

Dialogue between people with different experiences of a violent conflict can lead to shared understanding of complex problems. Conciliation Resources enables difficult discussions and exchanges to take place in all its work. This helps build trust and communication between people divided by war, giving them a chance to explore obstacles and opportunities.

Building relationships through dialogue

In 2007 intense frustration at the lack of progress in resolving the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict made informal political discussions challenging. However, 12 representatives from both sides discussed stumbling blocks in the peace process at our 20th confidential 'Schlaining dialogue' meeting, held in London.

In Sierra Leone, a pilot project on Strengthening Citizens' Security brought together community activists, youth groups and security sector representatives in groundbreaking meetings, radio panel discussions and workshops. In Uganda and southern Sudan, our partners' reconciliation work helped improve relationships across borders and between different ethnic groups.

CASE STUDY: UGANDA-SUDAN

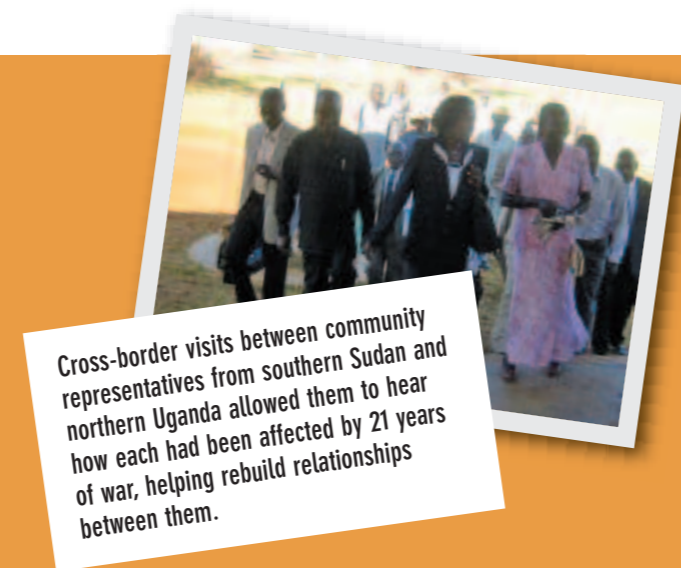
Improving understanding between war-torn communities

Rebuilding relationships and improving understanding among communities divided by more than two decades of war is a crucial part of our peacebuilding work in northern Uganda and southern Sudan.

Strong tensions exist within and between these communities, especially in areas that have suffered most from the rebel Lord's Resistance Army's (LRA) brutal attacks. This has created a backlash of revenge killings, finger-pointing and even the enslavement in southern Sudan of formerly LRA-abducted children.

Working with grassroots, religious and traditional leaders, government officials and our peacebuilding partners Ker Kwaro Acholi, Justice and Peace Council (JPC GANAL) and Totto Chan in Juba, we brought communities together across the Uganda-Sudan border for discussions, workshops and exchange visits.

A visit to northern Uganda allowed community representatives and elders from nine tribes affected by the LRA in southern Sudan to meet their counterparts. There, they listened to victims' testimonies from different communities and took part in radio talk shows. The



Cross-border visits between community representatives from southern Sudan and northern Uganda allowed them to hear of war, helping rebuild relationships between them.

exchanges helped improve each community's understanding of the war and highlighted their common suffering. The work also altered misconceptions among Acholis that they are the only LRA victims, and among southern Sudanese that all Acholis are responsible for the war.

After hearing in one village how the LRA had massacred, then cooked the bodies of fellow Acholis, Sudanese Member of Parliament Henry Odwar said: "My colleagues and I will carry one simple message to our people – the Acholis are not the enemies of southern Sudan. There was only one rotten element, and it, despite all the atrocities, has been forgiven by the Acholis."

CASE STUDY: GEORGIA-ABKHAZIA

Talking with the enemy

Young Georgians and Abkhaz with little memory of life before the 1992-93 war are increasingly ignorant about the 'other side'. While the internet allows some contact with peers across the conflict divide, opportunities to meet face-to-face are extremely limited.

With this in mind, we invited 20 Georgian and Abkhaz university students and recent graduates to take part in a week-long visit to Switzerland. Part study visit, part dialogue workshop, the event built on skills gained by the young people through discussion clubs run by our partners.

It offered a rare chance to discuss the conflict with peers from the opposing side. "This was the first time that I conversed with people I have called enemies my whole life," noted one Abkhaz student. "I found the experience invaluable."

Although challenging and painful at times, the discussions allowed the young people to hear about each other's lives, aspirations, hopes and fears. According to one Georgian student:

"I have realized that, despite spending almost all my life in a conflict zone, I knew very little about the conflict. I've learned a lot about the complexity of the problem. I've learned what young Abkhaz people think and what they want to achieve. I've learned that we have a lot of work to do."

Visits to Bern and Geneva also familiarized participants with key international organizations, and with how Switzerland, a federal, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic state, deals with diversity.

As potential advocates for tolerance and peace, young people will remain a focus of our work in 2008.



Students discussing the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict at a joint study visit in Switzerland felt it was important to meet face-to-face and go "through this painful process to know what we need to work on... and how to solve our conflict peacefully."