

Insights

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“The Power of Religion in Peace Building - How to stop violence and build inclusive and resilient societies from an interreligious dialogue perspective?”

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with the AGEH in the Civil Peace Service in Kenya

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Voices from the Stakeholders Dialogue Workshop

Editorial



Faith-based organisations (FBOs), specifically of Muslim and Christian origin, contribute tangibly towards reconciliation and peace in justice. This is one of the lessons learnt, the participants of the Exposure and Dialogue Programme stated unanimously. What enables these faith

based organisations to become agents of peace? It is by their spiritual inspiration, their credibility and social standing, *by their commitment for the cause of their people and not*



Exposure- und
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least by their professional expertise that they are able to generate opportunities for dialogue between opponents, help communities build peaceful and inclusive working and living together and advocate on political levels for access to justice and for good governance. The EDP participants witnessed that due to the dedicated peace work of such people it became possible not only to change violence-based socio-cultural practice and traditions of harmful rivalry towards communities living in peaceful co-existence, but also to achieve cooperation and support of political decision makers. In all cases this was being undertaken by interreligious cooperation and with a clear statement from all Kenyan partners: In a diverse religious setting, interreligious cooperation is a must to achieve social and political change.

This EDP had been commissioned by the [GIZ Sector Programme](#) ‘*Values, Religion and Development*’ and co-funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Since 2015 *German Cooperation* has been highlighting the role of faith-based organisations in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals by conducting studies, conferences, trainings and cooperation projects with religious organisations as partners.

The work of the Association for Development Cooperation ([AGEH](#)) and its Kenyan partners in the Civil Peace Service ([CPS](#) / “*Ziviler Friedensdienst*”) formed centre stage as local peace agents hosted the EDP visitors on the ground. Being part of a [consortium](#) of state and civil society organisations for 20 years, AGEH has been supporting peace building processes of partners mainly in post-conflict situations in Africa, Asia and Latin America also in the frame of the German Government-funded Civil Peace Service. Immersing into the sweat shop of civic conflict resolution in Kenya, though, the up-to-date relevance of this specific kind of personnel cooperation became obvious as it enables stakeholders to manage deep-rooted conflicts non-violently, e.g. also in current disputes over access to resources and in view of reducing the impact of imbalances in societal power.

Religious leaders and their organizations implement peacebuilding programs, support and train peace and human rights workers and network with decision makers. By doing so faith-based organizations do not only practice active non-violence but enable local communities to benefit from conflict transformation in terms of social cohesion and reduction of risks in economic activities. This is what impressed the group of EDP participants substantially. They also learnt that developing such initiatives of interreligious cooperation and collective action had been both requisites and success factors for managing social tensions in the context of the general elections in the year 2017.

In sum: The hosting peace agents of the FBOs facilitated an immersion learning process by which the EDP participants deepened their understanding of how civic conflict resolution and interreligious cooperation are being intertwined. At the end of the exposure programme, the concluding stakeholder dialogue workshop at *Tangaza University College* (Nairobi) with an impressive representation of scientists, religious leaders and practitioners helped analyze relevant criteria and indicators of successful peace building processes on the background of the different dimensions of interreligious dialogue. The workshop provided an important opportunity to digest and reflect on the fresh “field experience” with local experts, but also helped to understand it in the national Kenyan context.

Martin Vehrenberg
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Three Days with Munira in Mombasa

Munira had taken me along to the Friday Prayer in a mosque in the northern part of Mombasa. We had gone there directly from an interreligious meeting and were more than an hour early. She and two of her friends answered my questions about the legal background of polygamy knowingly and openly discussed the obligations Muslim men have vis-à-vis their different wives. They have to hold them equally, support them financially equally, and make them happy equally. But they only have to account for that in front of Allah. The conclusion, so the three women, is obvious: women have to be self-reliant, have to be able to support themselves and their children, since they cannot count to rely on their husbands. Women's Empowerment is not a goal, but a fact of life for most of the women I met, and they want to hand that on to their daughters and other women.



The Imams I was able to talk to during my days in Mombasa and the inputs others gave during the concluding workshop at Tangaza University College in Nairobi all stressed one point in particular: the Creator they believe in longs for peace and wants that mankind lives in peace. This longing for peace supports Munira in her work, but also many of the other activists I met.

Thus, Munira engages primarily in the Coast Interreligious Council of Clerics Trust, heading its Women's Desk, the work of the organisation supporting and empowering women. CICC works for a religious dialogue between clerics of Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in order to promote peace between the religions. Muslims, Christians and Hindus meet and learn about their faiths and traditions. This is of utmost importance in Mombasa, which, same as the entire coast of Kenya, is predominantly Muslim. Many outbreaks of violence occurred in the past years and decades, primarily linked to elections and disputes over land rights. Additionally, the radicalization of young Muslim men and their recruitment by Al-Shabab had increased. The old traditions of peaceful coexistence of religions were at stake. The Interreligious Dialogue bears fruits of hope.

The first day I was able to attend two meetings of Interreligious Dialogue. The first took place in a small mosque. About twenty people met, men and women, Muslim Imams and Christian priests as well as laypersons, and the elder of the village in which the mosque is located. The Imam of the mosque told of the troubled, non-peaceful history of the part of town. It was stressed by all that at the moment there are no tensions between the religions, that Muslim and Christian families live together closely and that there are even interreligious marriages. A nearby mosque that hosted radical Muslims had been closed. Asked by me about the impacts of such meetings Munira said: "We did build peace – thank God! – but we need to be careful and persistent."

I experienced what I might have intellectually known before, but not had truly realized: The peace seeking, spiritual face of Islam. The immense importance of the potential and power of women in any effort to strive for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. The fact, that our German perspective of a secular world does not meet the reality in the countries where we engage in development cooperation, where almost all people do actively belong to a religion and are led by some kind of spirituality.

Barbara Steinbrinker, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development



Build Trust and Educate!



„Education is the key“; Elisabeth told me and taught the kids of the Rendille. When the teachers had fled from the violence, Elisabeth continued to educate the kids. Over the years she formed a group of young people who tried to counter the traditional vicious circle of violence together with her. Elisabeth Kanini, a Kenyan from the southern part of the country, came as student of peace studies in 2009 to do empirical studies on the ongoing violent conflict of the Rendille and Borana tribes in

Marsabit County; the “forgotten part of Kenya” as locals coined their home. She came to study but she stayed for years – and “brought us peace”, the elders said.

What are the reasons of these violent conflicts?

First of all, there are conflicts over scarce resources in the struggle for survival of the pastoralists in the border region of Kenya, South Sudan and Somalia: water, pasture and fertile land. The second source of the conflicts is an archaic ideal of manhood: some of the young boys are educated to become warriors (morans) from early on to care for and protect the tribes’ ‘gold’, their livestock. Morans have to protect cows and goats against wild beast of the nearby forests as well as against the greedy grip of neighbouring tribes. Cheered as brave and audacious even by their mothers and future brides it is those Morans who do not only protect the tribe’s own livestock but also steel from the enemy tribe or even kill their men.

It took a long time before Elisabeth gained trust from the Borana tribe as they were distrustful against that woman from southern Kenya who enjoyed the trust of the Rendille tribe where she was hosted and adopted by a lady who had lost her husband in tribal clashes. Here, too, Elisabeth went the stony and persistent path of offering selfless services by teaching kids and youth without asking anything for herself.

Selfless peace building mission? The fact that she did not receive a salary from anybody and had no project funds at her disposal that she could have dished out to people for attending consultative meetings did not only help built her credibility but also generated the key prerequisite for sustainability in non-violent conflict transformation: local ownership. Of that, Elisabeth is very sure.

Nowadays, the elders of the Borana and Rendille talk with each other when cattle are stolen or when communities are threatened by outsiders. Together they resisted the attempts of politicians to incite another violent conflict before the last parliamentary election in 2017. Elisabeth has brought about friendships between young Rendille and young Borana. Now, the young villagers of either tribe use their cell phones to warn each other when learning about a Moran attack to come.

More and more I do realize that Elisabeth has a definite plan: The first steps need to be followed by further ones to sustainably overcome violence between the tribes. Therefore from very early on she began to create a group of the more gifted ones to have her interventions rooted deeply. Johnston is an example for that: During the games feast for the young people on Sunday he had been introduced as a new teacher. After secondary school Johnston went to university with a grant from the Bishop of Marsabit, Msgr. Peter Kitara; a grant that Elisabeth brokered. Johnston returned as a teacher. Nota bene: a Borana teaching in a Rendille village!

Johnston stands pars pro toto for a number of Elisabeth’s students: with a good eye for the



young people's gifts she tries to elevate the level of education in the villages with extremely limited means to sustainably implement a constructive conflict culture and in the end to improve the living conditions and create personal bonds of key persons across the different tribal communities. Well, academic theory knows a lot about the need to build social cohesion when it comes to matters of conflict and peace. I am grateful to have been able to walk for some few days in the shoes of a Missionary of Peace.

Prof. Dr. Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, Institute for Theology and Peace

The Trip to Matolani

Seven men in a 4WD: three religious leaders from Kenya's coastal region on the middle bench, two Protestants, and a Sheikh. They know each other, obviously appreciate each other; have not seen each other for some time. We travel to a meeting with youth representatives of two communities of different ethnic origins: Orma nomads (Muslims) and Giriama farmers (Christians and Muslims). The Orma migrated from the North a few years ago.



There was violence. Al-Shabab is also active and recruited in the area. For a few years the religious leaders have been working with the communities to create and preserve peace. You could say the religious leaders took us along to a "monitoring visit" if using project management language would be appropriate. We want to meet the youth representatives and let them tell us what they have done since the last meeting. It is about checking whether they were able to stay on course, about encouraging them, giving advice, guidance and orientation.

To me, the strongest impression during my immersion in the work of Coast Interreligious Council of Clerics Trust (CICC) I gained on that trip to Matolani.

What a ride! Long, exhausting, tiring, and demanding a lot of patience from my side, but also: entertaining, funny, exciting - and incredibly instructive.

Three religious leaders on the central bench: After the greetings and the exchange about the weather, the everyday things and news followed by a few jokes it gets serious. The Sheikh speaks of the Islamic idea of paradise. "What does it look like, who will come?" Quran quotations follow. "What is it like with you Christians?" – "And what about the sinners?" – "Is there still a way for them?" – "What about guilt and sin against God?" – "What about punishment, atonement, purgatory?" – "Reconciliation?" The Pastor and the evangelical Bishop quoted from the Bible, teasing each other and the Muslim Sheikh... - big laughing!

Was this just pietistic piety? No way! There are differences of opinion among the Christians travelers about the interpretation – and it would be the same, if there were several Muslims in the car. What do we have in common among Christians and Muslims? This is what counts!

Later we find out that this dialogue among the religious leaders served implicitly to be able to address the young people's consciences together and become able to connect the arguments.

There is an exchange on theological questions not for the sake of doctrine, but for the sake of peace and thus for the sake of life and God's will.

Martin Vehrenberg, AGEH

African spirituality as both promoter and adversary of peace in Kenya's coastal region

At its core, Haki Yetu Organisation's peace building work is based on trust, interreligious orientation, and bringing together the relevant stakeholders. One of the first doors that Julius, my immersion facilitator and host, opened to me was the one to the Deputy County Commissioner of the Sub County of Rabai, around 15 kilometres inland from Mombasa. The Commissioner had arranged for a meeting of Julius with elders from different villages of the Sub County – a clear sign of trust. The occasion of the meeting was an alarming one: in the coastal region, more than 50 mostly elderly people had been killed in 2018, in most cases induced by family members seeking to obtain land rights and titles. Since these titles cannot be disputed, and murdering their holders seems



to be the last resort, the elderly are being accused of witchcraft. Putting names on a flyer and distributing it in the village can be sufficient to make them appear outlawed. This method brings mistrust to the communities, gives rise to intra-family divisions, and overstrains the security staff.

In this situation, trust is a rare good. Haki Yetu Organisation, in the person of Julius, aims at rebuilding that trust.

It became obvious: Bringing together the relevant stakeholders is a factor of success! Trust is highly linked to people, as our meeting in Rabai showcased: during the meeting, the Deputy County Commissioner asked Julius to join a session of the entire security personnel he was simultaneously holding. Initially only prepared to address the elders, Julius joined the security meeting and was introduced by the Commissioner as a highly trustworthy person that could help address the killing of the elderly. It is worth noting that Julius was also a demanding counterpart on his turn: He reminded everyone in the room that if the killing did not stop, investors would refrain from starting a business in the region. In adapting his own language to different stakeholders, Julius managed to make each group focus on their ability and role in solving the problem.

Julius added the phone numbers of the persons listed on one of the flyers accusing people of witchcraft. He handed the list over to the security officer in charge, making clear that if one of the listed was killed, it would publicly prove the failure of the security staff. It is not presumptuous to state that such a step needs courage and passion for the ones at stake, but is also only possible because of the trust that Julius can rely on.

Christopher Haarbeck, GIZ (German Cooperation)

The (Soft) Power of Peace of Religious People – and their Power Station

The mountain of problems is high in Korogocho, an informal settlement in Nairobi, at least as high as the eight (8) kilometer long dumpsite: for twenty years garbage and rubbish has been left there and not cleared; some people in the neighborhood make a very modest living from it by collecting garbage but some others make millions with it. It is organized crime. Cancer incidents have risen; people are affected gravely by coughing and lung problems, in general, especially the children. There is far spread youth unemployment, a high rate of criminality and many violent youth gangs talking of the round-about 40 militia groups in the informal settlements in the area. There is also domestic violence and rape; all

that belongs to Korogocho. More than half of the women are single mothers, the fathers, though, „disappear“.

In this miserable informal settlement of Korogocho I got to know the power of ‘Mama Saint John’ and other religious actors in peace building and I learnt to understand the importance of their „power station“; being Tangaza University College (TUC) and its educational network.

First, there is “Mama Saint John”, my host lady and her witness of life. Then, there is the Justice and Peace group at Korogocho. I also had the chance to join a meeting of religious leaders of Korogocho and Kariobangi and from other sectors in that neighborhood.

Many Evangelical and Pentecostal pastors, the Catholic parish priest, a Comboni missionary, a Sheikh and two Imams as well as JP activists who joined the meeting, agreed to continue their cooperation and be prepared before the next elections in 2022. Importantly, they also agreed on an appointment for working on the next step in January 2019. All of them are appreciating the network and want to take care of it. They perceive that there is a reliable common ground in the ‘Faith in One God’ who is merciful and who wants that the people, all human beings, can live together peacefully and in justice.

What is moving people in the slum; is an issue in the exchange I witnessed: The access to social services, the caring for school drop outs, the domestic violence and the issues around the dumpsite. „Talk to the people and stay together with them, and cooperate with security“, this ‘dual-track strategy’ is also common and shared by all who want to reduce violence in Korogocho and make life more inclusive and peaceful. Lobbying and advocacy stays on the agenda of the local religious leaders, and they want to foster cooperation also in their political dialogue.

‘Mama Saint John’, my host lady, where I spend three days and nights, is the heart and the motor of justice and peace work in the parish as well as in the deanery. Walking through the dirty roads of Korogocho she knows almost everybody and talks to many – calm but with authority and knowledge about the background of the people and what they need. And she finds respect. „I had to get strong“; she stressed. I understood that when she spoke of all the obstacles in her life. At first she refused to take over responsibility for the justice and peace work in the parish, since there was „no money, no education“, but then the parish priest insisted: „You must help our people...!“

After several trainings at Tangaza University College she is now in charge of counseling victims of domestic violence, helping Micro-Startups (income generating projects) of women as well as for the Caritas work in the parish. After receiving training in paralegal advisory, she is now also doing legal counseling. She gets strong support from the parish and the Church, and gives her strong commitment in return.

„God has made it; it is my vocation!“ – To her, it is the fulfillment of her life. Financially she stayed poor and shares two rooms with a daughter and a grandson, a very humble and tiny place. But the children of the compound come over in the evening and get a plate from of the dishes, which hold enough food for all of them. They get talking and receive encouragement. Together they laugh and sing. „It’s a miracle“, she calls out. I do agree wholeheartedly!



Gertrud Casel, Exposure and Dialogue Programme Association



Voices from the Stakeholders Dialogue Workshop

On 30 October the programme's concluding dialogue workshop took place at the [Tangaza University College](#) (Nairobi), which -inherent to several courses- offers academic training in interreligious dialogue to both, Christian and Muslims of various denominations or sub-groups. The college, soon to be a University in its own right, trains volunteers in peace building and human rights work. *Tangaza* – a Kiswahili expression for “Announce!” [the Good Message/Gospel] is a joint venture of over 22 Catholic congregations and cooperates with the Muslim UMMA University and the Protestant Saint Paul's University.

Rev. Fr. Innocent Manganya M.Afr. (Tangaza University College):



“Interreligious dialogue (IRD) is the way, and the solution to sustainable peace in Kenya and in the world at large. Concerning IRD it is of utmost importance to know and understand experiences and challenges on the ground for actors on national and international level and vice versa. Politicians, civil servants must understand the burden of vulnerable people on the ground. The methodological approach of EDP – that is: come and learn from experiences on the ground - is to be utilized in different settings. I want to apply

the same methodology in our programs and would like to continue with our cooperation.”

In his welcoming speech **Sheikh Rashid Ali Omar** (Deputy Chief Khadi of Kenya) starts with the official greetings making a reference to “Islam as a Religion of Peace”:

(Greeting): “Salam aleikum!” - „Peace be with you!”

(Answer): “wa aleikum as-Salam!” - “And Peace be also with you!”

“Wearing a white robe, many people, not only from your country [i.e. Germany], seeing me on the street, might think ‘he might be a terrorist’. There are many misunderstandings about Islam and the Quran: So, please, do read this book!

In this meeting today, we are a great community. We have come together to serve God. KARIBUNI – please feel at home at Tangaza!”



Prof. Dr. Mohamed Karama (Deputy Vice Chancellor, UMMA University), highlighted the relevance of interreligious cooperation – also by conducting this workshop:

“When Christians and Muslims stand side by side, when Churches and Mosques act jointly, living together in peace and human development will advance. We, the Universities in Nairobi, took a first step...”



Ms. Elisabeth Kanini Kimau (Horn of Africa Grassroots Peace Forum):

“Education is very important so that religion can build peace. Women were left out in discussions for too long. As part of the solution they must be involved in interreligious dialogue at all levels. Women suffer most on account of their children so they are highly engaged in social transformation.”



Rev. Fr. Willybard Lagho (Vicar General, Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa):

“There is an important failure on the part of Government which is the inability to look at the past conflict history and appropriately deal with the burden of the past. There is a need for empowerment to give sustainability to peace initiatives like the one in Marsabit. We have to speak about the heroes in interfaith peace building, for our children, so that they do not only hear the bad stories of exclusion. It is important for the next generation to spread the narratives of inclusivity: ‘You are fellow citizens in the household of God, in His Kingdom nobody will feel as a stranger.’”

EDP – Development has got a face

Exposure and Dialogue Programmes are offers for further training and dialogue to promote sustainable and responsible acting carried out in developing and newly industrialized countries. They enable management staff and decision-makers from field of politics, business, church and civil society to have intense encounters and dialogues with people living in poverty.

Imprint

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