

ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES FOR CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

1 RESPECT AND PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Civil Society Organizations are effective as development actors when they develop and implement strategies, activities and practices that promote individual and collective human rights, including the right to development, with dignity, decent work, social justice and equity for all people.



Photo: Matt Smith/CAUSE Canada

The power of reconciliation: CAUSE Canada

Inspired by our faith in Christ and the inherent dignity of every person, CAUSE Canada seeks to alleviate poverty and injustice through long-term partnerships that empower communities to improve their quality of life.

CHALLENGE

At all points between 1989 and 2011, one or more of the neighbouring West African nations of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire were suffering open civil conflict. Cross-border movement of weapons, drugs, minerals, and people - both instigators and victims - destabilized the entire region as the national conflicts became tangled in a web that posed significant challenges to regional peace. To maintain peace in this context, civil society organizations (CSOs) need to be equipped with the proper tools to have long-term impact. In particular, there is need for those most negatively impacted by conflict — including women, youth, and persons with disabilities — to be incorporated into the peacebuilding process, to gain skills that enhance their influence, and to be encouraged through fostering regional partnerships in an established socio-political movement.



RESPONSE



In 2009, CAUSE Canada worked with CSOs in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire to organize National Peacebuilding Conferences in each of the three countries, and to identify common concerns for workshops and presentations. These conferences brought together 344 individuals in key positions representing 110 different peacebuilding CSOs, building national networks for conflict resolution, peace education, and social reintegration. National conference participants shared their experiences and expertise with one another across the regional, ethnic, and class divides that characterized their civil conflicts, demonstrating the power of reconciliation.

In 2010, 98 people from the three participating countries, representing 63 CSOs and seven government ministries, participated in a three-day Regional Conference in Freetown, Sierra Leone. There, CSO workers engaged in workshops on media, organizational governance, and policy advocacy. Together, participants summarized what they learned in a joint regional communiqué outlining what they believed to be essential components of a lasting peace. Among many others, suggestions like institutional support for CSOs, translation of significant human rights documents into local languages, and conflict resolution education in schools demonstrated a holistic understanding of the causes and effects of violence and marginalization. Participants publicized the communiqué through media networks and disseminated its contents in their home communities through translation and peace education.

LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

- The grassroots really matter! There is great value in supporting domestic civil society groups to educate their fellow citizens about their legal rights. From here, citizens can hold their governments accountable.
- There is tremendous and underappreciated talent within rural women's groups! These organizations have asked for capacity building workshops to improve their leaders' writing and public speaking skills, emboldening their marginalized voice. CAUSE Canada believes that this movement is worth supporting and will continue to do so through literacy programs, as well as skills training in media, public speaking, speech writing and desktop publishing.
- Conferences can be practical! In West Africa, where communications and transportation infrastructure is poor, conferences build a sense of cooperation and cohesion within civil society nationally, regionally, and globally. Many CSOs work in relative isolation, and physically meeting together is the best way to share experiences and best practices, and to build networks. A conference makes civil society actors feel like part of a movement, which strengthens their work and keeps them focused on their shared objective.



MAINSTREAMING/KNOWLEDGE SHARING



Before the conferences took place, CAUSE Canada set up an online discussion board to facilitate organization, knowledge sharing, and the spread of best practices among CSOs. This strategy worked for urban professionals, but mainstreaming required a more grassroots approach.

One effort in this direction was to train four interns from Fourah Bay College in Freetown in human rights education. These interns then spent three months in northern Sierra Leone teaching human rights education in three CAUSE Kids schools, training permanent teachers to embed these lessons into the permanent curriculum. CAUSE Canada has since incorporated this rights education into its women's literacy, leadership, and business training components of the Women's Integral Empowerment Program (WIEP) operating in rural northern communities.

The Regional Conference was also covered by, and the communiqué was disseminated in, 10 newspapers, 20 radio stations, and two television networks. Ten of these included coverage in their online forums, including links to the communiqué itself.

NEXT STEPS

CAUSE Canada built on the Peacebuilding Project through the Women's Integral Empowerment Program (WIEP) Leadership component: strengthening the capacity of women's groups at the grassroots level through learning leadership and literacy skills, improving confidence and planning, and executing community projects that increase women's local stature and help enhance their voice.



FURTHER INFORMATION

West Africa Peacebuilding Project summary with links to the regional communiqué and the final project report
<http://www.cause.ca/projects/past/wapp08-10>

Women's Integral Empowerment Program summary
<http://www.cause.ca/projects/wiep>

CAUSE Kids website
<http://www.causekids.ca>

Go here for more examples of how Canadian civil society is improving its development practice: <http://www.ccic.ca/IP-case-studies.php>