

Youth Peace Building Programmes in Masvingo's High Density Suburbs: Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Challenges facing the youth in Zimbabwe call for concerted efforts by all youth related organizations to find ways of addressing them. Youth susceptibility is exacerbated by poverty and unemployment. This study is calling for strengthened efforts for coming up with youth peace building programmes that will reduce risky behaviours in the ancient city of Masvingo. Politicians and sugar daddies take advantage of the youth's desperate situation to lure them into electioneering and prostitution. It is from this background that this study evaluated current peace building programmes being pursued in the high density suburbs namely, Mucheke (A, B, C&D), Runyararo west, Kwambudzi, Rujeko and the newly established Victoria range. The study explores attempts by non-governmental organizations in trying to address these acknowledged challenges among the youth. The study was underpinned by Lederach's structural violence theory. The data was elicited from secondary sources. The outcome of this study demonstrated the need for more of such programmes to be carried out as the youths in these high density suburbs were reeling under multi-faced conflicts. These conflicts are precipitated by the fundamental causes such as poverty, unemployment, peer pressure and alcohol abuse as well as the unfulfilled needs such as security, freedom and participation. The paper recommends the nongovernmental organizations working with the youths to combine their efforts and resources in order to cover a wider cross section of the youths in both urban centres and elsewhere in the country to ensure the youth are empowered to cope with incidences of exploitation, manipulation and disenfranchisement during election periods.

Keywords: Youths, Peacebuilding, HIV and AIDS, programmes, Conflict, disenfranchisement

1. Introduction

Society and various stakeholders are encouraged to embrace peace building programmes by the youth to achieve lasting peace and sustainable development. Youths have often been marginalized and not co-opted in decision making processes, even on issues that directly affect their welfare. This has created a sense of disenfranchisement in the youth as they view themselves as 'invaluable elements' who only get used in helping others especially politicians in achieving their objectives and agenda. The demand for recognition by the youth as well as the desire to be heard and to play an active role in promoting their interests is far from being collectively accepted. This study is therefore calling for a shift in drifts where societies are now being encouraged to adjust to the call for the new youth-adult relationship and involvement in all civic matters

It is important to identify youth programmes that can be adopted in strengthening youth's roles in peace building. The department of justice in America and South Africa implemented peace building programmes as a way of addressing gangsterism and crime in high density suburbs (Ramsbotham, 2005). Similar programmes could be adopted in the Zimbabwean context to address the challenges which are bedeviling our youth. There is need to use the community halls in the suburbs which are currently lying idle to run such beneficial youth peace building programmes. Although the nongovernmental and church organizations in Masvingo like Christian Care, Caritas, CCJP and BHASO have made such an insignificant breakthrough in youth programming since too much emphasis was being placed on leadership processes, training and capacity building programmes in rural areas. This is why this study is advocating for active youth peace building programming in Masvingo's high density suburbs as a vehicle to empower the youth to enjoy their civil liberties.

2. Statement of the problem

The youth are an important grouping in the societal order yet they are neglected in peace building programmes. They are the most vulnerable group each time conflict occurs and are generally exposed to rape, sexual abuse and other various forms of manipulation. There is need therefore to come up with programmes aimed at strengthening the youth's role in peace building in Masvingo's high density suburbs.

2.1 Research questions

This paper was guided by the following research questions in its pursuit to explore the peace building programmes which are in place for the youth in Masvingo's high density suburbs.

- 1) What conflict resolution programmes are in place for the youths in Masvingo's high density suburbs?
- 2) What challenges are faced by organistaions working with the youth in implementing their desired peace building programmes?

- 3) What is the impact of peace building programmes on the welfare of the youth in Masvingo's high density suburbs?

2.2 The purpose of the study

Since one of the researchers was born and bred in one of the Masvingo's old high density suburbs called Mucheke (kuRank) close to the bus terminus, it was easy to follow the changing trends in the prevalence of high unemployment and poverty as aspects which have adversely affected the general life style of the youth. This resulted in a large number of youth getting involved in crime, prostitution, drug peddling and political violence. It is from this context that the researchers decided to explore the current youth programmes which are aimed at finding durable solution to the problems faced by the youth.

It was envisaged that the outcome of the research would contribute towards the generation of new knowledge in the field of peace and conflict studies which seem to be currently under researched. In addition the study also sought to showcase adaptive mechanisms to absolve the youth from the current social, economic and political quagmire.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by the structural violence theory, which was developed by Galtung (1990). He postulated that conflict starts when parties' interests come into contention or the relationship between the parties becomes incompatible. This may develop into hostility as the attitudes and behaviours manifest in opposite directions. Such conflicts may suck in other people and may lead to an open conflict. He highlighted the fact that a conflict structure that tended not to have overt conflict attitudes or behavior was latent. The conflicts that the youths get involved in are caused by a variety of reasons which are explained by Galtung's (1990) structural violence theory. Galtung (1990) highlighted that where there were inequalities within society and consequently discontentment and structural violence were inevitable. The inequalities could be tracked back to unequal distribution of resources, deteriorating social services and one powerful group dominating others. Galtung asserted that, structural violence as opposed to personal or direct violence is indirect in that there may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and is rooted in unequal power and life opportunities. To end the structural violence, Galtung, advocated for the removal of contradictions and injustices. This exposition of Galtung's theory is related to the situation that currently prevails in Mucheke high density suburbs of Masvingo. The suburbs have been seriously affected by the current economic decline and this has affected the ability of local government to provide decent social services to the inhabitants, in a world that is already hostile to the youth due to widespread poverty, unemployment, drug abuse and exploitation by political gurus in the pursuit of their partisan interests. It is against this background that the youths need to be empowered in survival strategies. Therefore, the use of Galtung's theoretical framework on structural violence is appropriate for this discussion as it highlighted the possible root causes of conflicts in Mucheke high density suburbs in Masvingo.

4. Brief Literature Review

The new Zimbabwean constitution refers to a youth as someone whose age range falls between 15 and 35 years. Most of the youth in Mucheke high density suburbs are not employed and spend their time in groups smoking and drinking while boys are now trying to get small cars (zvikipipi) to drive even without licenses as a way of engaging in informal business generally known as 'mushikashika' (the business of transporting people illegally). These youth require formal training for them to engage in meaningful peace building programmes and productive crime free life. In this connection Lederach (1997) states that training in conflict resolution generally has twofold functions, namely; raising awareness and imparting knowledge and life skills. This entails educating people about conflict and how to deal with it. Training programmes are developed to provide participants with an understanding of how conflict operates and are taught useful concepts for dealing with conflict in more constructive ways. According to Lederach (1997) many of the conditions that generate conflict such as social and economic insecurity, political discrimination and human rights violations are experienced primarily at grassroots level.

In his book *Pedagogy of the oppressed* Freire (1993) highlighted the fact that those that are disempowered already know a great deal about the sources of their oppression and what must be done to overcome it. Participants empower themselves by taking responsibility for their own learning, by increasing their understanding of the communities in which they live and by understanding how they as individuals are affected by current and potential policies and structures.

Dugan (2003) indicated that theorists such as Curle (2003) supported the use of education to spread the voice of peaceful resolutions to conflicts. In his view, the strategies adopted would have to increase awareness of the nature and source of the conflict and of ways of resolving the conflict that meets the needs of the conflicting parties. It is also important to educate adversaries and potential allies so that the conflicts do not repeat

themselves. Educational efforts, in Curle's view, include strategies that increase awareness of the nature and sources of conflict, and of finding ways of resolving the conflict that meet the needs of the initially less powerful groups.

Ansell (2004) highlighted the importance of conflict resolution by indicating that gaining skills helps individuals understand conflict processes and empower them to use communication and creative thinking to build relationships as well as to manage solving of conflicts peacefully and fairly. Her view is supported by Himes (1980) who reiterated the fact that conflict resolution programmes became important as people's attitudes were stimulated by the knowledge explosion and by recognition of costs of unrestrained conflict. The need to avoid turning the youth into vagrants is not the only reason to introduce the conflict resolution programmes.

5 Findings and Discussion

Research findings indicated that the youth are manipulated of by politicians in their pursuit to achieve their own ambitions regardless of the consequences such actions might have on youth (Magaisa et al 2007). Monetary rewards have been used as a way to motivate the youth to perpetrate political violence and to harass residents during election times. Unemployment has also led the youth to engage in illegal activities to raise money to survive such as drug trafficking, prostitution and dealing in foreign currency on the parallel market especially around the old bus terminus and at the Exor filling station along the Masvingo- Beitbridge road. The study revealed that the youths in many of Masvingo' high density suburbs have been affected by the prevailing economic situation. This has caused them to engage in activities that bring in money at the shortest time possible. The majority of these youths have no means of starting income generating projects. However a few youths have managed to establish stalls at 'Chitima' (train) market place to support their families.

The study also revealed that poverty is one of the main challenges affecting youths in Masvingo's high density suburbs. Some of the households are headed by the youth themselves and this has piled pressure on this vulnerable group as they try to make ends meet. This was exacerbated by the fact that crime and prostitution have escalated and so have the conflicts within family units. The officials from the ministry of youths, indigenization and empowerment admitted that poverty was causing a lot of suffering. Income generating projects that were being implemented for youth were too insignificant to have any meaningful impact in changing the dynamics of the youth's welfare.

The study noted with concern the fact that the youth are manipulated by politicians who strive to achieve their own ambitions regardless of the consequences such actions might have on youth (Magaisa, et al 2007). Monetary rewards have been used as a way to motivate the youth to perpetrate political violence and to harass residents during election time. Unemployment has also led the youth to engage in illegal activities to raise money to survive such as drug trafficking, prostitution and dealing in foreign currency on the parallel market especially around the old bus terminus and at the Exor filling station along the Masvingo- Beitbridge road.

The study attested to the serious need for engaging the youths. If youth can be such a powerful force that can destroy the whole nation, why do people overlook our resources when working for peace? Findings further revealed that the youths are facing poverty and housing challenges. According to Bryan (2007) structural violence occurs whenever people are disadvantaged by political, legal, economic or cultural traditions. It is at this stage that negative influences on the youth, if unchecked, influence the way the youth conceptualise the world around them. The youth feel their views are not considered important. In the same light, Ross (1993) gave the example of Zimbabwe from 1990 when the country was growing through a deepening crisis that influenced all aspects of life in the country. Politically, as the ruling ZANU-PF, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change and the Zimbabwe People First contest for power, the space for citizen engagement has been polarized along party lines. Economically, political unrest disrupted food production and caused the formal business sector to collapse, leading to high unemployment and reliance on international food aid. Socially, the spread of HIV/AIDS dramatically disrupted daily life. The youth are looked upon as 'passive objects' rather than participants in shaping the society they live. The peace organizations felt that the youth are both architects and actors in promoting a culture of peace and tolerance. If the youth could be empowered they could be a vibrant youth movement inclined towards peace building and national development.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

A glaring conclusion was that at the time of the study there was no visible and meaningful peace building programmes by the youth in Masvingo's high density suburbs. On strategies to involve the youth in conflict resolution and community participation, the youth suggested that they should be informed of present programmes and the programmes should try to cater for as many youths as possible. It was also observed that not all youths knew the relevance of these programmes, hence the need to have more awareness campaigns. It was also felt that the youth were not consulted more in putting together programmes that targeted them. Rather these programmes were imposed on them. It would appear that the programmes have had little impact on the youth in

Masvingo's high density suburbs. The youth indicated the need for more information on conflict resolution while the organizations and institutions lamented the interference and restrictions imposed by government regulations on their operations which limited their activities, especially in the past few years. The other conclusion related to the need for the government to address the broader socio economic environment in terms of security, jobs, decent shelter, education and reduction of poverty. If a conscious effort is made to eliminate these factors, this would go a long way in reducing conflict involving the youth and this in turn would ensure sustainable peace in these seemingly vulnerable high. Lastly civic organizations admitted that they had not reached out to a wider spectrum of the youth, the people who are supposed to benefit from their programmes. They highlighted the need for a constant follow up and evaluation of programmes they had implemented.

6.2 Recommendations

In light of the findings that emerged, the following recommendations were made with regards to programming for youths in conflict resolution and peace building:

- Organizations and youth practitioners need to collaborate and share information on youth's programmes being implemented. Collaboration would ensure that the youth are capacity developed on conflict resolution and peace building programmes.
- Research by youth into causes and challenges of youth conflict and their solutions could promote a participatory approach in problem solving by the youth, community youth organizations and the state.
- Government and youth organizations should focus on breaking the barriers to youth participation and engagement. Youth participation and involvement is pertinent to the peace building process.
- The youths in Masvingo's high density areas and elsewhere in the country should be empowered to resist manipulation, oppression, exploitation for partisan interests and disenfranchisement during election periods through robust, ongoing and genuine youth capacity development programmes.
- Given the permeating nature of the problems faced by the youth in this country and the world in general, there is need to increase the intensity and scope of research in youth programming for peace building.

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