BURUNDI: Leadership Training Program (BLTP)

Burundi is another example of a highly successful post-conflict reconstruction effort where key leaders realized the importance of leadership capacity building as essential to reconciliation and the rebuilding of governance institutions. In fact, a national training programme, specifically intended to develop the capacity of civil service to work together in advancing the national reconstruction agenda, was a cornerstone of the peace process under the Arusha Accord of 2000. This programme became known as the Burundi Leadership Training Program (BLTP). The leaders of virtually all social and institutional sectors embraced the initiative including the National Liberation Front (FNL), which was still outside the peace process at the time. Multilateral and bi-lateral aid agencies as well as a foreign academic institution supported the programme, making this a good example of international support to an indigenous initiative leading to successful results.

The BLTP began by inviting a group of almost one hundred key Burundian leaders to take part in an 18-month-long capacity-building initiative. The participants were selected in consultation with public and community leaders and were ethnically diverse and representative of a broad cross-section of Burundian society. Participants were drawn in almost equal measure from the political milieu and civil society. The aim was to build a cohesive and sustainable network of leaders who could work together across all ethnic and political lines in order to advance the national agenda. Workshops featured training in conflict analysis, interest-based negotiations, conflict mediation, communications, strategic planning, and institution building and management.

The initial BLTP training workshop took place in the Burundian town of Ngozi and thus this particular approach became known as the “Ngozi process”. This was not a one-time event but part of a continuous process that would bring the participants together every two or three months for exercises meant to broaden their leadership skills and strengthen networks. About a third of the selected participants were involved in each workshop. Over time, the three groups of participants would merge into a single leadership network. The workshops employed a variety of simulation, role-playing and other interactive exercises to help transform the way in which participants understood how their own interests directly depended upon, the larger collective society that conforms the nation. Another important training objective was to foster a climate of mutual trust among the participants. This is because sustainable agreements among competing parties require not only a sense of shared interests but also a set of working personal relationships. Participants were also taught how communication, decision-making process and the distribution of resources can affect trust and cooperation. An important lesson participants discover through the simulations exercises is that long-lasting solutions to issues that led to conflict can only be found through inclusive, participant-based processes.

The initial workshops were so successful in fostering a sense of cohesion and developing collaborative capacity among the leaders involved that the BLTP was soon replicated with a group that included the Tutsi army high command and the six armed rebel groups.
This was followed by a workshop for members of the Joint Cease Fire Commission and for another charged with laying the groundwork for a unified army as well as the police force. Eventually the Ngozi-process had an impact on other sectors as well. Most importantly in the Responding to fears that fresh elections would see a reprise of the Burundi Independent Electoral Commission which wrote an Electoral Code of Conduct to ensure elections without violence or intimidation. The process seems to be becoming institutionalized in the building of a new Burundi.

**Burundi’s Leaders Capacity Development after conflict**

Howard Wolpe, *Journal of Democracy* 2004

The post-conflict reconstruction of any society involves a wealth of distinct elements — new basic laws, new legislative and judicial systems, the building of civil society capacities, elections, security-sector reform, ex-combatant reintegration, and the like. These will not mean much, however, if leaders of the various camps continue to see themselves as locked in winner-take-all struggles, if they cannot arrange for orderly power sharing, or if they are unable to communicate constructively with one another.

What is exciting about the Burundian transition is the emergence of a new political culture reflective of a more inclusive way of doing politics. The enterprise in Burundi is nothing less than the slow but steady transformation of an entire nation’s behaviour and attitudes. This is still very much a work in progress, but the news so far is promising.

When scholars and experts talk about peace-building and post conflict interventions, the discussion often suffers from an unmediated gap between “micro” and “macro” levels of analysis. Policy makers often speak of the “institutional” prerequisites of transparent, democratic governance: multiparty electoral competition, a separation of powers, the rule of law, and the like. But institutions must draw in individuals if the institutions are to have any real force. And institutional transformation requires individual transformation—in the way people think, in how they relate to one another, and in how they work together. A key to successful international interventions, therefore, is to reach the critical national leaders. Failing that, institutional transformation will be hollow and fleeting.

On a technical level, the art of building democratic state capacity is well understood. Experts know how to arrange the disarming, demobilization, and reintegration of armed belligerents; organize multiparty elections; deploy international peacekeeping troops; train new police forces; and overhaul court systems or macroeconomic policies. But the harder political task—helping the leaders of warring factions to find a way to achieve these objectives, to work collaboratively in avoiding war or supporting post-war reconstruction, and to build democratically accountable links between the governors and the governed—are generally neglected. The too-frequent consequence, sadly, is that negotiated peace accords wither quickly while rickety new democratic institutions wobble and sway badly.

Burundi’s experience so far suggests that peace-building and international post-conflict interventions can benefit significantly by focusing on the leadership dimensions of institutional transformation and combining the skill-sets of both diplomats and organizational specialists. Neither diplomats nor “trainers” can by themselves implement effective leadership interventions. Diplomats have access to national leaders and usually see the “big picture” fairly clearly, but typically have little training in or understanding of techniques of institutional and conflict transformation. Trainers generally have scant access to national leaders and little knowledge of the larger political and diplomatic dynamics that affect divided societies.