

Duteramire Umutekano: Rebuilding Trust between Youth and the Police in Bujumbura Mairie, Burundi

A decade after the end of the civil war, Burundi's peace process and stability remains challenging. Still recovering from generations of ethnic conflict, Burundians are faced with a political crisis and limiting democratic space. The conflict has pitted young people against the police, and the cycle of violence and retribution was regularly escalating, especially in Bujumbura during the electoral period.

To deescalate tensions and reduce the risks of violence, Search for Common Ground (Search) implemented a 12-month project (1

January – 31 December 2017) funded by the Bosch Foundation entitled, *Duteramire Umutekano: Rebuilding the Trust Between Youth and the Police in Bujumbura Mairie* with the goal to rebuild trust among key stakeholders, and especially among youth and police forces.

The project brought together local leaders and stakeholders to bridge the misunderstandings and tension between youth and security forces in the most volatile neighborhoods of Bujumbura, selected based on the violent demonstrations during the 2015 crisis and the continuing violent clashes between the police and young community members. As such, project activities opened a space for constructive dialogue and interaction through various techniques, such as capacity-building trainings for youth and police, roundtables, solidarity, peace, and cultural events, radio programming, and participatory community theater performances.



OVERALL RESULTS

The evaluation of the project found that it had been effective in helping young people and police to reduce the risk of conflict and better understand each other, providing new skills to resolve tensions in a non-violent way, and creating inclusive spaces for dialogue.

The project **improved knowledge** in conflict transformation among youth, and in non-violent communication and human rights among the police. The evaluation showed how participants retained the knowledge and skills learned to incorporate peaceful conflict resolution in their practices. Moreover, the project triggered increased **trust and positive interactions** among targeted youth leaders and members of the police forces in Bujumbura.

80% of interviewed police participants and 76.7% of the youth reported that the project contributed to positively change the relationships between youth and the police in Bujumbura Mairie.

80.3% of trained youth increased their skills in conflict resolution and leadership. Similarly, 85% of trained police officers increased their knowledge of and respect for non-violent communication and human rights.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR NON-VIOLENT APPROACHES TO CONFLICT

Search provided capacity building to youth on non-violent conflict resolution and positive leadership to empower their capacity and confidence to seek constructive avenues for addressing their grievances as well as promote their leadership capabilities as champions of peace within their communities. Coincidentally, Search provided capacity building to police on non-violent communication and human rights in order to promote rights-based approaches to security challenges and ensure police have the skills to effectively communicate with community members without exacerbating tensions.

As a result of these trainings, **82.8 %** of interviewed police officers say that ***young people have begun to integrate the peaceful and nonviolent methods to resolve conflict***. Moreover, majority of interviewed youth participants

"I did not know him, but I heard he was the person responsible for the denunciations of young protesters, then arrested or missing. I thought he was a savage. The first day of the training I was so afraid of him, but during the training, I heard his concerns. They were similar to mine." – Training participant, Ngagara youth member.

(58%) said the same of police officers, marking a significant shift in approaches between the two groups to resolving conflict and tensions within their communities.

Training young people from diverse, social and political backgrounds also constituted a unique opportunity to increase trust and collaboration between youth themselves. Former adversaries became conscious of their common humanity.

DIALOGUE AND REFLECTION SHIFT ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Through **roundtables** and **reflection sessions**, the project provided targeted youth and police with opportunities to interact and dialogue in safe spaces and as a result better understand and appreciate each other's perspectives.

The end-line survey highlighted this transformation, and a majority of surveyed youth and police forces reported trusting the other group. The level of trust was particularly high among police forces (88.6%), but also increased among a majority of youth participants (58.2%).

"The fact that we sit together and chat with young people in the project activities has increased the trust between us and the youth. Now, we respond positively to their security concerns. Previously, young people considered us enemies, but with the project that all changed." – FGD Participant, Police Officer

SOLIDARITY AND CULTURAL EVENTS UNITE YOUTH AND POLICE

Solidarity events, such as soccer tournaments, created a safe social environment for both police officers and youth to interact and enjoy time together. These events were jointly designed by youth and police participants, providing an avenue for collaboration based on mutual interests and ensuring the events were relevant and entertaining to both parties. Solidarity events such as these bring conflicting parties together as a way to lay the foundation for relationship building, opening the door for increased dialogue and collaboration.

As a result, over 51.2% of the youth participants, and over 88.5% of the participating police forces reported collaborating with each other in the past three months. This increased collaboration contributed to prevent incidents between youth and the police.

RADIO AND THEATRE MEND RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILD TRUST

Building on Search's strong media work and partnerships in the country, Search partnered with three **local radio stations**, including Isanganiro, Rema FM, and RTNB, to produce and broadcast more than 25 radio programs for the project. These programs provided platforms for humanizing the "other" through increased understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of both duty bearers and community members in ensuring community security, human rights, and the peaceful resolution of conflict.

Similarly, **participatory theater** performances offered an entertaining and conflict-sensitive platform to engage communities around sensitive points of contention between youth and police. Community theater performances

are structured so that the audience interacts with the performers to play out various scenarios. The audience then collaboratively discusses the topics addressed in the performance, offering non-violent solutions to the themes portrayed, while understanding conflict from a new perspective.

Recommendations

Increased tensions are likely as the country moves towards the constitutional referendum in May 2018, and the elections in 2020. Given the fragility of the current context, engagement should be renewed in order to achieve long lasting peace and endurable changes.

Specifically, the evaluation pointed at the following recommendations:

- Participants highlighted the importance of having platforms for sustained interactions between youth and the police to keep channel of communication open and address emerging issues. Mixed security committees could play this role, as they become increasingly inclusive of diverse members and perspectives. Roundtables, reflection sessions and intercultural solidarity events are effective tools to continue to be used to connect divided youth and police.
- Many participants expressed their appreciation of the project and the change that it brought about. They recommended expanding the project and targeting additional locations outside of Bujumbura Mairie, especially in areas where there is or has been a high level of incidents between communities and the police, such as Mukike, Mugongomanga and Mugamba in Bujumbura Rural and Bururi.
- To increase its impact, the project should seek to engage the most vulnerable and at-risk youth, including youth with strong political affiliations, ex-combatants, etc., who are more likely to participate in violence.
- Synergies could be created with other interventions that target stakeholders who influence youth and police behaviors. For instance, complementary interventions could focus, through capacity building on non-violent communication and transformative leadership, on transforming attitudes and practices of political leaders and other key stakeholders who can influence the police, or manipulate youth, so that there are less instances of manipulation towards violence.