Conflict Management and Negotiation Skills Training on Integrated Water Resource Management: 
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)

HELD AT IMPERIAL RESORT HOTEL-ENTEBBE, UGANDA

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UPEACE 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 Integrated Water Resources” held in Entebbe, Uganda, between 1 and 4 July, 2009. Hosted by the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), Uganda Chapter, in partnership with the University for Peace (Africa Programme), the training brought together 22 participants drawn from various line ministries and other relevant agencies in Uganda. The ministries and agencies represented include: Ministry of Tourism Trade and Industry (MTTI), Rakai District Local Government (DLG), Department of Wetland Conservation, Ministry of Water and Environment (MW&E), Environment Support Services Department (MW&E), Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment among others. The participants were middle level and senior level actors in government 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 water 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 this regard, the facilitation team is confident that the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained in the 4-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 the 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 Nile Basin and other water resources in Uganda. 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. Denis
Bayamukama 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 workshop administration; and overall strategy.

2. WORKSHOP THEME, STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The workshop theme – “Conflict Management and Negotiation Skills Training in Integrated Water Resource Management” – 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. As well, the draft program was discussed in detail with co-facilitator, Professor Baregu. 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; Theory and Practice of Intermediary Roles and Theory and Practice of Negotiation.

Based on past experience working together in other related training activities, the facilitation team worked 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;
- Gender, Human Rights and Water Resources; and,
- A Training of Trainers (ToT) follow up for select participants with a view to create a team of national resource people in Negotiation skills.

If such a workshop were to take place in Uganda 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.

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

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 on the dates of the training, the facilitation had to rely rather heavily on the lecture method for a day 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.
The role play at the end of the workshop seemed, pedagogically speaking, to have played major role play in distilling the participants experience then follow up with theoretical issues derived from the discussions and lectures. This helped in filling the gaps in theory and skills that manifested themselves much earlier in the workshop thus shaping the kind of content and pedagogy that would assisted in address gaps in theory and praxis. We were unable to do two major aspects of the 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 training dates to be firmed up ahead of time so that the lead facilitator can recruit co-facilitators in sufficient time to allow for quality interaction before the beginning of the training. Efforts should be made by the lead facilitator to have gender considerations in the selection of the facilitation team.

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 be helpful if the custodians of this important element of life were fairly represented. While we appreciate that NBI has little say in selection of ministry and other stakeholder representatives, we urge NBI-Uganda to strengthen its advocacy on this matter at the national level. A greater participation by women – we only had 5 women (out of 22 participants) and 3 of them were from the ministry of Agriculture – would help articulate the women’s and gender perspectives on the utilization of an important resources such as water.

The venue of the workshop was excellent. Space was adequate with a lot of available room for break out sessions. Overall, the hotel facilitates were equally adequate.

5. 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 Uganda. 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.