

Civil Peace Service Great Lakes

Cooperating across borders as an interconnected community of practice to address conflict

The challenge

The classic categorisation of conflicts as interstate and intrastate does not apply in the Great Lakes region, since these tend to expand geographically, and their epicentre shifts from one locus to another. Furthermore, conflicts in the Great Lakes region are dynamic and complex, as they involve a diversity of local, regional and international actors and the consequences of conflict in one country affect neighbouring states through refugee flows and the regionalized armed groups that operate within the conflict zones. However, the conflicts have common features relating to issues of governance, identity division, exploitation, and equal access to resources, which are found in abundance in the region. Inequitable access to resources, state arbitrariness and political exclusion create a ripe context for conflict, as social and political elites play on ethnic divisions and prevailing stereotypes to advance their interests.

It is also a region with common fundamental problems that emanate from post-colonial challenges to state-building and nation-building.

Our approach

Given the interrelationship between conflicts in the Great Lakes region, peacebuilding activities in the Civil Peace Service (ZFD by its German acronym) have taken a regional approach since 2018, including Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), rather than focusing on a single country.

The ZFD supports dialogue processes and strengthen capacities in nonviolent conflict transformation to improve conditions to foster a culture of peace in the three countries, contributing to SDG 16. It is designed in a way that encourages and promotes that partner organisations from all three countries cooperate across borders as an interconnected community of practice to address conflict issues, based on collaborative processes and standards to implement peace projects. Additionally, it seeks that partners use opportunities for dialogue to address differences in a constructive way, manage existing social conflicts and reflect on how past

experiences of violence and sexual and gender-based violence are dealt with.

A fundamental third pillar of the programme includes the identification of common capacity development needs at various levels (leadership, administration, project management, etc.) and in relation to various areas (planning, monitoring and evaluation, economic independence/fundraising) and with that in mind partners and ZFD staff organize joint learning and exchange activities to further develop their capacities and support one another in carrying out their tasks.

The GIZ ZFD programme has been implemented in Rwanda since 2001, in Burundi since 2009 and in the DRC since 2019, when, as it has been mentioned, became regional. It currently supports a total of 10 civil society organizations and one university working in the areas of, conflict transformation, the empowerment of youth and vulnerable people, sexual gender-based violence, Dealing with the Past and Critical Thinking. Currently, a team of eight national staff and seven international advisors in the programme support partner organizations' peacebuilding activities.

Project name	Promoting Peace Skills and Civil Society Networks in the Great Lakes Region - Phase 2.
Commissioned by	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Project region	Great Lakes (Rwanda, Burundi, and the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo)
Lead executing agency	GIZ Civil Peace Service
Duration	01.01.2023 -31.12.2025

The benefits

The programme strengthens cooperation networking and mutual understanding between its partners. Additionally, it facilitates dialogue about issues that are essential to peace, such as identity-based manipulations and stereotypes, and promotes values of non-violence and tolerance among youth. The programme



L. to r.: Ceremony to commemorate of the Kw'lbubu massacre organized by the Collectif des Associations pour la Réconciliation et l'Appui aux Victimes des Conflits (CARAVI) in Bujumbura (Burundi). A young performer during a Forum theater performance organized by Vision Jeunesse Nouvelle (VJN) in Gisenyi (Rwanda).

focuses on youth because youth organisations are capable of positively contributing to peace because of their ability to think outside the box bringing innovative perspectives into the table and youth are often overlooked as valuable actors in peacebuilding, even in regions where they are actively and constructively working toward peace at a local and community level, yet they are not included in peacebuilding activities and decision-making at the national level.

An example from the field

The cross-border collaboration between partners of the ZFD existed before the programme became regional and it was a boost to realize it. A great example of this is the Public Speaking & Exchange (PS&E), an event that was born in 2011 based on the English Speaking Union guidelines that brings together youth from different countries to debate and discuss their opinions in a safe and respectful environment;

The rationale behind this activity is that the conflicts in the African Great Lakes region have greatly impacted on youth compared to the rest of the population, who are easy to manipulate through various channels to become actors in violent conflicts, as they are often disillusioned by poverty and lack of opportunities. In this sense, partners realized that youth have a vital role to play in the decision-making process, hence they should be provided with opportunities and platforms to voice their opinions and to discuss some of the issues which their communities are facing. The main objectives of the PS&E are first of all the creation of spaces for dialogue in schools at local and regional level to discuss issues hindering peace and suggest potential solutions. Also, that youth and their teachers acquire capacities on Critical Thinking and apply them in their daily lives, to develop empathy and reduce negative stereotypes. Last but not least, the ultimate goal is to empower youth to raise their voices in private and public forums.

Every year, the organizations part of the PS&E, this is Vision Jeunesse Nouvelle, Ejo Youth Echo, Never Again Rwanda (Rwanda), Club de Jeunes pour la Vie (DRC) and Solidarité de la Jeunesse pour la Paix et l'Enfance (Burundi), get together in a reflection workshop to evaluate the previous year's event and develop recommendations for the future, as well as a theme for that year's get-together and to choose a hosting organization. Throughout the year, partners organize their own local Public Speaking and Exchange events with the peace and critical thinking clubs in the schools that they work with in their respective countries. In the second half of the year, selected students from each country get together in the regional PS&E.

On the first day of the regional event, there are teambuilding exercises, and the preparation of speeches and artistic performances takes place. On day two, participants present their productions. The beauty of this is that at the end there is a unique winner, but a collective award given to all participants for their efforts and motivation. Participants are also asked to take the ideas back to their schools and regions to enable others to also benefit from the exchange.

As a result, youth participants develop a deep understanding of issues in their respective contexts and schools and are provided with a platform to advocate for their peace needs among the decision-makers and stakeholders to mobilize their support in the peace processes in their communities.

More than 10 years after, this activity enjoys great popularity and support among organizations and participants. It has adapted and changed throughout the years, even in 2020, during the covid pandemic, organizers managed to keep the activity running and participants gave each other feedback and support through inspiring and innovative videos posted on a YouTube channel created only for this purpose, under the theme "Our diversity, our opportunity". For this year, the theme states "United for peace, strive in diversity for social cohesion in our region".



L. to r.: Participants of the Public Speaking & Exchange (PS&E) event do exercises during the regional event that took place in Kigali, Rwanda in 2019. A group of youth performs a dance in the context of the Regional PS&E event in Kigali, Rwanda in 2019.

Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

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As at February 2024

Photo credits List of photographers in alphabetical order
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GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

On behalf of Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)