

Lasting peace needs commitment from political leaders but must also be rooted in communities. This is especially important when armed conflict has happened at a local level between people who live side-by-side. Conciliation Resources and its partners reach out to groups most vulnerable to violence and strengthens their skills to tackle conflicts peacefully.

Strengthening community peacebuilding

In 2007 our partners continued their pioneering work in Sierra Leone through local 'peace monitors', who have resolved more than 1000 community conflicts during and since the country's decade-long war. In Uganda, networks of 'peace committees' and paralegals working in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) helped mediate disputes and raised awareness of human rights and conflict-related issues. In the South Caucasus we supported various non-governmental organizations working with young people, women and IDPs.

To strengthen grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in all these places we also helped partners with organizational development, financial management and strategic planning.

CASE STUDY: UGANDA

Peacebuilding in northern Uganda's schools

In northern Uganda, many young people have been both perpetrators and victims of the 21-year conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government.

Our partner, the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), has been working with students to get them involved in peacebuilding in their communities and schools.

Efforts to teach them non-violent problem-solving skills through student peace clubs have brought positive results. In Kitgum district, for example, a name-calling incident triggered a dispute between some former LRA abductees who had returned to school and fellow students. The returnees arranged a potentially violent strike targeting the community and school.

"When the speaker of the peace club in their school – himself a formerly abducted person – learnt of this he began to persuade them to avoid any violence in any action they intended to take," explains Richard Kidega, JPC's programme officer.

"Together they explored the possible courses of action within their reach and resolved to stage a sit-down strike,

demanding the school denounce the ugly reference and take action on anyone using this term again."

The returnee students presented a letter to the Principal, explaining they felt stigmatized. Fearing violence, he called the police but also talked with the students.

"Thereafter an assembly was called, the school denounced the ugly reference and decreed anyone using it would be punished. The students were happy with the response and instantly ended their strike, so the police left."

Everybody was surprised at the outcome. "The teachers believe they owe this to the peace clubs that impart problem-solving skills to schools in the region," says Richard Kidega.



Student peace clubs in northern Uganda have helped improve understanding between young people through training and debates on human rights and conflict resolution. This has also helped ease friction between youths and displaced people.

CASE STUDY: SIERRA LEONE

Promoting violence-free elections

In the run up to Sierra Leone's August 2007 elections, the potential for violence among young people was considered especially high in Bo and Kenema Districts.

Our Youth in Progress project found that a deep lack of understanding about the electoral process was causing great frustration and anger among youths. Working with one of the country's largest youth associations, the Bike Riders Association (BRA), and several Bo drama groups we developed a Youth-to-Youth Campaign for Violence-Free Elections to help them learn how the elections worked.

We co-organized a training day with presentations from the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the Sierra Leone Police and the Office of National Security. It increased youth representatives' understanding and helped develop a relationship with the security and electoral authorities.

"Now I have heard about the registration problems directly from the NEC, I understand and I'm not going to be so angry," said one BRA member. "My heart is calm."

Wearing 'violence-free elections' t-shirts, the BRA campaigned in lorry parks, an important meeting point for young workers. They shared information and leaflets about the elections and the importance of avoiding violence.

Local radio reported positively on the campaign, and youth drama groups performed short plays in the lorry parks, markets and schools, portraying the downside of political intimidation and violence. These were followed by open discussions.

Community elders were impressed. "It is good that this kind of sensitization has been begun by the bike riders themselves, a group vulnerable to violence," said one. "If people see them talking about violence-free elections, their colleagues and friends will take caution."



Members of the Bike Riders Association, made up mostly of ex-combatants, held rallies and drove through local towns talking to the public about their commitment to refrain from violence to ensure free and fair elections in Sierra Leone.