# Conflict Prevention in Zanzibar

During Ramadan in 2012, a group of Christians traveled door to door in a Muslim community in Zanzibar, evangelizing. Tensions rose. A community member phoned the Mufti's office, cautioning that people in the community were preparing to throw stones. The Mufti asked them to wait. He phoned the leaders of the Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches, who phoned their local congregations – none knew of any door-to-door evangelists from their own communities. They went to investigate and found a group of students who had travelled from Dar es Salaam. The local clergy informed them that their actions were insensitive, disrespectful, and harmful to the local community and the delicate peace in Zanzibar.

The evangelists left. The local clergy apologized to the community for the insensitivity. Not a single stone was thrown.

The ACTION Support Centre (http://www.asc.org.za/) and Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations (CTPSR) (http://www.coventry.ac.uk/ctpsr) are partners in an 18-month research project (http://www.makingallvoicescount.org/blog/from-early-warning-to-response-in-preventing-violence-transforming-conflict-through-citizen-engagement/), funded by 'Making All Voices Count' (http://www.makingallvoicescount.org/), a multi-donor global initiative designed to support innovations and research that harness new technologies to enable citizen engagement and improve government responsiveness. The project is entitled "From Early Warning to Response in Preventing Violence: Transforming Conflict through Citizen Engagement (WRPV)". The project's local partners are: the Zanzibar Interfaith Centre (ZANZIC), People's Voice for Peace (PVP) in Northern Uganda, and Local Peace Committees (LPCs) in South Africa's Gauteng Province. This blog reflects on initial visits to ZANZIC (September 2014) and PVP (October 2014), both partner organisations with whom the ASC has a longer term established relationship. The MAVC visits allow for a deeper engagement with local organizations and partners through focus groups, interviews, and workshops.

What led to the prevention of violent conflict in the above episode during Ramadan 2012? What are the opportunities to continue such prevention in future? What are the challenges to the current efforts in Early Warning and Early Response? How does technology affect local contexts? These are a few of the questions being explored in this project.

In many societies affected by violence and social conflict, responses by decision makers and authorities frequently occur only after the violence has surpassed critical levels or attracted sufficient external attention and criticism. Early warning in managing conflict dynamics before they turn overtly violent minimises the destructive effects and increases opportunities for conflicting parties to constructively engage and transform the conflict. Local communities have the most grounded understanding of contextual dynamics, conflict drivers and triggers, yet are often hampered by ineffective communication, social and political marginalization, and mistrust. Events over the last few years vividly illustrate this 'gap': service delivery protests and xenophobic violence in South Africa, electoral violence in Kenya, social and political conflict in Uganda, and electoral strife and attacks in Zanzibar.

Our research is grounded in human relationships and interpersonal engagement, to provide insights into the intersections of technology and development. Through a conflict transformation process, we learn from our partners about opportunities and challenges for technological and communications innovations in warning-response systems. Our research aim is to provide grounded analysis and guidance to improve warning-response communications between engaged citizens on the ground and authorities with the potential to respond to citizen concerns.

## ICT and Conflict Prevention

Various tools have been developed in response to these challenges in recent years, notably a range of crowd sourcing technologies. For example, they have been employed in monitoring electoral violence, responses to natural disasters and public health initiatives. Innovative ways of using ICT to bridge the gap between communities and authorities have been used effectively, with Kenya and Ghana often cited as examples.[i]

Crowd sourcing tools used for conflict prevention and response include FrontlineSMS, Ushahidi, Uwinao Platform, Artificial Intelligence for Monitoring Elections (AIME), Uchaguzi, Sisi Ni Amani Kenya and PeaceTXT. Similar examples from Western countries include CureViolence and Standby Task Force, which also cover humanitarian mapping and crisis responses, such as Ebola outbreaks. However, one notable drawback for such technologies is how fast they become defunct, obsolete or unsustainable. Early warning systems also appear to be dependent on the organisations who run them, and their effectiveness is linked to people rather than technologies. For example, the "Forum on Early Warning and Early Response" (FEWER) no longer operates despite its original popularity, and similar initiatives in West Africa and the Horn have yet to demonstrate their durability.

## Weaknesses of ICT-focused approaches

International funders, governments, and NGOs have moved to capitalise on technology to create conflict prevention architecture for monitoring and interpreting conflict-data trends. Yet a persistent gap between warning and response remains. While ICT-driven tools remain a favourite with donors and the international community, there is a serious possibility that, like much else in the international development world, top-down solutions imposed or suggested by outsiders will not reflect local needs and priorities. Basic questions about access and usage are overlooked in the face of generalized statistics. Analogous use is assumed between project designers and local would-be users and there is seldom allowance made for context specificity.

In Kyrgyszstan, for example, Anna Matveeva describes an SMS communication system, designed and implemented through the international community, only to learn that the design did not work: "Rural women, most of them elderly and semi-literate, could not use text messaging and were unwilling to be trained."[ii]

Our first field visit noted such a gap. We spoke with the Zanzibar Police, who operate a Facebook Page (last updated in September 2014) and we met with an organisation conducting a

survey by phone. The communications weaknesses do not seem to be the presence or lack of cutting-edge technologies. Instead, there is a shortage of location-appropriate methods that can build on existing communication channels and strengthen trust between those communicating. Participation in the mobile survey rose only *after* those surveyed met the people conducting the survey. In-person meetings took place to build confidence and establish trust. We observed that *improvements in conflict prevention appear more likely to emerge from building relationships of trust between different sectors of society, and between them and the authorities, rather than developing yet another crowd sourcing ICT tool and training stakeholders how to use it.*

## Communal Relations in Zanzibar

In September 2014, ACTION and CTPSR staff were in Zanzibar, working with ZANZIC, who over the last few years have done inspiring conflict prevention work with the Joint Committee of Religious Leaders, the Youth Interfaith Organisation of Zanzibar (YIFOZA) and a youth drama club that promotes interfaith football games and music video-based campaigns of their activities. The research team agreed from the outset that the workshop, and the various meetings that preceded it, would be highly participatory. The research team would not try to lead discussions, but instead allow respondents the space to speak freely about important issues dealing with violence, conflict and security.

In addition to meeting with the Police, other NGOs, and participants in ZANZIC's activities, we conducted a workshop attended by roughly 45 participants. The workshop used conflict transformation analysis tools and a process focused approach to dialogue that sought to elicit the views of all participants.

The participants included a range of local demographics: women, youth, faith leaders and religious minorities were well represented. Two officers from the Community Policing department were also present. This workshop was notable for several factors, which deserve closer examination. Women, even young women, felt able to stand up in front of the whole hall and speak on sometimes highly sensitive issues. It was obvious that their voices were being listened to, and not just because the men were being polite. When working in breakout groups, women again contributed to discussions and were not excluded or belittled. Young women chose to work with young men, and a man chose to join the women's group and was warmly received.

The police presence at the workshop was welcomed by participants and not resented, despite the fact that lack of trust between communities and police was one of the issues raised during the day. It was very gratifying to witness this endeavour at a new style of policing being welcomed by local people, and several participants said how pleased they were that the Police station had sent two officers.

In a society characterised by hierarchy and status, it was interesting to see the important role that young people had in the workshop. Older and senior participants did not dominate the proceedings, even in group work. There seemed to be consensus that young people represent

Zanzibar's future and their attendance at events like this is a welcome step in helping reduce extremism and violence.

As inspiring as the diversity of participants was, it is important to note that each was invited, each came, and each participated out of an established relationship with the Zanzibar Interfaith Centre. Trust has been established over many months, if not years, which contributed significantly to the candid sharing and meaningful communication.

**Reflections**
Concepts and phrases such as 'conflict prevention', 'conflict transformation' or 'early warning' have little resonance with most Zanzibari people. Instead, issues of political violence, crime and personal safety are conflated into what we would term concern over 'human security'. Child abuse, the effect of shifting traditions and cultures, unemployment, and general safety were articulated as significant concerns.

We observed that participants tended not to clearly distinguish different aspects of responding to conflict. Instead, they articulated a framework that emphasises how different 'agents' communicate and coordinate, how they trust each other, and how they are networked. What became evident during our fieldwork in Zanzibar was that the labels and frameworks used in the overarching discourse on Early Warning/Early Response and innovations in ICTs are not adequate or inclusive enough to capture the realities of what local people understand and believe.

**Workshop Survey on Communication Tools**
During the workshop, we conducted an anonymous, multiple-choice survey to investigate the existing communications usage and preferences. Participants were asked how often they use various communication tools, their age and sex. 32 people completed the survey. The multiple choice answers were coded thus:

- Several times a day:    1
- Several times a week:   2
- About once a week:      3
- Infrequently:           4
- Not at all:             5

If a respondent failed to answer a particular question, it was left blank in the analysis.

The table below shows the preferences of respondents' use of communications tools:

| Ranking | Communication tool: | Average answer |
|---------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Mobile Phone | **1.28** |
| 2 | TV | **1.28** |

| 3 | SMS | 1.46 |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | Radio | 1.75 |
| 5 | Personal Computer | 2.07 |
| 6 | WhatsApp | 2.11 |
| 7 | Facebook | 2.28 |
| 8 | Email | 2.32 |
| 9 | Newspaper | 2.33 |
| 10 | Other [various responses provided] | 2.75 |
| 11 | Internet Café | 3.28 |
| 12 | Flyer | 3.32 |
| 13 | Landline | 4.33 |

The average age of respondents was late twenties and early thirties, and three quarters were men. This could indicate that older participants were less likely to hand in their completed surveys.

Our short survey indicates that the top four most commonly used communication tools for the workshop participants are mobile phone, television, SMS, and radio. Most respondents used these tools several times a day. Personal computers were also surprisingly high in the ranking, perhaps indicating that our workshop participants are not reflective of Zanzibari demographics as a whole. Internet cafes and landlines are rapidly falling out of common use, presumably thanks to the rise of cheap mobile phones.

Though fliers are infrequently used, previous conversations conveyed how influential they are. In one conversation it was observed that fliers often precede violence, and that a flier is never a good sign. Another influential communications tool that was mentioned was a public board on which xenophobic messages were written, read by commuters walking to and from work every day. These low-tech forms of communication are a critical consideration in understanding escalating tensions and appropriate responses to preventing violence. Media forms with higher rankings in the survey carried out are not necessarily more important or influential in communicating messages than those with lower rankings.

**Early Warning & Response 'Gaps'**
The potential for Early Warning (EW) infrastructures in local communities is hampered by a combination of factors, some of which include:
- The lack of any communication channels between communities and authorities;
- In-actionable or untimely communication;
- Political elites may not act on information from the grass roots, through unwillingness or inability;
- In some cases elites have a vested interest in allowing or even promoting violence;
- Disagreements within the authorities about how to prevent conflict;
- Conflict prevention mechanisms may actually exacerbate local tensions;

- Local people may be scared of providing information, especially if this leads to them being identified as dissenters or provocateurs.

Our project aims to assess the effectiveness of the role of communication tools and the opportunities to build trust and support relationships that connect 'warners' (local organized community members), to 'responders' (local authorities and decision makers). Both groups are stakeholders able to mobilise human resources aimed at transforming conflict, preventing violence and harnessing the potential for constructive outcomes from escalated tensions. Through the learning, we intend to initiate wider dialogue and violence prevention processes in support of local responses.

**Closing Thoughts**
It is clear that the groundwork done by ZANZIC over the last few years is a major factor in the success of the workshop and similar community events. Without their outreach activities and the inter-group relations that have been built up, the workshop would have been poorly attended and much less illuminating.

For outsiders, the levels of trust and openness apparent in the workshop were palpable. The relationships between diverse stakeholders that were built and strengthened appear to be important.  However, we recognize that the participants may not be representative of Zanzibar as a whole. The key issue therefore, seems to be how to promote and broaden this dynamic of inter-communal trust so it becomes more of a 'norm' in the society, contributing to a deeper culture of dialogue and relationship building.

As strong relationships and a norm of dialogue develop it is more likely that concerned or angry community members will approach their Mufti, who in turn will know the clergy well enough to call them, and who will have enough trust to listen to and hear the Mufti, and take the steps necessary to communicate effectively with their own constituencies. Representative leadership that is connected across differences and communicating clearly and effectively can more easily begin to build a culture that can prevent violence and promote respect and peaceful coexistence.

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The ACTION Support Centre (ASC) is the Africa regional hub of a network of organisations and individuals committed to transforming conflict, ACTION for Conflict Transformation. It specialises in capacity building, lobbying and advocacy, grassroots mobilisation, facilitating dialogue and initiating innovative forms of community organising.

Coventry University's CTPSR advances research, education and partnerships to address the challenges posed by violent conflict and promote a deeper understanding of peace and reconciliation.

Zanzibar Interfaith Centre (ZANZIC) is an office of the Lutheran Church in Tanzania. It supports a joint committee of religious leaders who promote peace during elections, support 300 local

peace committees, mediate interfaith conflicts, and make joint statements in the media calling for peace.

People's Voice for Peace's activities include facilitating reintegration of abducted children, advocacy for peaceful resolution to the LRA conflict, encouraging grassroots perspectives and including women's voices to build a peaceful Northern Uganda.

Gauteng Local Peace Committees (GLPC) were initiated by ACTION with the support of Diaspora Focused and Community Based Organisations, the South African Police Service, South African Council of Churches and the City of Johannesburg Migrant Desk, to address local, community-specific challenges and also national, continental and regional issues that are affecting them.

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[i] Revisiting the Utility of the Early Warning and Early Response Mechanisms in Africa: Any Role for Civil Society?
Olumuyiwa Babatunde Amao, Dorcas Ettang, Ufo Okeke-Uzodike, and Clementine Tugizamana
[ii] "Conflict Cure or Curse? Information and Communication Technologies in Kyrgyzstan" in *New Technology and the Prevention of Violence and Conflict*, ed. Francesco Mancini (April 2013).