step out of the shadows, take control and define your role in the society. Achieve a life in dignity.

Let us light the torch of struggle in solidarity and design peaceful mechanisms, based on positive virtues and values, which shall be the basis of our civilization and our success.

We are convinced that youth is Africa's and also Uganda's greatest resource. We can surmount the difficulties and challenges that lie ahead through active and full participation.

We recognize that youth are partners and an asset in sustainable development towards peace and prosperity of Africa and the world at large. We, the young people, have a unique contribution to make to the present and future development. "Together we can!"

Joining a sports team at your school is another way to stay involved and focused as a youth

## A CRY OF THE YOUTH

At the sight of a youth, one's reaction is usually one of the three: pity, disgust and how low society has sunk in treating its young people, the extending of a helping hand.

Take a look at how youth move, day and night, roaming to get a job, how young women are mistreated by their husbands, being evicted from their homes, with no authority to own property, how tumultuously they are affected in many ways, meditate on how youth are victimized and how this influences their criminal behavior, see the structure of leadership and see how they have been left out. How many youth have been in a position to develop their self-esteem? How many obstacles are youth faced with in trying to assess information which could improve their lives?

"I am just a voice," said Julius Ocwinyo in his book "Fate of the Banished." "If you go out and leave your only blanket spread in the grass and it's beaten by rain, you have only yourself to blame if you cover yourself with a wet blanket." We will continue to suffocate if we don't address problems affecting the youth.

## Anyone can be a Leader

If I were to ask you to name a leader in your life, a common answer might be President Museveni or a recognized political leader such as the President Nelson Mandela. However, it is important to recognize that leaders come in all forms and that they exist at all levels. If you take a moment to consider, you have leaders within your school, within your household, within your community; within any youth group you may be involved in, and even within your own peer group. A person does not become a leader by the title they are given, but by the qualities that they espouse and the characteristics that they portray.

Even if you are not in a position of leadership already, you can still act as a leader through your daily routines and actions. If you use the following list as your guide, you can embody the characteristics of a positive leader in all of your actions.

1. Sharing a vision, a goal, or a plan.
2. Inspiring and encouraging others.
3. Offering ideas.
4. Making suggestions.
5. Helping make decisions.
6. Listening to others.
7. Helping others speak and share their ideas.
8. Summarizing ideas, decisions, and plans.

Above all, remember that being a leader doesn't mean forcing your ideas on others or demanding that your way is the best way. Instead, it is listening to others, encouraging those around you to be the best that they can be, and serving as a positive role model for everyone around you. So go out today, and lead!

Advice from AYINET's United States Peace Corps Volunteer



Madam Sophie Achen, Head Teacher of Lira Town College, addressing students during an Open Forum Dialogue

"This school activity should continue, not only in Lira Town College, but also in other schools. It supports positive behavior changes and strengthens student discipline, increases students' involvement in leadership and peace building, and provides the best opportunity to avert student strikes."

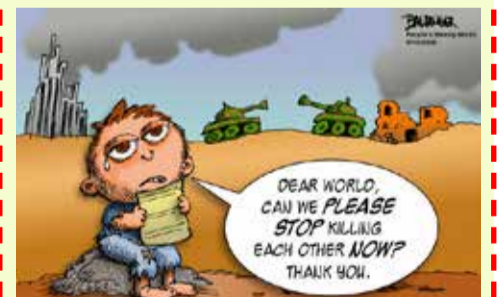
"Even if we suffered during the war, a lot of issues continued to affect us even after the war had ended. Despite persisting physical and mental injury, we should not only look at the bad, but also consider the good things that happened after the end of the war, as for example development. More NGOs started working here, more schools were built, people were resettled back home. I am glad to see my home town Gulu, which suffered the most, becoming one of the busiest and most developed towns, almost a city. Fellow youth, let us put the past behind us and look at the present and the future. I am hopeful that reconciliation will allow my children and the generations to come to live in peace and harmony, free from war, hatred and revenge."

Acora Jennifer, Bar-dege, Gulu

**"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." — John Quincy Adams**



## FUN CORNER



### QUIZ!

1. As a youth, what do you think limits your participation in peace building in your community?
2. What should be done to involve the youth in your community?

Please deliver or Email your answers to the address below. The best answer will be published on the AYINET website and will win a PEACE Tshirt



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