



Regional Office
for Eastern Africa

DISCUSSION PAPER FOR PEACE EDUCATION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

“Education is a right that transforms lives when it is accessible to all, relevant and underpinned by core shared values. Because quality education is the most influential force for alleviating poverty, improving health and livelihoods, increasing prosperity and shaping more inclusive, sustainable and peaceful societies, it is in everyone's interest to ensure that it is at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda.”

Irina Bokova (Director-General, UNESCO)

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Rich in natural resources and biodiversity, the African Great Lakes Region¹ has nevertheless experienced some of the most intractable conflicts ever witnessed in Africa. Millions of lives have been lost in recurrent conflicts that have caused indescribable suffering to the peoples of the region. The violence that characterized in particular the conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi and the DR Congo has left profound marks, particularly on the youth of the region, negatively affecting both their psychological and physical well-being. In fact, youth have played a central role in the recurrent conflicts. They have historically made up a big part of armed groups, which they join either through coercion or manipulation. The violent history of the region has led to a situation where many youth - both those who have participated in violence directly or who have witnessed it through the conflicts - have internalized violence as a primary means of resolving conflict².

This important finding came out of participatory action research conducted by Interpeace and its local partners in Rwanda, Burundi and in the North and South Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Specifically, participants at a regional forum held in Nairobi in December 2014, where opinion leaders from the three countries convened and emphasized the necessity to break the vicious cycle of youth engagement in violence as a crucial element in establishing lasting peace in the region. Participants at the Nairobi forum emphasized the importance of strengthening moral and ethical values among youth with the goal of ensuring that youth become the drivers of constructive social change and the pillars of sustainable peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. While humanitarian interventions are important and legitimate in the current context, sustainable change requires the transformation of the attitudes and behaviour of individuals. Thus, participants at the Nairobi forum underlined the fact that peace in the Great Lakes region is contingent upon a change in people's behaviour to embrace tolerance and non-violence, as well as to embrace dialogue as a means of conflict resolution³.

¹ The African Great Lakes region (GLR) region is typically understood as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

² Concept note: A Great Lakes Regional Summit on Formal Peace Education.

³ Ibid.

Behaviour and attitudinal change can be facilitated using any number of strategies including peace education. Peace education has been recognized as an important pillar in bringing about positive social change. It is therefore important to develop, and implement an integrated peace education programme in the formal and informal education systems in the countries of the GLR. **In the informal settings, sports, theatre, music and religious and youth organizations have been identified as viable conduits for transformation and positive social change among the youth of the Great Lakes region.** The fundamental importance of peace education has been emphasized by participants from a Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda, as well as by UNESCO and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and other agencies at the recently concluded Great Lakes Region Peace Education Summit held in Nairobi from 3 – 4 March 4 2016.

The Summit further emphasized the urgency with which regularizing and indeed making peace education a priority for policy makers. During the Summit, participants reiterated the disparities in the levels of development of peace education amongst member countries in the region but nonetheless called for the **rapid advancement in the development of a regional peace education curriculum that will provide the opportunity for all member states to institutionalize and promote peace education both at the formal and non-formal levels,** in their respective countries.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

This discussion paper between Interpeace, UNESCO and the ICGLR calls for the development of systematic **peace education** in the region using a variety of **pedagogical approaches that focus on democracy, human rights education, development, multiculturalism etc. and that these must be institutionalized in the education systems of the member states of the Great Lakes region.**

Collaboration between ICGLR, INTERPEACE and UNESCO on a Peace Education Agenda in the Great Lakes Region

1. ICGLR, INTERPEACE and UNESCO **reaffirm a transformative and holistic vision of peace education as a fundamental prerequisite to peace and development in the Great Lakes Region.**
2. There is an **URGENT NEED for the DEVELOPMENT of a Regional Peace Education Programme for the countries in the Great Lakes Region. Burundi, DRC and Rwanda have been identified as pilot countries for this project, with the aim to promote a common understanding of peace through formal and non-formal education interventions which include themes such as civics, democracy, inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding and values for sustainable development.**
3. INTERPEACE, ICGLR and UNESCO place emphasis and advocate for a clearly-defined, regional **peace education** agenda, which should be an integral part of the broader regional integration and development framework. **Such a regional peace education agenda should be framed by clear, comprehensive overarching goals, to be computed into measurable outcomes and related indicators of peacefulness, tolerance, justice and development.**
4. **Peace education** must be seen as a public good and therefore its success largely depends on the participation of **all stakeholders including policy makers, religious leaders, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, educationists, parents and communities. INTERPEACE, ICGLR and UNESCO therefore call on all stakeholders to take ownership of the process in developing regional peace education programmes.**
5. **Transformative peace education should be at the core of all Peace Education Programmes in all sectors of society in the GLR. It equally requires strong partnerships at national level including**

all stakeholders who can contribute to the common goal of **peace education** for all, supporting the government in delivering its primary obligation and ensuring that everyone's right to peace is fulfilled. A designed **Peace Education Programme** must ensure a transformative perspective that adopts the broad vision of access to peace education at all levels. Appropriate pedagogical approaches must be developed for the different levels.

6. **As a first and perhaps URGENT STEP, a regional curriculum development for the Great Lakes Region should be commissioned with national and regional focal points, INTERPEACE, ICGLR, UNESCO and other selected stakeholders participating. Thereby, UNESCO's comparative advantage allows direct intervention through Ministries of Education to discuss and develop curriculum for peace education programme through formal, non-formal and informal education and also through youth programmes outside the formal sector.**
7. INTERPEACE, ICGLR and UNESCO **must nurture its existing alliances and networks around peace education issues.** These networks and alliances must be strengthened at the GLR level and within different member states.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Peace education is an imperative priority for any actor seeking sustainable peace in the Great Lakes region. The tendency in the past has been to focus on macro-level efforts such as state building, infrastructural development and economic projects. In the process, the attention paid has largely remained inadequate, and local populations have resultantly remained vulnerable to manipulation. It is in this regard that the ICGLR, Interpeace and UNESCO together propose the following steps for the way forward:

1. **Development Partners, both bilateral and multilateral,** are encouraged to integrate elements of peace education in their engagements within the region.
2. **Regional Organizations** are encouraged to place peace education as a priority item on their agenda for peace and stability in the Great lakes region. This call is particularly relevant to the mandates of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL), the East African Community (EAC), ICGLR, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the African Union.
3. **Education Ministries** are encouraged to work towards standardizing the formal peace education curriculum within their countries, and to mobilize the requisite human capacities and material resources required that will enable the provision of effective, formal peace education. This comes out of the realization that although peace education exists in all regional countries albeit, at varying degrees of implementation, there are gaps between the existing political will and action on the ground.

The overarching rationale for these proposed actions is to situate peace education at the centre of a collective effort by regional states, regional bodies and development partners in the Great Lakes region, with the long term goal of developing future generations of young people who will be effective agents of peace in the region.