

Report about Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) Africa Gathering Feb. 2014, Kenya

by Amule Emmanuel (AVP facilitators' forum South Sudan)

Under the theme "Celebrating African diversities in Peace Building", the first Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)-Africa gathering took place at Bishop Stam Conference Center outside of Kakamega, Kenya. One hundred and one people participated from eleven African countries – Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, eastern Congo, South Sudan, South Africa, Namibia, Nigeria, and Liberia. The major part of the funding for the conference was supplied by the American Friends Service Committee's Dialogue and Exchange Program.

One of the first activities was for each country to give a fifteen minute report with four minutes of questions about their activities. By far the most active country was Kenya which has seven organizations using AVP. For example, Friends Church Peace Teams did 82 AVP workshops in the last three years. These organizations formed a committee which organized the conference. Rwanda was the second most active country even though the AVP program in Rwanda no longer receives support from AGLI. They have had a strong Board of Directors since they began in 2001 and have actively promoted work with other organizations. One that caught my attention was doing AVP basic workshops with families in conflict (even deadly conflict) supported by the Rwandan Red Cross.

It was difficult to determine how much AVP is being done in Uganda because there are many, many organizations doing some AVP, but there is no overall body in Uganda that meets together. But these go from the graduate program at Makerere University's peace studies department to nuns who use it in schools to various community groups. In South Africa there are three active centers in Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town. The one in Durban is done through a research institute at a university, while the Cape Town Friends Peace Centre mostly does it with youth in schools. The program in Johannesburg, which once was very vibrant, has lost some of its funding from the government and so is not as active as formerly.

Nigeria in the past has done a lot of AVP in twelve states, but when funding dried up, many of the AVPers in those states were not well enough organized to continue finding alternative sources. Maji Peterx, though, is still active with groups in Kaduna and Plateau states. AVP in Liberia is just beginning so they are having the teething problems of new countries starting the program.

In eastern Congo, Tanzania, and Burundi the AVP programs are weak, doing very few workshops. But then one of the issues that were raised was if HROC was considered a part of AVP or not. Rwanda, for example, which is doing a lot of HROC work mostly supported by AGLI, did not include HROC in the report, while Burundi, which is doing a lot of HROC supported by a number of different funders, did.

South Sudan and Namibia were the most dependants, their programs were completely dependent on external funding and, when that dried up – as it always will – the programs became defunct until another golden angel comes along. This then became the basic theme of

the conference – how can AVP become self-sustaining in Africa, resilient by itself.

There were a lot of creative ideas. AVP-Rwanda has gotten some micro-credit organizations to pay for workshops for their participants. In Kenya one group got a supermarket to donate a voucher to buy food for workshops.

Lessons for AVP South Sudan:

- AVP South Sudan should stop being dependant on external funding, they should solicit for local funding within South Sudan
- Spirit of voluntarism should be applied in AVP work, as it is a movement of voluntary workers, it has to continue.
- Host organizations like ONAD should adopt the Alternatives to Violence Project as one of their programs and look for funds to maintain it going.
- AVP workshop is more needed in South Sudan more than it has ever been needed, so AVP South Sudan should work hand in hand with ONAD to do more work.

WAYFORWARD:

The conference ended with the Way Forward. After considerable discussion, it was decided that there would be a Second AVP-Africa Gathering in Rwanda in 2016. A coordinating committee/council will be arranged with each country naming a representative. In addition there will be three committees – regional gathering planning, communications, and fundraising. People with the appropriate interest and expertise will be appointed to these committees. Change Agents for Peace, International (CAPI) will be the secretariat for AVP-Africa

Pictorial

