

# **Practicing Community-Based Conflict Mitigation EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



***A Workshop Co-Sponsored by USAID/BHR/OFDA,  
USAID/AFR, and DOS/AF  
March 29 & 30, 1995 National Foreign Affairs Training Center***

## **WORKSHOP SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

From March 29 to March 30, the U S Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, Bureau for Humanitarian Response, in conjunction with USAID's Bureau for Africa and the Department of State's Bureau for African Affairs, hosted a workshop entitled *Practicing Community-Based Conflict Mitigation*. Over the course of two days, representatives of the U S Department of State, USAID, African governments and religious groups, organizations involved in conflict resolution activities, and approximately thirty non-governmental and private voluntary organizations (NGOs/PVOs) created a forum to develop a comprehensive strategy for conflict mitigation activities in Africa. The motivation for this workshop originated with the African Conflict Resolution Act of 1994 which asserts the deep commitment of the United States in helping to build indigenous African conflict resolution structures and capabilities.

This workshop was a ground breaking move by the U S government to address the burgeoning issue of conflict mitigation throughout Africa. By reaching out to the NGO and PVO community and soliciting the thoughts of experienced conflict mitigation professionals from Africa, the U S Government sought to focus on a process whereby Africans could be empowered to help themselves. One of the major beliefs of all the participants was that solutions must emerge from the community level to be truly successful in dealing with civil conflict issues that surpass national and social boundaries. The purpose of this interactive workshop was both to analyze the experiences of community-based conflict mitigation programs in Africa and to identify standards and criteria to make conflict mitigation a practical tool for NGOs and PVOs working in African communities. By drawing extensively on the experience of practitioners currently active in Africa, the workshop focused on the successes and setbacks of their community and regionally-based programs.

The nature of the workshop was captured by its objectives:

- I To provide an opportunity for non-governmental and governmental personnel to explore the application of community-based conflict mitigation in Africa by learning from the experience of practitioners in the field
- II To identify common themes, standards, and criteria to mitigate conflicts in Africa
- III To develop collaborative strategies for non-governmental and governmental organizations to work together on conflict mitigation in Africa

With these goals in mind, the participants were reminded to reflect on common values and build on each other's experiences to create an interactive workshop. The workshop was geared specifically for NGOs and PVOs working at the community level and attempted to allow for an open exchange of ideas and experiences among a wide variety of professionals who do not often have the opportunity to interact with so many different people and organizations. This workshop was divided into ten small group sessions and four large plenary sessions. The main mechanism for consensus and sharing of ideas was group working sessions, which allowed participants to hear from a variety of practitioners with extensive African conflict mitigation experience. Participants were able to attend two working group sessions over the course of two days. The groups were arranged to allow maximum interaction between participants and conflict mitigation practitioners. Following a sharing of experiences, a consensus was reached in each individual group and then brought before the plenary for evaluation and synthesis. Out of this process emerged twelve constructive principles, agreed on by all the workshop participants.

### Principles of Successful Conflict Mitigation

- I Recognize the Ownership of the Conflict Mitigation Process by the People**  
It must be recognized that, while external organizations can be effective catalysts to change, it is impossible to impose sustainable long-term solutions to conflicts from the outside.
- II Encourage Dynamic Engagements Grounded in Local Culture/Norms, Partnering with Local Organizations and Attending to Changing, Diverse Cultures**  
This entails a deep understanding of the context and history of any given conflict to determine if engagement is appropriate and to design appropriate programs for engagement.
- III Employ a Regional Approach Where Appropriate**  
There should be an integration of economic, political, government, and donor approaches, as well as a gathering of people with shared experiences within a region, or Africa as a whole.
- IV Adopt a Long Term Approach**  
This will allow for sufficient sustainability and capacity building while ensuring that people will be prepared and less vulnerable to future conflict.
- V Embrace a Top Down/Bottom Up Dual Approach**  
Recognize the interdependence of state and civil diplomacy in order to create mechanisms of recognition between levels, ensuring that roles and niches are clearly defined to promote accountability.

- VI Attend to Special Roles for a Variety of Indigenous Populations and Institutions, Including Women, Religious Organizations, Schools, Elders, Security Forces, and the Media**  
Recognize all these communities as special resources, keeping apprised of their inter-relationships and defined roles
- VII Require Inter-Agency, Inter-Organizational Collaboration**  
In order to successfully accomplish this, both the players and process must be clearly identified Establish trust through information sharing and coordination of activities
- VIII Expand Communication in the Broadest Sense**  
Focus on basic freedoms to increase communication capabilities for a true cross-pollination of the peace message through different programs This process entails utilizing local and traditional means of communication to coordinate messages Disseminate information throughout both rural and urban areas
- IX Accept the Interdependence of Development, Relief, Rehabilitation, and Conflict Mitigation Activities.**  
During the relief process, facilitate reconciliation and pay attention to the fundamental causes of conflict to avoid exacerbating the situation Conflict mitigation principles should guide the development process
- X Pay Attention to States of Conflict and the Appropriate Intervention/Response, Recognizing the Need for Multi-Level Response**  
It should be recognized that conflict is a dynamic situation which requires constant monitoring and evaluation to create flexible programs and responses
- XI Support Activities Addressing Issues of Human Rights, Justice, Diversity, Root Problems, and Healing**  
Work with indigenous groups so that they address these issues from their own perspective Recognize the on-going international debate on the difficulty of achieving widely accepted global standards and cultural norms
- XII Increase Transparency and Accountability of Governments and NGOs in this Process**  
There should be a free flow of information, dialogue, and accountability between NGOs, donor organizations, and governments

*(Detailed proceedings will be available following the transcription of the audio tapes from the workshop All participants will be provided copies of these proceedings upon their completion Transcripts will be provided upon request )*

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