Peace in Action

Transcript

Peace in Action: Episode 2 - Africa

“The spaces of dialogue that we create are spaces in which we enable them to to bring out their dreams and their hopes and look forward to building a new future for themselves.”

“They could access their farms, they could visit their relatives, go to their burial grounds. And to me, this was one example of where dialogue done well leads to significant change.”

Welcome to the Peace In Action podcast from Conciliation Resources. I’m Jonathan Cohen, Executive Director of Conciliation Resources. In this series to mark our 30th anniversary, I’ll be talking with some of the people involved in the diverse work of peacebuilding around the world. We’ll hear stories from a range of guest speakers and uncover how dialogue and mediation support can help to create more peaceful societies and bridge divides.

JONATHAN COHEN: Joining me today are two longtime friends and colleagues, Janet Adama Mohammed and Kennedy Tumutegyereize. Janet’s been leading Conciliation Resources’ work in West Africa since 2010 and Kennedy's been leading our work in East Central Africa since 2007, so between you, you’ve a huge wealth of peacebuilding experience and two of Conciliation Resources’ longtime most experienced peacebuilders. Conciliation Resources has been working in peacebuilding for 30 years now, and this series is looking at dialogue and how it has shaped our experience of working alongside people who experience violent conflict, and the ways in which dialogue can bring about change and help bridge divides.

So it's a delight to have the two of you here. Today I'd like to share your experience of what it means to create opportunities for people embroiled in violent conflict and to overcome their differences. So to start with, Janet, perhaps you could tell us how you became involved in this work and what motivates you to keep doing it.

JANET ADAMA MOHAMMED: Thank you very much, Jonathan, nice to be working with you for all these years. In 1994 the violent conflict started in Tamale, a town in which I lived. All the workers that I had on my farm went to war, and only a few of them came back. It was very hard for me to take. Also in my work in rural development, I realised that the communities where I was working were hard hit by the Konkomba-Nanumba War of northern Ghana, and so I decided to do something about it. And what I did was to start working with the religious institutions that are in northern Ghana, bringing them together to look at what we could do to mitigate the risk and the tensions in the conflict. We started by getting food items and materials to aid the affected people. And this is how I started, only to become the peacebuilder that I am today.

JC: Wow, thank you, Janet, that really takes you back into your roots in many ways. Kennedy, how about you? How did you become involved in peacebuilding work?

KENNEDY TUMUTEGYEREIZE: I stumbled into peacebuilding work. I was an economist. In late 90s, early 2000s there was this debate on structural adjustment programs, whether it is leading to poverty reduction or increasing poverty. And so the World Bank Department for

International Development decided to do a study on understanding whether poverty in Uganda was going down or going up. So I happened to be one of the researchers. Then we went to northern Uganda, which was affected by conflict, and it was through some of the roundtable discussions we were having, and in particular, I met one group of women. And they were very clear, if you want to reduce poverty, end wars. And that statement kept ringing bells in my mind. And from there, I started to look at issues of peace and peacebuilding, and how they are integral to poverty reduction. And from there, I started, then engaging more with the women groups, the youth groups, religious leaders, and eventually ended up in mainstream peacebuilding. Thank you.

JC: Well, no, thank you. I mean, it's fascinating. Both of you came into this work through seeing how conflict was affecting communities you lived in directly, and you had first hand experience. And Janet, from your story of the farm workers and Kennedy, your experience of the women, I think you've shared this sense of how people who are affected can shape our understanding of what needs to be done, and I think you've both brought that into your work in many ways and how to create spaces and opportunities for people to actually talk about their experiences and their hopes and aspirations and the possibility of change. I wonder, Janet, if you can tell us a bit more about your experience of working in borderlands, because I think both of you have done a lot of work across borders and trying to bridge divides between people who've been in conflict. How has that evolved for you? How have you been able to bridge those divides and contribute to dialogue in those communities?

JAM: If you look at the civil war in the Mano River region, which is Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, the borderlands have been areas of tensions, and people from the borderlands are often branded as troublemakers. Even with the civil wars, the rebellion started from the border regions, and this made governments to have some kind of mistrusted relationship between them and the border areas. Border regions were areas which were assumed to be training the rebels. So a lot of tensions in border regions.

In our work in Conciliation Resources, we have a docudrama which is called “Talking Borders.” And we used “Talking Borders” to sensitise the communities in the border regions, also the security actors. And through that, we were able to come out with a lot of information. This is the advantage of dialogue.

Dialogue enables parties in conflict to listen to one another and to come out with common understanding of the issues that affect them. And so we were able to use that to get the people in the border areas, including the government stakeholders, to listen to the people in terms of what was happening. And so across the borders, we then noticed that the people on the other side did not have the same understanding. And so we repeated this at the other side, which is the Ivorian border, and through that, we had to bring both sides together for a mediation session, which is the Track Two that we had.

JC: So when you say Track Two, you mean sort of informal dialogue, not necessarily with government officials. But what I'm interested in is, where does a dialogue actually happen?

JAM: Dialogue happens at all levels. So we can have dialogues at community level. We can have dialogues that are regional, bringing more communities together, and we can have dialogues at a national level.

What is important is that the parties in the conflict get to share their views and their perspectives, regardless of whether it is at the local level, at the regional level or at the national level. What is important is that parties in the conflict get to come round and share their views, listen to the other person's perspectives as well, and this helps to bring people to a common understanding of what are the drivers of their tensions, what are the drivers of their conflicts.

JC: And so when you're trying to bring people together to do this, presumably there's a lot of work you do with groups separately before you bring them into dialogue. So in a way, you're having to do dialogue within communities, before you bring them together with people who might be perceived as their adversaries.

JAM: In doing dialogue, we go into a community. We have a process, which we have termed 'community entry process'. So we go to the community elders to sit and listen to them and also take their permission to come into their communities. They would tell us about the different sections of their community, and whether there are parties in the conflict in these communities. And we have to go to these different sections to listen to them and also try to understand them. And in this way, we build relationships with all these parties before we can then ask for a meeting. The meeting itself is not the only space for dialogue, going to them and making them feel safe and committed to come to the meeting is a whole process, and sometimes this takes a longer time. It can take months, it can take weeks, and if we are lucky, it can take days to get people to have an understanding that they are safe and that the space that you are creating is safe enough for them to come and speak their minds and also present their perspectives and their grievances.

JC: And what are you trying to achieve by giving them that space and giving them that sense of voice and the ability to speak to one another?

JAM: Often, time and again, we sit in dialogue and mediation spaces with only the elite who do not have an understanding of the issues that affect the people in the conflict. So bringing the people in the conflict together to dialogue enables them to build trust. For example, in northeast Nigeria, where we saw young people were excluded, they were not only excluded, but they were also branded as the violent perpetrators of the conflict. These young people were the same people who served as vigilantes to work and protect the communities from the Boko Haram attacks. So that misunderstanding between the young people and the community elders was very strong, and so bringing them together to understand why the young people behave in one way or the other was very important. And also for the community leaders to hear this directly from the young people and to help them to build an understanding that would enable them to support the young people, just as the young people supported them during the war. And that led to them having a common understanding of how to deal with the situation that they faced.

JC: I'd like to come back in a moment to this experience in northern Nigeria and the way you worked with excluded youth to help them create connections to the security forces. But before we do that, Kennedy, I know you've done an extraordinary amount of work with excluded groups as well, and this sense of going into communities and helping them talk to people who might be perceived as adversaries, and a lot of what you did for several years in areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army was all about that. Perhaps you could tell us about what you were trying to do with the Lord's Resistance Army? And then one of the questions I'm always mindful of in our work is, what is it that gives us legitimacy to play these roles and to come from outside to try and support people In dialogue and to support them in bridging their divides?

KT: Oh maybe I'll start with the last question on the legitimacy, because it's legitimacy that forms the basis of everything for you to be able to facilitate processes, dialogue or with the communities. You need legitimacy, you need their buy in, but most importantly, you need to understand from their perspective what the issues are.

So in the case of the areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army, first the legitimacy came from the invitation of the local actors, for example, the religious leaders, the traditional leaders, the local groups, which had the will to engage and they needed just an outsider who can accompany them in these processes.

JC: Perhaps you could just say a couple of words about what the conflict around the Lord's Resistance Army was and where it was, in order to help people understand the context?

KT: So the Lord's Resistance Army is an armed group that started in northern Uganda in 1986. Initially, it was opposed to the regime that was in Kampala, but eventually it took a life of its own, and one of its main methods of operation was abducting young people, indoctrinating them and sending them out in the communities, initially, where they came from, to cause all sorts of mayhem. Most significantly, from the Lord Resistance Army's perspective, this would ensure that the young people don't return to their communities, because they would know that they have committed atrocities in the areas. It went on up until now, although it has lost momentum, but it's still using those particular methods of work.

JC: And Kennedy, over many years we've heard terrible stories of the tragedies of people abducted and forced to fight their own families and their own communities and people being kidnapped and awful atrocities happening. We very rarely hear about the ways in which the communities work together to inform one another about where there might be attacks, and how to protect themselves and how to resist the violence that was happening. What was your experience of working with elders and religious leaders to try and protect communities, but also then to try and find ways to encourage young people to come out of the bush and to return?

KT: So there are a number of ways in which local actors worked to try and encourage young people who are already abducted to return from the armed groups to their the communities. One of the ways, and the most significant part, was the community understanding and sensitisation. First and foremost, understand that these young people are victims of the conflict. They didn't

join, but they were abducted, taken, indoctrinated and unleashed to the communities. That was significant, and therefore these people needed to be protected in as much as they were also responsible for some of the crimes that were committed in the communities. Secondly, the Lord's Resistance Army worked in such a way that it built its strength on existing tensions in different communities and multiplied them, both in-country and across the border. So much so, that when the Lord Resistance would be in Uganda, they would be seen as fighting the government in Uganda. When they crossed into South Sudan, the South Sudanese would perceive them as Ugandans now fighting South Sudanese, and they go to DRC the same, and even when they crossed into the Central African Republic. So by working with the local communities, by working with religious leaders and faith leaders in all these areas, by working with other civil society groups, we worked with them to ensure that there is a common understanding of what the problem is and how it could be addressed.

JC: There's a lot of commonality between what you did with communities in the areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army and the work you did, Janet, in northeast Nigeria, where Boko Haram, a different but similarly marauding armed group that paid little heed to human sensitivities. What was your experience of trying to facilitate dialogue in communities, between young excluded people and the security services, but also intergenerational dialogue between younger people and elders.

JAM: Even the security forces saw the young people as the perpetrators of the conflict, and so when there was an attack and they came in, they just arrested any young person they saw, male or female, they just arrested them and took them away. The communities were not happy about this, because they had their children who were out of school, but were with their families and were not with Boko Haram. Now, Boko Haram had a strategy of attacking and looting the communities of their resources. So one thing was to sit with the community elders and say, how do you protect yourself? The best way to protect yourself, then is to work with your young people who understand the terrain and who understand the movements around the place, so that they can keep surveillance. And in working with them together, we saw that the religious leaders had also lost their integrity and their legitimacy to speak to the people. The community elders could not also speak to the young people, because the young people did not also trust them to have provided them with protection. So we started talking to the elders, the religious leaders, and then we talked to the women and the young people so that we could build bridges between them first. And then we started looking at what are the ways in which they can protect themselves as a community. And in this way, they saw the need for the security forces. The security forces then had to come in, for them to sit together and analyse issues that would let them trust the surveillance information that they provide. They didn't want to have fake news, but they wanted to have news that would support them to be able to combat the coming of Boko Haram each time they attack the communities. And in this way, we use dialogue at all stages of the process.

JC: So, in a way, this work is really focused on creating spaces to promote understanding, rather than trying to convince people. And it seems to me that a lot of what the dialogue is about

is, how do you help the multiple perspectives that different people have on an issue find some commonality, rather than pushing or forcing. It's really about creating a space where people can understand one another, and hopefully through a process of mutual respect, develop some shared ideas of what can be done about it. Is that your experience, Kennedy?

KT: My experience is pushing doesn't work. External views, externally generated ideas, don't work. But rather, what works is organic ideas that are generated through common sharing of what the problem is and how it can be addressed, but most significantly, those involved in dialogue, taking ownership of the process, driving the process. You can help in facilitation and others, but it should be them who should be on the driver's seat. Then, in that way, it works because they own it. But most significantly, because they trust and believe in the process. So if you have those two ingredients or three ingredients, then the process works.

JC: And then I suppose an extra ingredient that is really essential to this is courage, because you're talking about people whose communities have been torn apart by violence, who know that by standing up to it, they're putting their lives on the line. You must meet some extraordinary people who are prepared to really push things forward, put their own lives on the line to bring about change.

KT: Oh, definitely. Probably I should have started with courage, because you need courageous individuals, courageous groups of people. And these courageous groups of individuals, in my experience, are not necessarily people with big titles and big high levels of education, but these are individuals with big levels of motivation. And we've seen women's groups, for example, you've seen local chiefs and individuals in communities taking an extra risk, going an extra mile, travelled miles and miles to go and meet the Lord's Resistance Army. When going there, they are not sure that they will come back, but courage drives them, and also the issue and sheer need to change the suffering of their communities.

JAM: In most affected conflict-affected communities, people are used to being told what to do and where to look so that they can be safe. But the people live in the community, they have experienced the conflict themselves, and so they are the people who know where to look and what to do. But when they are traumatised, all they need is a shoulder. All they need is a friendship hand so that they can think, they can rethink, they can conceptualise, they can analyse the situation themselves. And what we do in these dialogue spaces is to assure them of the safety, and we build friendship with them so that they know, they are sure, that we are actually listening to them and not telling them what to do. So in most of these spaces we create, we let them tell their stories of how they have been affected. We also refer them to the time past, what they were experiencing, and then we help them to dream and hope for the future. And this is what gives them the energy to move on. This is what gives them the energy to be creative, in terms of doing things that would help them to stay safe, doing things that would help them to reconstruct their communities, reconstruct their societies and renew their relationships. So the spaces of dialogue that we create are spaces in which we enable them to to bring out their dreams and their hopes and look forward to building a new future for themselves.

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JC: I wonder if you could think of some stories, some examples of the way in which you've seen people actually provide challenge to the oppression they're facing and actually bring about change as a result of that.

JAM: So there is a community in Borno State, northeast Nigeria, called Bulabulin Ngarannam. Ngarannam was the community in which Boko Haram took siege for over two years. All the humanitarian organisations could not have access. This is a community where they had built tunnels underground and lived there and used that as a tunnel to come into the communities. The security forces just cut this community off. When we went to the community leaders, the whole community came out to listen to what we had to say, and when we said we had come to learn with them, so that we find solutions, they told us outright that if we had come with rice and plastic mats and plastic bowls to give them, they wouldn't accept, but if we say we've come to learn together with them, then they would accept us. And this is what we are talking about, that this enables the communities to listen and to find solutions. So even the space in itself, is a resource that affected people need and in that space, they are able to articulate their grievance. So is it access to the community that is an issue? Yes. Access to the community, and how were they going to get access? Because they have been cut off. So they started working together, and they said, "We have young people, but our young people are on drugs." So how are we going to mobilise these young people on drugs to be able to create the access. So we then had to go and look for the young people who are also the at risk youth that we work with over the years, and to help them to also search for their future. That enabled other organisations, humanitarian organisations, security officials, to now have access to Ngarannam. And today we have a plantation that of trees, because of the trees protect the the floods from coming to the community, and that community, that plantation is called Janet Adama Plantation!

KT: I'll start with giving an example from Central African Republic in the place called Bossangoa. There was a process which we later labeled Decentralised Dialogue. When we went this community in Bossangoa, all they told us was that they needed to talk amongst themselves as communities, but also engage the individuals from Bossangoa who were outside in other areas, for example, in the capital Bangui; involve the government, both at the national and at the subnational level. Most significantly, ensure that the talk is on their terms. It's them deciding what they need to talk about and how they needed to talk about it. And with who, so we worked with these communities for a period of about six months, where we went through the sort of issues and challenges that they were experiencing. Some of the issues were at the local level, which could be resolved at the local level, and through this process, they were able to address some of the issues, for example, around land and land boundaries and things like that. But other issues were political in nature, and it needed the engagement of the political actors from the capital and others were security related and needed engagement of the security forces. This served many purposes. Number one, everybody understood what the problem is and how it needed to be addressed. Most significantly, it addressed the concerns of some of the local

communities. For example, young people who had gone to the armed groups, they were unsure whether they can come back and still be safe. And number three, they felt there was a feeling that somebody was listening, and including those in government, being able to tweak one a few areas here and there. For example, allowing communities from the town of bosangwa, where the dialog took place, to be able to reach their villages and their farms without being harassed by security forces. So by approaching it this way, we saw that dialogue was able to shift boundaries and bring some relief to the local communities. They could access their farms, they could visit their relatives, go to their burial grounds. And to me, this was one example of where dialogue done well leads to significant change.

JC: I think the idea of Decentralised Dialogue is very powerful notion that the dialog has to be seized by people, and so that they can shape the conversation that influences them. And what I learned from you about the experience in Central African Republic was just as you said, so often the national level processes were about the people who held power but didn't attend to the needs of communities, and in fact, they paid little attention to the communities that were a long way from the capital, but where the violence often happened. And so the Decentralised Dialogue was a way of spreading the responsibility and giving people the opportunity to change their own context?

KT: Yes, spreading responsibility. Yes, that's one element. But the bigger element was also connecting the drivers of conflict, or what was sustaining violence in the community, and also the discussions at the political level, in for example, among the signatories to the peace agreements, and see, how can we improve our situation? How can we implement some of these elements? Most significantly, there are some quick wins that could be won immediately. For example, security forces allowing local communities to access their farms. If the communities had waited for somebody in in Bangui to give orders the security maybe it would have taken ages, but by taking the space of dialogue to the local communities and bringing all these actors, some of these openings happened immediately.

JC: How do you connect dialogue at different in different parts of society, the community level dialogues that are necessary to help bridge divides. How do you connect those with the dialogue with political leaders and political elites that are often quite reluctant to let go of power or reluctant to see change happen?

KT: That’s always the challenge, Jonathan. In a place like Central African Republic, and through this Decentralised Dialogue, how we were able to make each group move an inch was bridging a common understanding of what the problem was. Hence it was difficult to for some groups to turn around and at least not be seen to be conceding certain elements in their power.

JC: Janet, what's your experience of this? Because you've seen this in many contexts and in many layers as well.

JAM: So during the civil war in Liberia, the rebels came from these areas that I’m mentioning into the capital. There was the assumption that the rebels were groomed in Côte d’Ivoire in the

Ivorian context and then released to attack the Liberian government. Fast forward in the years, Côte d'Ivoire also exprienced civil confict in which the rebels also came from the border regions to attack the capital. So again the assumption that the rebels were also groomed in the Liberian borders and released to come and attack the capital. So again the assumption that the rebels were also groomed in the Liberian borders and released to come and attack. So they all had the misconception about each other. During the civil war the rebels ran back in Côte d'Ivoire from Liberia and during the civil conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, the political opponents also ran into Liberia, and so there were political tensions between both governments and the Ivorian government was demanding that the Liberian government should release the political prisoners to them, they should release the political actors to them so that they can face the rigors of the law. And this affected the way border communities were being treated in terms of security. So you would have Ivorian security actors just march anytime into the Liberian context, searching for people or doing all kinds of things and women who had to go in between the border regions were often faced with tight security searches and extortions and so on. So our work was to see how we could get both sides to understand each other. Most of the officials in the capitals did not have an experience of what the citizens in the border regions were actually experiencing, so having to work with them at that level, at the community level, enabled building the confidence of the people themselves to be able to say their grievance openly to the officials. Then we realised that there were other processes at the high level without the voices of the local people. So our processes at the community level helped to bring voice to the high level mediation sessions. And for example, whereas Liberia had seven border openings, Côte d'Ivoire had only four, and both sides did not know about this until we took the issues to the higher level, where the women had to see we have this opening here, and we have that opening there. And because of that, when we cross the border to Côte d'Ivoire, Côte d'Ivoire, people say we've breached the law, whereas this is an official post. And so sometimes the way that the local people are able to express themselves to high level processes are ignored, but we were able to facilitate this by documenting what was going on on the ground, sharing this in New York. We did a lot of advocacy work in New York, in Washington, we shared all the information, and also at the regional levels, at ECOWAS and different places, were able to share. So when they wanted to talk about the issues, they would ask us: "so who are the people who can actually speak about these issues?" And so we would then point to them, who to invite, and that also helped the high level processes. It's not an easy journey, but we were able to get them to at least bring, I think, about four people to the high level processes who stood, including market women, who stood up and spoke about the issues that affect them in the border regions. And today, the situation is changed.

JC: You've both spoken a lot about the role that women play in promoting dialogue. I wonder if you could share some further insights into why it is that women are so central to promoting dialogue in the face of mass violence?

KT: Well, the experience I've seen from the areas where I'm working, in Uganda, in Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic, and also in South Sudan, is that one even from

the demographic side of things, they are the majority, but sadly, they are the least engaged or who would have spaces or opportunities to engage in political processes. Therefore their views tend not to make it into the formal negotiations and dialogue processes, especially among the political elites, their views tends to be minimised. Yet my experience of engaging with them, you find they have even far much better insights that are not politically diluted. Hence, I've found that by listening to them, by creating spaces where they can express their views, by getting a platform where they express their opinions, it tends to open up new angles and new issues and new possible ways of moving forward than what we are used to when we are hearing from political actors. So I've seen that some of the issues, for example, like social integration of returnees from armed groups, for example, issues of GBV (gender-based violence), for example, spaces where they could use to create other creative ways of doing dialogue don't always make it when the women are not involved. So it's essential, and they are always very central in community dialogue processes.

JAM: I always say that women have the capacity to analyse conflict situations more and more because they witness a lot. They are often the ones that are either easily wiped off and or held to witness killings. They are the ones that have experienced gruesome, living experience of the war. So, for example, there was a conflict between herders and farmers in a community and in the deliberation all along over the years, they just said “Yes, they come to steal. They come to rob our things and their cattle. They come to eat our crops.” They never mentioned anything gendered, until the women were brought into the room, the women said, “Yes, the fear we have is that we as women, when we are going to the market, some young people from the herder community attack us and they rape us.” So the farmer community found this to be indignifying to talk about but this is actually something that they had in themselves, and they started killing young people from the herder community, but they wouldn't speak about it. And so when we brought women to come in, the women said “The sad thing, and the worst thing that is affecting us is the way we are often raped, the way we are often dealt with in this indignified manner.” So women bring in out issues, the needs and the interests of people affected to deliberations more than the men do. And some of these issues are actually so pertinent in conflict issues more than what we see as positions, and we need to bring the women more and more to these spaces.

JC: How do you change the power dynamic? Because, from what you're describing there Janet, the the abuse that women experience and Kennedy from the description of women being excluded from political processes, so much of this is around who holds the power?

JAM: I think I’ll start with northeast Nigeria. When we went to northeast Nigeria and went to the communities, we had elders and religious leaders, all men coming round, and we asked them questions. Here we talk about the power of questions and how we use questions to get people to think about how we need to bring these people to come and speak for themselves. So we asked them questions about how the conflict affected women and how it affected young people. And when we asked that, they said, “Oh, we cannot ask this. We cannot answer this question. So maybe we would create a meeting for you to talk to the women.” And then they realised that, eventually they realised that no, the women had to come in to speak also, because then they

have to speak for themselves. Because when you ask them questions about, “How did the conflict affect you?” then they would answer as, yeah, it affected and they'll talk about themselves. But when you ask specifically, how did it affect the women? How did the women behave when this happened? How did they feel? Then you would see that they will think about it and say, Oh, in that case, let the women speak for themselves. How did the young people behave? How did they feel? How did it affect them? Then they say, let the young people also speak for themselves. And eventually they began to understand why we talk of inclusive processes.

KT: Thanks, Janet for that. I think you raised an important issue around the power of questions and in dialogue what I've seen, learned, is the power of questions. For example, one of the key questions we use to ask, or we sometimes ask, is around who are the actors in this conflict, or in the whatever conflict we are trying to address. I'll give an example in Central African Republic. The general narrative is that women are victims. That's how it's largely perceived. But when using this power of question, you begin to ask, so who are the actors? Who are the members of armed groups? Then it became apparent that even some of the girls, young women, were also members of the armed group, and were doing any other job like any other member of the armed group. But when it came to the point of reintegration, sadly, the women were left because of masculine society, because of the perception that probably women were not necessarily fighting. At the point of demobilisation and reintegration, they started to fizzle out, but when they needed the fighters, the women were also in these armed groups. So we kept asking with one of the local leaders, why, for example, women were not considered at the point of DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration). Then at that point, we realised that there were a lot of social gendered norms and social challenges that women would have to face, or so many hurdles that they would have to jump for them to be considered an ex-combatant, like, for example, the young men. But also because of the stereotypes in the communities, the gendered stereotypes in the communities, nobody wanted to talk about women in armed groups or women in reintegration and women in DDR. So by creating these spaces and using the power of questions, it opened up the discussion around these issues, hence the why were, as we said earlier, the issue of inclusion, why it is important in a dialogue so that you are able to understand the various actors, the roles they were playing, and most significantly, at the point of transforming these conflicts, so when transforming these conflicts, who you need to be involved, whose voices need to be heard, and how it should be heard. On the how part, again, when, especially in the areas I work in, the social setup is such that child care is the responsibility of the women is the responsibility of women men not involved. So if the dialogue is, say, in the afternoon or late evening, of course, the women are busy with kids, and whatever, or some of them would have children. And therefore, if you don't work on the simple basics, for example, childcare during dialogue, then you lose out a big component or a big group of actors. But by paying attention to some of these nuances, we've been able to see more inclusion, more work, more engagement of women, especially young women, and most significantly seeing the issues from different perspective, as I said, for example, the perspective of women who are in armed groups, who are victims of armed groups, who are in communities. And through these

processes, we can see the enrichment of the discussion, the issues being discussed and the possible solutions that are proposed during and after the dialogue process.

JAM: In fact there is often a dialogue around participation with the communities. So we ask them who is involved in decision making and who is excluded and why. Dialogue offers us the space to challenge some of the status quo in people's belief systems, in people's understanding of issues, and you allow they themselves to talk about these challenging situations and search for the solution themselves.

JC: You've both spoken about the emotional toll of the communities affected by violence, and also the emotional courage to become involved. And you've also spoken about the level of preparation that's necessary to bring people into dialogue. But I know something that you've both experienced and looked at and worked on a great deal is the way in which communities affected by violence are traumatised by the experience of violence, and yet so much of what dialogue is about is trying to reconcile communities that have been broken by the violence and try to create new opportunities and new frameworks, new thinking for how people can live together. What do you think the role of dialogue is in that process?

KT: I would start maybe by giving you one story, on Central African Republic. We went in one community, and we were talking about the issue of trauma, and everybody was like, "No, we don't have issues here. None of us is traumatised. What's your problem?" But eventually by when we started to dissect and, you know, open up the discussion, then everyone was like, actually, the reality is that each one of us has got a certain level of trauma. There was in this particular community in a place called Sibut, Central African Republic, in their social orientation, young people are not expected to show emotions in public. If you are, if you show emotions as a young man in in public, you are written off. Secondly, from the women or women's perspective, there was a perception that if women, one woman – is traumatised in the community, she would contaminate all the women in that community. Therefore, if their perception that this particular woman is traumatised, get her out of the community as soon as possible. So through opening up and starting the dialogue on some of these challenges, we were able to move processes further. It's hard, it's difficult, because this is individuals upbringing and societal perceptions. But by opening the discussion around trauma and acknowledging that everyone can be affected, but also appreciating some of the channels in the communities that can help process trauma and now working with, say, faith leaders, some health workers and those traditional healers, we were able to take the discussion to another level, where, first, there is no acknowledgement that trauma is a big issue which needs to be addressed. But number two, there are also some of the cultural practices that have been used to or that can work to help reduce the trauma on individuals and communities, but it's still a challenge. It's something that all dialogue processes, peacebuilders, people of goodwill, need to focus on, because it's affecting a big community, especially where we've had mass displacements, like in Central African Republic.

JAM: In northeast Nigeria, we have different categories of women. So we have women who stayed back in the communities during the attacks and suffered all forms of atrocities and saw

visibly how people attack them. So sometimes they also know the attackers or the families, and know you come from that family or that family, and it is from that family that attack us. So they have the trauma, and they are keeping it. They cannot act, they cannot do anything. Then we have another group, which is those who were abducted and taken away by Boko Haram. And they are those who, when they have the opportunity to come they come back to the communities, but they come with children, and these children are branded as evil children, and so are also suffering forms of trauma and dislike and so on. Then we have those who were able to escape to other parts of Nigeria for safety and are coming back to the community, but people do not know whether they were abducted or they joined the security forces, so people are also looking at them in different forms. Some of these ones are young people who are coming back. So what we did was to begin a storytelling. Share your story about what you experienced. And we called it *biikichen lokochi*, which is looking at a trend of events that happened. And the women sat in a community called Bulunkutu Lasuwa in Maiduguri, and they shared their stories. One woman got up and narrated how her son was beheaded in her face and but everybody saw her as someone who was quiet and they didn't know whether she took part, whether her son or whether her family was affected, or was part of the perpetration or whatever, but she was an excluded person. But when she stood up and she shared her story, all the women were shedding tears for her. People were hugging her and doing things so we realised that there was a lot that women harboured that was affecting their health. Some of them told us how they were managed to deal with it. Some of them got this Benylin cough mixture with codeine, so they would drink that - a whole bottle, which is meant for one week. They would drink it to go to sleep. Some of them would go and buy Tramadol quietly. So it wasn't only the young people who were on drugs. But we created these storytelling spaces where women were put into groups of people to share their stories. And in that way, they built affection for one another, and they shared common themes, and they also looked for solutions together. And some of them have decided to become economic groups. They weave hats. They teach each other how to build, how to weave hats. Some of them make local lavender, and some of them decide to come together and contribute little monies, where, in my context, we call it *susu* contribution, so they support each other with with such monies and have moved on. It's not easy for traumatised people to transition from being traumatised to not being traumatised within a twinkle of an eye. It's a whole process, and each time, storytelling helps them to deal with some of these issues. Okay, you've dealt with this so your neighbour would ask you, so how about this issue you spoke about the last time? Are you able to deal with it, or do you need help to deal with it? And that has actually helped in the way that it is being done, and to the extent that in the community, the men and community leaders have asked why we created storytelling for only women and not for the men. And now the men too are beginning to create their own groups of storytelling, to tell their stories about how they were affected by the war and how they are dealing with it.

JC: Storytelling's such a powerful insight into how communities deal with trauma. For me, it's very interesting because in a way, storytelling is both a monologue and a dialogue. It's people sharing part of themselves as a monologue, but by sharing it with other people and receiving their response, it becomes a dialogue.

JAM: A facilitated storytelling is structured in such a way that you are supporting the storyteller, and you are also supporting the listeners. Because sometimes, when somebody is telling a story, those who are listening, it reminds them of what they went through also. And you have to also be observant. When you are facilitating such sessions to support such people, you either tap them or you say “We would listen to your story. And I know you've gone through that.” You have to learn to acknowledge them as it goes on, so that they can feel empowered to be able to share their story the next time. So a facilitated storytelling is actually a dialogue, and that's how we have used storytelling. The power of questions is used to help. Also tell your story in a structured way, in such a way that you unleash your burden, but also you help others to bring out their burdens as well.

JC: Thanks so much for sharing these insights. Before we go, I wonder if I can ask each of you to reflect on one or two key lessons that you've drawn from your work in supporting dialog over the years. Perhaps I'll start with you. Ken.

KT: So many lessons, but maybe if I was to choose two, I would say one, we need to be prepared to fail and prepared to succeed. In fact, failing should not be seen as … okay … not delivering what you intended to do should not be seen as a failure, but rather as a learning process and to keep learning each day. Number two, dialogue needs to be connected to political processes for it to be sustainable in the short medium and long term.

JC: Thanks Kennedy. How about you Janet?

JAM: Dialogue is a journey. It's not a one time activity. People think that dialog is just a one time activity. Just go and organise a meeting and that’s it. There are several processes, and these need to be interlinked to make meaning. Sometimes, because we want to learn from the process, we tend to want to direct it in a certain way, and then in that way we would fail. But when we allow it to go, but guided in a way that would bring out the strength of the participants, then that would really be be useful. Again, I've learned a lot from from dialogue process myself, because it is an empowering process. It is a process which empowers the parties, the affected, the different categories of affected people in the community or in the conflict, in the context to listen to one another and search for common solutions. So I think that dialogue should be supported in various ways, because in today's world, we fail to listen to one another, and dialogue enables us to listen to one another. Thank you.

JC: Well on that note, thank you ever so much for sharing your experiences.

KT & JAM: Thank you.

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