

Interview with

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IICBA: Could you please tell us a bit about yourself?

My name is Mary Kangethe from Kenya. I work for the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (KNATCOM) as Director for the Education Programme.

IICBA: What are the most frequent types of conflicts or violence in your country, including risks of violent extremism?

For a long period of time, violent inter-ethnic conflicts have been experienced in Kenya as communities grapple with scarce resources such as water and pasture, especially where pastoralist and farming communities live in close proximity. Over time politically instigated inter-ethnic conflicts have emerged mainly occurring around elections. With the youth bulge and increasing unemployment for young people, criminal gangs that increase insecurity at the community level have also been witnessed. Radicalization of young people to violent extremism whereby they adopt radical beliefs and violent practices is also a concern.

IICBA: What are the main causes or drivers leading to conflict and violence, including violent extremism?

Due to the politicized nature of ethnicity in Kenya, community conflicts have tended to be particularly frequent and intense around national and local level elections. Conflicts have also been prevalent among pastoralist communities and are rooted in pastoralist

Background: This series of interviews was prepared for the International Day of Education on January 24 whose theme for 2024 is “learning for lasting peace”. As noted on UNESCO’s International Day of Education webpage, “the world is seeing a surge of violent conflicts paralleled by an alarming rise of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and hate speech. [...] An active commitment to peace is more urgent today than ever: Education is central to this endeavor, as underlined by the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development. Learning for peace must be transformative, and help empower learners with the necessary knowledge, values, attitudes and skills and behaviors to become agents of peace in their communities.” This series of interviews builds on projects implemented by UNESCO IICBA on education for peace and the prevention of violent extremism with support from the Government of Japan.



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customs, where cattle raids play a dual function as a rite of passage as well as opportunities for restocking herds or acquiring bride wealth. The political undertones within these raids cannot be ignored. Another key driver of violent conflicts in the country is struggles related to control over, or access to, local natural resources such as grazing land or water. Oftentimes this conflict driver is connected to group livelihoods – such as competition over the use of land between two pastoralist communities, or between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. This form of conflict revolves around scarce natural resources and is often understood in relation to a broader context of natural degradation and climate change. Such conflicts are often exacerbated by a lack of recognition of traditional systems, structures, and practices for cohesive living which include traditional guidelines on intercommunity resource sharing and the use of community elders for conflict management.

IICBA: What are some of the effects on individuals, communities, and society at large? Does violence affect women and girls differently?

Violence has adverse social economic effects on communities with a surge in economic losses experienced every time there is widespread violence. Community-based violence causes substantial physical injuries and mental health illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder for the perpetrators, witnesses, and victims. We also observe loss of property by institutions and individuals, displacements, and at its worst loss of lives. Intercommunity relations are severed, leading to the existence of invisible boundaries. It is imperative to note that gender-based violence incidences are aggravated given the impact of conflicts on women and girls.

IICBA: Does violence and conflicts affect schooling and learning in basic or higher education?

Violence affects the achievement of both national and local level targets in education. In areas directly affected by violent conflicts, learning time is lost as communities move to zones of safety. Education infrastructure may be destroyed by perpetrators and some institutions are converted to camps for the displaced. There is evidence that violent conflicts affect educational performance. For example, the 2007 election violence led to a drop of about a seventh in some educational outcomes in the regions directly affected by the violence, mainly due to overcrowded classrooms, and lack of teachers, as well as teaching and learning materials. Increased cases of gender-based violence have led to child marriage and teenage pregnancies for school-going children and young people. Learners with disabilities have also been affected due to displacement from institutions equipped with and supportive of children with disabilities.

IICBA: What do you think could be the role of education in promoting peace and preventing violence and conflicts?

Education is a key indicator of normalcy in instances of violent conflicts, hence there is a need to focus on supporting prompt resumption of this service. Education provides opportunities for the creation of safe zones for understanding and confronting aspects of our diversities that predispose us to conflicts such as ethnic, religious, and cultural identities. In addition, education provides a major opportunity to facilitate the development of competencies for the prevention of violence and for promoting peaceful coexistence. This includes critical thinking, negotiation, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. In some of the regions that we have worked in, education is the common agenda that brings together warring communities to engage as they plan on the resumption of education. There is a need to empower school administrators and teachers to harness these opportunities provided by education through continuous capacity development.

IICBA: If you participated in a project of UNESCO IICBA, was this project helpful, and if so, how?

I participated in the UNESCO IICBA peace education initiative. The project was helpful in promoting the skills of teachers and teacher educators in promoting peace and global citizenship education (GCED) and in providing face-to-face and online tools for the capacity development of teachers and teacher educators. The project also helped initiate a policy engagement on mainstreaming good practices. An achievement worth noting is the engagement and collaboration between in-service teachers and teacher educators in developing and shaping institutional-based peace education practices in the classroom and beyond.

IICBA: What does your organization or institution do today to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence? What more could be done?

The work of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO on peacebuilding is founded on the mission of the Commission which is “to promote building of peace, sustainable development, intellectual collaboration through UNESCO areas of education, the sciences, culture, and communication and information.” The Commission works in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, other Government agencies, and departments responsible for peacebuilding as well as partners to develop and implement peace education programs. The programs focus on the capacity development of education officials, school administrators, teachers, and other education stakeholders, as well as research, piloting of innovative peace education-related initiatives, and the development of guidelines to support mainstreaming of GCED in basic, TVET, and higher education institutions. We also support policy dialogues on peace education matters and we are looking forward to scaling up existing transformative initiatives such as Fashion for GCED, Learning to Live Together programs, and Ethics Education through the use of UNESCO networks such as the Aspen institutions, UNEVOC Centers, and UNESCO Chairs.

IICBA: What is your government doing today to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence? What more could be done?

The Government of Kenya has put in place mechanisms for promoting peace and preventing conflicts and violence. Key structures and initiatives include the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, the Department of National Values and Principals of Governance, and the National Steering Committee on peacebuilding and conflict management. These institutions work together to promote peace through tracking, preventing, managing, and reporting on peace-related issues in the country. Peace education has also been integrated into the curriculum while capacity development for teachers has been ongoing. Innovative programs to strengthen peace education have been implemented at the institutional level and key lessons integrated into the curriculum.

IICBA: Have you seen innovative initiatives to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence? How did they work?

One of the innovative initiatives, albeit on a small scale, is the Fashion for GCED program implemented through a collaboration of KNATCOM, MTREE (a non-profit organization), and the Ministry of Education. The program uses art, fashion, and design to promote values and skills for peace among children and young people. It creates enjoyment for learners and teachers and presents the concepts and practices of peace education through art, fashion, and design.

IICBA: What are the main challenges today to implement initiatives to promote peace and prevent conflicts and violence?

Some of the key challenges include (i) exposure of children and young people to information on violence in homes, workplaces, community, and among the political class which may negate what is achieved through peace education; (ii) inadequate capacity amongst





teachers on concepts and pedagogy needed to facilitate transformations for peaceful coexistence; (iii) emerging forms of violence such as radicalization to violent extremism and gangism; and (iv) drug and substance abuse which predisposes children and young people to violence.

ICBA: Finally, could you share with us an anecdote about yourself or your work?

My work in peace education started in 2007 immediately after the post-election violence in Kenya. As a staff in the Ministry of Education working in the Guidance and Counselling Department then, there were concerns about the effects of the violence on teachers and learners. This led to the development of a national peace education program. I was in a team that received training on peace education and developed teacher training materials that were used to train teachers in primary and secondary schools nationally. Through these initial capacity development initiatives, I became aware of the potential for education to prevent such violence and immediately embarked on a program to promote peace at the community level through learning institutions. We provided platforms for teachers to express their emotions, share experiences, and work together to create school-based peace education initiatives. The momentum led to the National Campaign for Peace held in all 47 counties to engage local leaders and community members toward

maintaining peace in the run-up to the 2013 elections. To mainstream the lessons learned so far, an education sector Peace Education policy was developed and launched in 2015. The effort by Kenya to promote peace through education was noted and the country was nominated by the Association for Development of Education in Africa to coordinate the Inter Country Quality Node (ICQN) for Peace Education which brought together 17 African countries. Through ICQN regular meetings we shared information and strategized for collaborative action on peace education. I had the pleasure of coordinating the ICQN from 2009 to 2016. Having coordinated various peace education programs, my greatest lesson learned is that the complex nature of this work calls for developing and embracing multisectoral partnerships. In addition, there is a need for players in peacebuilding to continuously share information, tools, and practices to facilitate continuous development and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of programs.

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment

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