



Summary Note: BURUNDI, LEADERSHIP WORKSHOPS, 2001-2004

2001-2004: The Burundi Leadership training Program (BLTP)

Background:

Burundi's recent history of inter-communal massacres, including genocide, and post-independence domination of a sub-set of the Tutsi minority over the majority Hutu population, produced deep-seated suspicions and mistrust among elites – and an ethnically polarized urban leadership class, and also a huge gulf between the country's "political class" and a deeply alienated largely rural population. At the onset of the three-year political transition established by the Arusha Peace Accord of August 2000, all four of the key political imperatives for a sustainable Burundian peace and successful post-war reconstruction – a new interdependence-affirming paradigm, trust among key players, cooperative political rhetoric, and consensus on the rules of the game – were largely absent. While there were plentiful examples of grassroots reconciliation, at the leadership level there was little sense of common ground. Trusting inter-ethnic relationships were the exception rather than the norm, and the consensus among principal parties on the rules governing their interactions was exceedingly fragile. Remarkably, despite all this, a very strong peace dynamic took hold. Burundians leaders no less than rural farmers are tired of war. The country, for decades one of the world's poorest, has been economically devastated by the conflict. It has become clear to most that there is no military solution to Burundi's political crisis. Burundians everywhere want to find a way of creating for themselves a peaceful, stable, secure future. This common yearning has made Burundian leaders receptive to the concept of a national training program, designed to strengthen the ability of key leaders to work collaboratively – across the lines of ethnic and political division – and to develop a common vision for the nation's post-war economic reconstruction.

Process:

With key leadership from Howard Wolpe and Eugene Nindorera¹, a carefully constructed multi-event leadership training initiative was designed, and financial support was won from the Post Conflict Fund at the World Bank. The approach taken in constructing the Burundi Leadership Training Program was informed by six principles:

(1) *Securing a Burundian "buy-in"*-- program sustainability required that the initiative be "owned" by the Burundians themselves and that knowledgeable Burundians be involved at the "take off." Project managers held almost one hundred meetings over two months with Burundians from all political perspectives -- from government and civil society, and from the military and rebel groups. In addition, Burundians were brought into the project management team at the project's inception who are highly respected and trusted individuals who enjoyed the confidence of virtually all Burundian institutions and political factions and lent immediate credibility to the initiative.

(2) *Selecting Leaders Strategically* -- Burundian stakeholders were each requested to draw up their own list of thirty-five leaders they would most like to see involved in the training program -- asked to nominate only persons who, by virtue of the positions they held, or by virtue of the influence they wielded in their respective groups, had the capacity to shape Burundi's future. One-half of the participants were to be drawn from the "political class" (the government and the political parties, the Army, and all of the rebel organizations); the other half came from civil society (churches, women's organizations, academia, media, youth, labor unions and the business community). Submissions would be treated confidentially, shared only with members of the management team, and final responsibility for participant selection would lie with the project managers, who had to ensure that the composition of every workshop group satisfied the need for ethnic, regional and gender balance, and for sectoral inclusivity.

¹ **Howard Wolpe**, Director of the Africa Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; former Chair, House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa; former Special Envoy, Africa's Great Lakes Region; **Eugene Nindorera** – former Burundian Minister of Human Rights, former Director of Burundi Office of the National Democratic Institute.

- (3) Framing the Invitations to Prospective Participants** -- invitations to participate in BLTP stressed three themes:
- The invitee is one of a very select group of approximately one hundred leaders identified by other Burundians as individuals whose influence and stature are such that they can shape the future of their country. Participants report that this framing underlines the importance of the effort and imbues the leaders with a sense of responsibility to commit to the program.
 - Leaders are invited to participate in their personal capacities, not as representatives of their organizations or institutions. This enables them to feel freer and more open with each other within the workshops.
 - The training workshops are not negotiating venues; rather, they are to be understood as part of a technical, capacity-building initiative designed to strengthen the individual leadership skills of Burundian leaders. This formulation helps to depoliticize the project, making it easier for persons who have resisted earlier opportunities for inter-group dialogue to participate.

(4) Securing a Regional “Buy-in” -- consultations were held with several regional leaders to ensure their full understanding of the objectives of the BLTP and to receive their analyses of evolving peace process dynamics. It was important to assure the regional states spearheading the still on-going peace talks – Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa – that the BLTP workshops would never become an alternative negotiating venue.

(5) Insuring Program Sustainability -- Burundians have had extensive experience with well-intended training initiatives that lacked any follow-through or sustainability. Project managers stressed that the BLTP was designed not as a series of discrete training sessions, but as a continuing process directed to the development of a sustainable, cohesive network of Burundian leaders. To ensure that this was a realistic objective, the World Bank’s Post Conflict Fund provided adequate start-up funding not for a single workshop, but for a series of workshops that would be organized over an eighteen-month period. In addition, the project managers received assurances from a number of donors that additional funds would be made available for further training or to meet other project resource requirements – and because this follow-on funding has indeed manifested, there is a widespread belief in the sustainability of the “spirit of Ngozi”.

(6) Insuring Concrete End-Results for Burundi -- the leadership training and networking are conceived not as ends in themselves, but as means to the ultimate objective of advancing Burundi’s post-war reconstruction. There is no stronger impetus toward the rebuilding of a sense of community than joint problem-solving initiatives that have people working across the lines of ethnic and political division; the successful accomplishment of joint tasks helps validate both the common ground of previous adversaries and their ability to transcend earlier antagonisms.

Setting and Structure:

The BLTP involves three workshop groups, each numbering between 30-35 leader-participants. Each group begins with a 5-6 day retreat in which the participants receive the “core” BLTP training. Shorter follow-on training workshops are held periodically. Between these formal training sessions, many of the participants meet and socialize by themselves – sometimes with the facilitation of local BLTP staff, sometimes entirely on their own initiative – to deepen their relationships, and to develop projects that can contribute to the nation’s economic recovery. Because the BLTP seeks to facilitate a cohesive network involving all of the participating leaders, all three workshop groups are gradually being linked together – through social events, the sharing of contact information, combined training activities, and their work on economic recovery projects. The local BLTP office serves as a meeting-place and reference point for participating leaders. The BLTP project team stays in close touch with the leaders – supporting their efforts and assessing the impact of the training on personal and professional lives.

Workshop Format and Content:

The central training objective was to address the four political imperatives for the reconstruction of war-torn societies: a shift from a zero-sum paradigm to one that affirms inter-dependence and common ground; the development of a modicum of trust among the decision-makers; moving from confrontational to cooperative rhetoric; and a consensus on how power will be organized and decisions will be made, i.e., on the rules of the game. BLTP is based on the premise that this requires more than a cognitive understanding of concepts -- a paradigm or mind-shift can not be taught; it must be experienced, and the same is true of trusting relationships that develop only over time and involve personal emotional investment. BLTP training provides an opportunity for experiential

learning² – through interactive exercises, simulations, and role-playing – all designed to enable the participants to learn and build upon their skills, not only through lectures and reading, but also through their own experience. The project uses exercises in perception and in communication, role-plays, simulations, and strategic games to engender an actively “experiential” atmosphere and to create opportunities for participants to take risks and experience change.

Outcomes cited in Independent Evaluation³:

Direct Impact

Attitude change: observations and interviews with participants and observers indicate that the BLTP workshops effected a personal transformation in the way people perceive themselves, breaking through some of the stereotypes and *a priori* assumptions that they may have carried for years; the most dramatic attitudinal changes occurred with extremists, refugees, and newcomers to the political game.

Social capital: participants cited the relationships they built at the workshops as an important impact; the BLTP’s ability to able to bring together such a diverse group of people and create dialogue between them is cited as “an enormous contribution”. There is no other venue where this group of decision-makers can come together informally and relate relatively openly with one another. Some participants believe that the social capital being created through the BLTP is essential for helping the peace process to move forward, precisely because there is still the real possibility that it will fall apart. For that reason, maintaining this social capital beyond the initial workshop is considered crucial by all, and the post-workshop participant-generated communications initiatives such as group internet site and newsletter, are viewed as supporting the continued deepening of social cohesion

Skills: Participants were pleased with the skills, tools, and methods learned; skills transmission during the BLTP workshops has been very successful at helping to build better communication among participants, and moderately successful at bringing the participants to a level that allows them to use these skills in their professional work.

Capacity for Economic Policy: BLTP has not been very successful in developing effective economic recovery strategies or projects. Most of the development projects developed during the Ngozi I and II workshops engage only a few people and were not necessarily of particularly high quality, although a demonstration agricultural project incorporating local leadership training has been funded and will be beginning soon. Development of larger strategies for economic recovery in Burundi has also been elusive; during relevant brainstorming sessions, participants tend to rehash old, general development strategies without critically analyzing how these would create anything new or different compared to the past. Understanding this, the BLTP has focused instead on the building of confidence, a network of committed people, a broad range of activities in support of the transition, and targeted interventions in security sector reform.

Indirect Impact

Participants’ Behavior Changes: Anecdotal evidence suggests that some participants of Ngozi I and II workshops have taken some of the new insights home with them, beginning to apply them in their personal and professional environments.

Security Sector: The most immediate wider impact (outside individuals) on national institutions and policies has come in relation to the security sector training, and particularly the training of the Etat-Majeur Général Intégré (EMGI) in Gitega in May 2004, where BLTP training helped the EMGI to have a breakthrough on the “status of combatants” issue by building skillfully upon incentives that existed among the EMGI participants to come to an

² A detailed summary of the BLTP techniques is available in “Re-Building Peace and State Capacity in War-Torn Burundi”, by Howard Wolpe, Steve McDonald, Eugene Nindorera, Elizabeth McClintock, Alain Lempereur, Fabien Nsengimana, Nicole Rumeau, and Alli Blair; in **Roundtable: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs**, July, 2004.

³ Independent external evaluation conducted for the Post Conflict Fund: “The Burundi Leadership Training Program: A Prospective Assessment”, by Peter Uvin and Susanna P. Campbell, July 2004, The World Bank.

agreement -- BLTP increased the trust among them as well as their communication capacity, so that an agreement could more easily be reached.

- The important lesson learned here is that the most direct impact will be observed with institutions and decision-making mechanisms that are faced with issues that they need to resolve, and have incentives to do so – the question of institutional “ripeness” when choosing which institutions to target.)
- Many of the Ngozi I-III participants report that they do not have the power, leverage, or even the incentives as individuals to make a serious impact at the present time on institutional transformation, economic reconstruction, or sustainable peace. But, they believe (and observers agree) that the significance of the BLTP is that it continues to create relationships among a group of people that may be able to help keep the transition, and the country, from falling apart (which is currently a real risk) -- they constitute a network that shares, more than any other group of such political and social diversity, a sense of trust and openness to mutual discussion.

Spin-Off Activities

The BLTP produced a set of spin-off activities, which were not planned or predicted at the outset: three additional workshops in the security sector (funded by DfID and the EU), and a community-based leadership training project adopting the BLTP approach in two Provinces (with WWC TA, but funded and executed by the Office of Transition Initiatives of USAID). These spin-offs may constitute the most direct impacts of the BLTP on national institutions and policies, and possibly longer-term peace and economic reconstruction; certainly the EMGI training has produced clearly visible results. These spin-off activities demonstrate that the BLTP team works as a flexible learning organization, capable of rapidly responding to emerging opportunities, soliciting funds from a broad range of other international actors. In a second phase, these spin-off activities may increasingly come to define the BLTP – but it is important to remember that it is the experience and the credibility gained from the Ngozi I-III workshops that allowed these spin-offs to occur.

This summary note was prepared by the LICUS unit in OPCS, as a companion to the “Dissemination Note on Leadership Workshops, 2001-2004” jointly issued in December 2004 by the LICUS unit and the Public Sector Governance unit in PREM. The content of this summary was reviewed by the workshop organizers responsible for the event.

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