Conflict Management and Negotiation Skills Training on Trans-boundary Water Resources: A Reflective Report on Content, Pedagogy and Training Strategy

Organized by the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and administered by the University for Peace (Africa Programme)

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FACILITATION TEAM

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following pages offer some reflections and recommendations drawing from the enriching experiences and learning at the “Conflict Management and Negotiation Skills Training on Trans-boundary Water Resources” held in Bujumbura, Burundi, between 9 and 18 October 2006. Hosted by the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), in partnership with the University for Peace (Africa Programme), the training brought together 29 participants drawn from 9 Nile basin countries, namely, Burundi, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. The delegates were middle level actors in government and academia who are directly concerned with Nile basin and/or water resource issues.

Overall, it was evident throughout the training that water resource issues are sensitive, critical and occasionally evoke strong passions. The learning from the workshop suggests the need to urgently develop skills and strategies to creatively address the latent and occasional overt conflicts emerging from the use of the Nile basin resources. Indeed, it is envisaged that since the majority of participants belong to “middle level” actors – with access and ability to influence both higher policy level decisions as well as grassroots level approaches – they would be able to continue influencing decisions that would result in equitable and sustainable use of water resources in the Nile basin. In this regard, the facilitation team is confident that the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained in the 10 day training is a critical step in developing creative and collaborative approaches in conflict resolution within and without the Nile Basin Initiative.

Foremost, we are grateful to majority of the participants for the commitment to the learning, understanding of the context and readiness to make quick adjustments to the learning process. The participants were candid with their feedback and generous with their time resulting in a wholesome learning experience. We hope these reflections can strengthen the creative praxis that the workshop generated, in responding to problems and issues emerging in the trans-border Nile Basin resources. We also extend our gratitude to the leadership and management of the workshop. While the workshop momentum built up rather slowly particularly on the first day we appreciated the openness with which the workshop managers made quick decisions to address emerging concerns in the formal and informal learning spaces. In particular, we thank Dr. Canisius Kanangire and Mr. Ernest Kagoro who graciously accepted feedback from the facilitation team and participants and applied their diplomatic skills to deal with urgent needs and issues.
In the paragraphs that follow, we offer reflections on the workshop guided by the question: if we were to serve as facilitators in a similar workshop again, what would we do differently? In other words, how could the leaning be enhanced in future training programs of NBI’s Applied Training Project? We shall focus on the theme, content and structure; pedagogy (androogy); workshop administration; and overall strategy.

2. WORKSHOP THEME, STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The workshop theme – “Conflict Management and Negotiation Skills Training on Trans-boundary Water Resources” – was chosen to intentionally address an existing need, namely building institutional capacity and organizational culture for peace and creative transformation of conflicts emerging in the Nile basin. The workshop experience captured the dilemmas, challenges and fears associated with how conflicts are currently handled. Indeed the learning revealed several insights in theory and practice that NBI may consider in its future training programs.

The bulk of the workshop content was prepared by the lead facilitator, Dr Tony Karbo of UPEACE, in consultation with the NBI staff and co-facilitators, in particular Prof Mwesiga Baregu and Babu Ayindo. As well, the draft program was discussed in detail with co-facilitator, Babu Ayindo, who fortuitously visited the UPEACE office in Addis Ababa a few days before the training while on another mission. From our own assessment, as well both formal and informal feedback from the participants the content bore immediate relevance to the participants.

The workshop content focused on Critical issues on trans-boundary water resources; Water, security and human rights issues; conflict analysis and response; Peace Theory; Theory and Practice of Intermediary Roles and Theory and Practice of Negotiation.

Though the facilitation team had very limited email conversation before the workshop, the team developed a chemistry that allowed them to work, almost seamlessly, complementing each other while providing room for their diverse expertise and facilitation styles to enrich both the content and process of the workshop. In addition, the content was structured such that it invited reflections and stimulated interaction from the participants. The mini-lectures mainly offered
with power point slides, therefore served as “good questions” or discussion starters while the role plays and simulations provided experiential learning that generated volumes of quality reflection and candid debate.

With the benefit of the learning experience, we believe that the following topics need to be considered in similar trainings in future or as follow up of this workshop:

- Advanced Training in Negotiation and Facilitation Skills
- A possible Training of Trainers (ToT) follow up for select participants with a view to create a team of national resource people in Negotiation skills
- Politics, Leadership and Conflict Resolution
- Gender, Human Rights and Water Resources

If such a workshop were to take place in Bujumbura given the climatic and socio-economic and political factors we would re-organize the workshop agenda such that more time in the morning sessions would be used for the content-heavy learning while the afternoons would be dedicated to “hands-on” kinetic learning. The high afternoon temperatures (unanticipated before the workshop) and the regular power cuts necessitated changes in the curriculum content and pedagogy/andrology.

Working with a flexible agenda, more time was allotted for “Conflict Analysis.” It was apparent that participants required more tools of analysis before critical steps could take the steps of enhancing skills of negotiation. This was unanticipated as the team assumed the analysis of the issues was clear to most of participants.

3. WORKSHOP PEDAGOGY/ANDROGOGY

In line with adult learning methodology, the workshop adopted a highly interactive learning process that heavily drew from the participants’ experience. Given the challenges we confronted such as sudden changes of space and scheduling, the facilitation had to rely rather heavily on the lecture method for two days just to retain the momentum and logic of the curriculum. In future, better communication needs to happen in the pre-workshop phase (especially on the learning facilities available) so that a wider variety of learning processes – such problem posing case studies, role-plays, videos or open ended and structured discussion – could be employed. In
other words, the challenge would be to achieve the same goal through a better balance between content and process so that neither suffers.

Towards the end of the workshop, it seemed that pedagogically speaking, it would have helped to have a major role play at the very beginning of the workshop to “distill” the participants experience then follow up with theoretical issues derived from the role play. This would help fill the gaps in theory and skills that are manifest much earlier in the workshop thus shaping the kind of content and pedagogy that would address these gaps. We were unable to do two major role plays towards the end as the preparation and execution of the role play/simulation demanded more investment in time and energy.

It would also be useful that the quality of dialogue amongst the facilitation team before the training programs be improved. Even with the limitations of email and busy schedules, it would be helpful for all the facilitators be recruited early and then the Lead facilitator begin by assessing how the strengths of each facilitator/resource person would be utilized in the agenda of the workshop. In this regard, we have three recommendations:

- for a ten day training, we only need to have two or three principal facilitators who can then be supplemented with two or three experts/resource persons who come for a limited period;
- Consider shortening the training period from 10 days to 6/7 days (say with arrival on Sunday and departure the following Sunday).
- Strive to ensure the facilitation team is gender balanced.

Let us now consider the enduring translation problem. The facilitation team had assumed that all participants would have a functional command of English. However, it was evident right on the first day that the delegation from DRC and Burundi were struggling to grasp the communication. While the facilitation team attempted to creatively explore ways to address this “sudden” problem – through the mixture of Kiswahili or using more visual forms of communication – we recommend that NBI reconsider its strategy on this issue. Peacebuilding works from a strong spirit of inclusivity. At various moments, the apparent “exclusion” felt like the very anti-thesis of a fundamental value in peace work. We have two suggestions in this regard:
• One way would be to ensure that the delegates can function in English or provide standby resource person who can help out with facilitation and translation, particularly of the technical concepts.

• The facilitation team can prepare a succinct summary of key content (not more than 20 pages) which could then be translated into French.

4. TRAINING MANAGEMENT AND OVERALL STRATEGY

In retrospect, the workshop’s overall strategy and impact could be enhanced through facilitators and organizers dialogue in the pre-workshop phase. At which point critical questions on the broader strategy could be clarified. These would include, *inter alia*

- In what ways is the training linked to the larger existential reality of the participants?
- What scope of decisions did the participants have in so far as the Nile basin is concerned?
- and in what ways will the participants translate the learning into action (for example, do they have the resources, authority, skills, alliances, government support, etc)?

A clearer articulation of these issues would help in strengthening the pre-workshop, workshop and post-workshop learning and action. As well, we recommend that the participants’ profiles (a paragraph would be sufficient) be provided to the facilitation team at least two weeks before the workshop.

If the gender imbalance in the facilitation team was a concern before the workshop (as expressed by various email communication by the Lead facilitator), the gender imbalance amongst participants was equally disturbing. When reflecting on the water resource and conflict resolution issues it would have helped of the custodians of this important element of life were fairly represented. While we appreciate that NBI has little say in selection of country delegates, we urge NBI to strengthen its advocacy on this matter with national selectors. A greater participation by women – we only had 6 women (out of 30 participants) and 3 of them were from Rwanda! – would help articulate the women’s and gender perspectives on the utilization of an important resources such as water.
The quality of participants was generally high. However, we recommend that the pre-workshop questionnaires need to be returned in time to allow facilitators to identify the “gaps” and design the agenda to address the various levels of needs. In addition, while experience suggests that one cannot have a 100% committed participants, we urge NBI to continue strengthening the selection process of participants. The facilitation team was concerned about a small number of participants who, mainly through level of participation and attendance, were simply not interested. In a continent with limited resources, the facilitation team felt rigorous selection could ensure virtually all participants are worth investing in.

The venue of the workshop presented unique challenges: Burundi is emerging from over a decade of internal violent conflict. Basic infrastructures and institutional cultures are rather weak. Whereas the location of the workshop provided a “reality check” on the challenges Africa is facing in peacebuilding, we believe that the unique challenges of Bujumbura notwithstanding, the learning environment would have been enhanced through:

- A more fluent flow of communication from the hosting team in Bujumbura and the workshop management;
- Briefings from the hotel staff on the basic, but critical information, required by the participants.
- Having personnel or volunteers clearly designated to deal with various concerns.

5. **IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION**

The content and process of the workshop raised critical questions for learning and unlearning skills in negotiation. Both the formal and informal spaces provided moments of reflection and experimentation. It was a particular challenge taking up the facilitation role in a very challenging environment.

Finally, it was clear that water resource issues need to be handled more creatively in the continent. Developing skills and strategies to address the latent and overt conflicts peacefully is one solid way of approaching the problem. A peacebuilding approach would also suggest the need to build stronger institutions and legal frameworks that can support the work of all actors in all strata of society. We believe NBI is equal to the task.