

Interview with

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

My name is Ruth Nawakwi. I am a Social Scientist currently pursuing a master's degree of education in civic education at the University of Zambia. I hold a bachelor's degree from the university and have acquired certificates in peace education and sustainable development from Hiroshima University of Japan as well as in other topics through the student exchange program at the University of Helsinki in Finland. I am an educator under the Ministry of Education in Zambia. Additionally, I am the founder of Inclusive Education for Sustainable Development (IESD), an organization in Zambia where I serve as Executive Director. I am personally committed to promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Zambia and globally with a focus on SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 16 (Peace and Justice), and the African Union Agenda 2063.

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

In Zambia, the landscape of conflicts and violence is multifaceted, shaped by political, ethnic, and resource-based tensions. Political unrest, particularly during election periods, has often led to clashes between opposition groups and the government, underscoring a volatile electoral environment. This unrest is frequently compounded by deep-seated ethnic and tribal tensions, where historical rivalries and disputes over land and resources. The struggle for control over

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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valuable natural resources, including land and water, especially in areas with rich mining activities, exacerbates these tensions, highlighting the complex interplay between politics, ethnicity, and economics in fueling discord.

Another critical dimension of Zambia's conflict landscape is the rural-urban divide with disparities that often lead to tensions. This divide is aggravated by economic struggles, with unemployment and economic inequality fueling discontent. Gender-based violence remains a pressing concern, deeply rooted in cultural and societal norms, and often exacerbated by conflicts. Additionally, human-wildlife conflict driven by habitat encroachment and resource competition also poses challenges, particularly in rural communities. The Zambian government in collaboration with regional and international partners has taken steps to address sources of conflict and extremism, emphasizing inclusive development, good governance, and social cohesion. But as Zambia shares borders with countries that have experienced higher levels of extremism, concerns remain about potential spillover effects.

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

The drivers of conflict and violence, including violent extremism, include ethnic and regional tensions. Ethnic and regional rivalries are sometimes exploited by opportunistic actors seeking to gain support by playing

on grievances and historical animosities, potentially escalating into violence. Ensuring inclusive governance and addressing historical injustices are crucial to mitigating these tensions. Another source of conflicts is economic inequality and high levels of poverty that fuel discontent and provide a breeding ground for radicalization. Lack of economic opportunities, especially among the youth, may make them susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups promising solutions or ideologies that seem attractive in the face of economic hardship. Political instability and poor governance are also challenges. Weak institutions, corruption, and contested political processes undermine the rule of law and contribute to a sense of injustice, fostering an environment where extremist ideologies can take root. Finally, the media may at times spread misinformation, propaganda, and sensationalized reporting that can also contribute to conflicts, creating a complex web of factors leading to the rise of violent extremism.

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

Violence exerts a devastating toll on individuals, communities, and society at large. At the individual level, the physical consequences of violence are immediate and often severe, ranging from injuries to long-term health issues. These physical traumas are compounded by profound psychological effects, including trauma, anxiety, depression, and potentially chronic conditions like PTSD. The social and emotional repercussions are equally

significant, as victims may face social isolation, stigma, and difficulty in maintaining or forming relationships. Additionally, violence disrupts educational paths, leading to long-term negative effects. In communities, the pervasive nature of violence erodes the very fabric of social cohesion and trust. The impacts of violence are particularly acute for women and girls, as is evident from domestic abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking. Gender-based violence leads to specific physical and sexual health consequences, including unwanted pregnancies. The psychological impact is again profound, with increased incidences of depression, anxiety, and trauma. Societal stigma and discrimination further exacerbate these effects, creating barriers to seeking help and support. Economically, gender-based violence limits opportunities for women and girls, contributing to cycles of poverty and impeding their full participation in society. Educational barriers also emerge, and the inter-generational impact of GBV is significant, affecting the well-being and prospects of future generations.

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

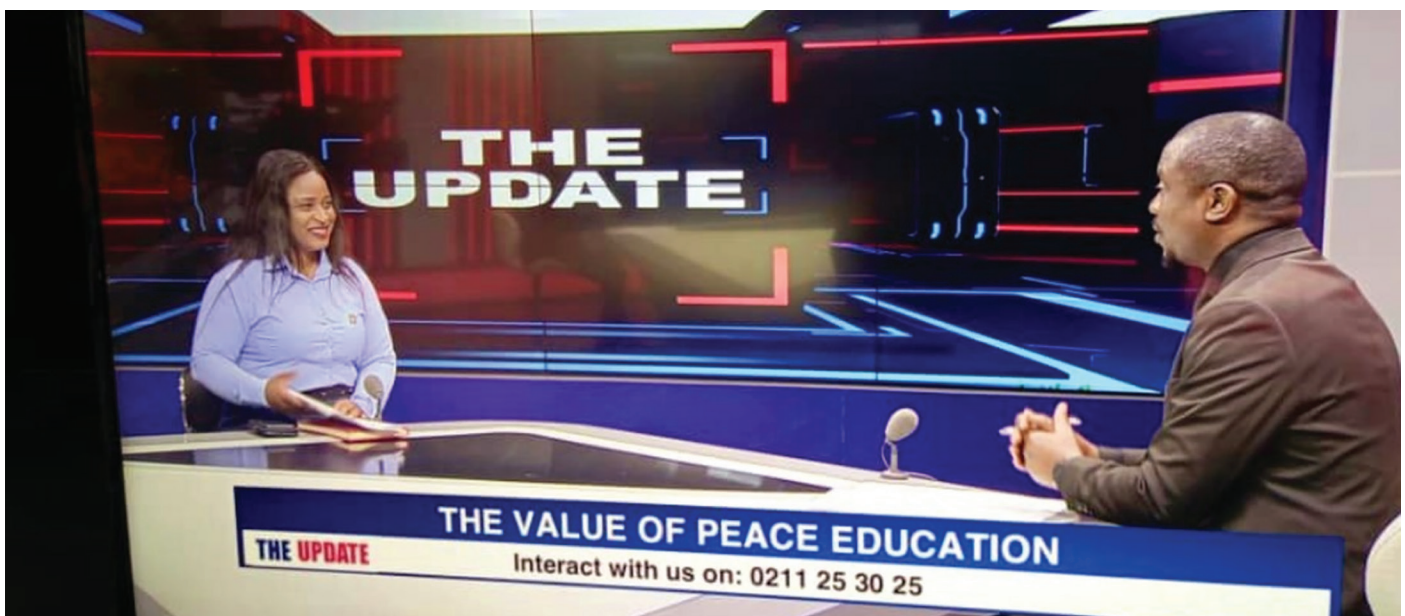
Yes, violence and conflicts wreak havoc on the educational landscape, affecting both basic and higher education. Educational institutions in conflict zones struggle to maintain standard teaching practices, and the delivery of curricula is often compromised. This situation is worsened by limited access to educational resources, as conflict hinders the supply of essential textbooks, supplies, and technology crucial for effective learning. Conflicts often magnify gender disparities in education, with girls facing greater obstacles to school attendance due to safety concerns, cultural norms, and disrupted transportation. Higher education is also impacted, with universities closing, leading to the displacement of students and faculty and a decline in academic standards. These disruptions not only affect individual learning but

also impede the development of a skilled workforce, potentially resulting in long-term economic drawbacks. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, focusing on ensuring the safety of educational institutions, providing support to displaced populations, and offering psychological and educational resources to assist individuals in overcoming these challenges.

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

Education serves as a vital catalyst for peace and the prevention of violence and conflicts. At the core of its influence is the promotion of understanding and tolerance. Education broadens individuals' horizons, fostering an appreciation for diverse cultures, perspectives, and backgrounds, thus diminishing prejudices and discrimination which are often root causes of conflict. Furthermore, education equips individuals with essential conflict-resolution skills. By teaching negotiation, communication, and mediation, education prepares individuals to resolve disputes peacefully, whether in personal or broader contexts. This skill set is complemented by the development of critical thinking and empathy. A well-rounded education encourages individuals to analyze information critically and to empathize with others, thereby preventing the dehumanization that frequently accompanies conflicts.

Beyond individual skills, education also promotes broader societal values essential for peace. It is a key driver in promoting human rights awareness, where an understanding of one's own rights and those of others fosters a culture of justice and equality. This awareness is closely linked to the encouragement of civic engagement and participation in democratic processes. Educated, informed citizens are more likely to seek peaceful avenues for change and less likely to resort to violence.



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

I participated in the UNESCO-IICBA project as a country Peace Education Ambassador. Our project aimed to strengthen the participation of youths in peacebuilding and conflict prevention through transformative action for peace in universities and colleges in Zambia. The project took place in three provinces of Zambia Lusaka, Copperbelt, and Southern Province with a total of 25 Colleges and Universities in Zambia. A series of half-day workshops provided an intensive learning environment, reaching a diverse group of students and disseminating ideas and strategies in peacebuilding and preventing violence extremism. Furthermore, the establishment of peace clubs in 25 institutions of higher learning stand as a testament of the project's commitment to sustainable peace initiatives. These clubs have become vital platforms for dialogue, conflict resolution, and ongoing peacebuilding activities, ensuring that the project's impact continues to resonate within the academic community.

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

Our organization has made significant strides in this area, primarily through expanding inclusive education programs that foster understanding and respect for diversity. These programs are essential in breaking down stereotypes and nurturing empathy across communities. To enhance these efforts, integrating peace education into standard curricula becomes crucial. This can be achieved by developing modules that elucidate the interconnection between education, sustainable development, and peace. Moreover, it is essential to focus on teacher training, equipping educators with conflict resolution and peacebuilding techniques. Our organization has been actively fostering community participation and empowering local communities to lead peace-building efforts. This involves establishing community outreach programs and collaborating with local leaders to address specific peace-related challenges.

Also, the role of technology and cultural sensitivity cannot be overstated in contemporary peace-building and educational initiatives. Leveraging technology not only for distance learning but also for developing educational resources that promote an understanding of global issues. This can be done through creating virtual exchange programs connecting students from diverse backgrounds and enhancing their understanding of different cultures. It is also important to celebrate international days related to peace, justice, and education, such as the International Day of Peace on September 21. Incorporating diverse

perspectives into the curriculum and promoting cultural sensitivity within the education system are pivotal steps in fostering respect for different cultures and backgrounds.

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

Zambia is committed to peace and stability in the region. Strengthening institutions is key. By ensuring that the mechanisms responsible for maintaining law and order, justice, and conflict resolution are robust and effective, Zambia can provide a solid foundation for societal stability. Alongside this, community engagement matters. Actively involving local communities in dialogues and addressing their concerns can foster long-term stability. Furthermore, the empowerment of youth is crucial. By focusing on education, skills development, and creating employment opportunities, Zambia can divert its young population from the allure of violence and instability. This investment in youth not only nurtures a more educated and skilled workforce but also promotes a more cohesive and peaceful society. Finally, Zambia recognizes the importance of international cooperation in its peacekeeping efforts. Working together with regional and international organizations helps in addressing complex cross-border issues and in promoting regional stability.

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

The initiative "One Zambia, One Nation" stands out as a significant and innovative effort to promote peace and unity. This slogan was introduced by Zambia's first President, Kenneth Kaunda, during a crucial period of nation-building after gaining independence in 1964. The concept aimed to foster national identity, discourage tribalism, and unite diverse ethnic groups. The idea was to emphasize the shared destiny and common goals of the people, transcending ethnic and regional differences. The "One Zambia, One Nation" initiative played a pivotal role in preventing conflicts and violence by creating a sense of national cohesion. The government actively promoted cultural exchange programs, educational initiatives, and civic engagement to instill a sense of pride and belonging among citizens. By fostering a national identity that transcended tribal affiliations, Zambia was able to avoid some of the ethnic tensions and conflicts that plagued neighboring countries in post-colonial Africa. The initiative had a lasting impact on the country's political landscape. Despite facing challenges in subsequent years, Zambia has generally maintained a relatively peaceful coexistence among its diverse population.

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

The fragility of political systems can impede the execution of peace initiatives. This instability, often characterized by conflicts among different political factions or the absence of a robust government, creates an environment where peacebuilding efforts struggle to take root. Further exacerbating this issue is the prevalent economic inequality, as I mentioned earlier. Limited access to education also perpetuates ignorance and misinformation, which can lead to conflict. In parallel, media influence plays a pivotal role. Finally, global health crises such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic can disrupt economies, strain resources, and exacerbate social tensions, potentially leading to conflicts.

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

My journey began when I joined the Ministry of Education as a civic education teacher in 2015. I noticed early on that traditional teaching methods and curricula often left out crucial elements that could help shape a more empathetic, understanding, and inclusive society. I see education not just as a tool for academic learning but also as a powerful medium to sow the seeds of peace and unity in young minds and survival skills for one to thrive. One incident stands out. During local elections, a period often marked by tensions and divisions within villages or communities, sensing an opportunity for a vital teaching moment, I organized a special session for my students in 2018 on the dangers of drug abuse and the principles of democracy, respect for diverse opinions, and the importance of peaceful coexistence. During this session, I shared a story that resonated deeply with my students. It was about two brothers in a village who, despite having different viewpoints and supporting different candidates in an election, maintained mutual respect and understanding. This story was not just a narrative; it was a reflection of

the values I work to instill in my students. What made this day remarkable was the attendance of some parents and community members, initially out of curiosity, but soon they were engrossed in the discussion. The message of peace and unity transcended the classroom's boundaries, sparking conversations among adults in the village. In the days that followed, something extraordinary happened. The usual animosity and arguments that characterized the election period were noticeably subdued. People started engaging in more civil and constructive discussions.

I also advocated for inclusive programs that cater to all youth, regardless of their background. I believe that every child, regardless of their economic or social status, deserves a quality education and the chance to be a part of building a peaceful community. My efforts paid off when the Ministry of Education started to take notice and I got recognized by the Commonwealth General Secretary's Innovation Awards for Sustainable Development Goals. The Ministry has begun incorporating some of these methods and ideas into the curriculum. Personally, I would be remembered not just as a teacher but as a catalyst for change, a woman who helped transform her community through the power of education and the relentless pursuit of peace. Today, my students have themselves become ambassadors of peace and other educators are spreading the seeds of harmony and understanding that I have disseminated through UNESCO-IICBA peace education projects for youths, career talks, radio programs, TV interviews and articles.

Disclaimer & Acknowledgment

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