

July 2014 Interview with our Global Associate in Colombia, Lissette Mateus Roa:

- Who made up the group you were working with on the ground there in Gulu/Uganda?

The group was made up for 16 people from 5 different regions of Northern Africa, some of them were former child combatants, some of them were teachers from different schools, some people from the community and one person was a counsellor and a university teacher. The entire group of teachers told us that they have former child soldiers in their schools.

- How many people took part in the training?

Sixteen people in all took the training

- Talk about the specifics on how long it took, how intense was the training?

We developed the training during 8 days, from 8 am to 5 pm, it was very intensive, but despite the tiredness and the heat we went through, it went very well. We did three days of the first phase of the ESPERE called forgiveness, two days and a half of the second phase of ESPERE called Reconciliation, one day of methodological transfer in order to teach them how to do the ESPERE training. There was one day visit to the field where we got to know former child combatants and the different ways of reintegration that the Ugandan society or government has been implementing to their communities. We had the opportunity to talk with them to realize their needs in terms of forgiveness and reconciliation in order to create our action plans - taking into account the reality and the needs of the child (former combatants) and of the community. Then we workshopped an entire day devoted to action plan creation.

- What was the feedback you received while there and since the trip and your return to Colombia?

At first we were very worried about the methodology because we thought that because of the culture, maybe the workshop would not work. During the workshop I realized the methodology was actually quite perfect for Uganda, as the need of forgiveness and reconciliation are universal and the need of having tools for facing these situations and be able to live in peace with themselves and the others. People were very happy because of the training - many of them realized (and came to understand) the different concepts and theory about forgiveness and reconciliation, they highlight the importance of

knowing that forgiveness is a healing process of oneself so that you don't need the other part, but for reconciliation you need to know and think how will be the new terms of the relationship you want to fix. Also, some of them said that it was very important to understand how forgiving is not just saying "I forgive you", it's a process and you need some tools to go through that process in a very conscious way, and knowing what is necessary to fix in both sides, victim and perpetrator. I like that many of them were able to find that their perpetrators have a bad and a good side to them, they said they realized that maybe the same person is able to be a good person and have a bad person within them too. But in the end, they were able to recognize that "We are all human."

- Are you in touch with members of the coalition and if so, what kind of longer-term follow-up do you think you will be conducting with them?

If you are talking about Arigatu or Arlpi (two partner organizations), I'm in touch with Dorkas (Dr. Kiplagat, partner to the Goldin Institute) and with her, we have been talking about starting as soon as possible with follow-up, by sending the manuals of the ESPERE workshop to see which actions plans are going to be supported and to hold the participants to their established goals that they made at the end of training.

- Your impressions of working in Uganda/Gulu, was it like you expected and prepared for?

My expectations were different than the reality in Africa, normally the mass media shows to the world the bad things about Africa, I was expecting some kind of hungry people, in a dusty or dirty environment, waiting for water and food. But, I realized (once there and on the ground) that they have needs, but also they have so many good things that the mass media doesn't talk about: they are a happy and generous people, (there are) amazing buildings for education, they are bilinguals and have spoken their own language and English since they were kids, they have some kind of sense of community that we have lost in our developed societies, and is highly necessary for healing our societies – they are ahead of the game in that sense. I realized we have as many things to learn from them as they can learn from us. I'm not saying everything is perfect, I'm just saying that not everything is bad, and there is great hope for the future because of the people. Moreover, I was expecting a very rough place but it was a beautiful place for the workshop.

- What were you surprised to learn as you worked with the group there on the ground?

What surprised me the most was that the ways of teaching and learning are still based in the authority, it's still a vertical teaching, not horizontal. For that reason at some moments they were expecting the knowledge would naturally come just from the facilitator (me), but with the time, they realized the knowledge needed to come from them.

I understand the importance of talking about the "Ethics of Care" (others, environment, opinions, etc), it's a topic that is really needed over there in the society in general. Also the need to realize how many positive things that their country has (as mentioned before, the sense of community that hasn't been lost there), and the importance of working hard in order to obtain what they want to achieve. Some of them told me that their society have learned to live from others, so sometimes it is hard for them to understand that working by themselves and with an independence, is the best way to overtake their economic needs.

I learned also about the importance of getting back to our cultural roots for mending our society back together again. I learned about the scars of war in their memories and that their hearts are just the same as ours, but the biggest surprise to me was to learn that we are very similar even when we are so far (geographically) from one another.

- Talk about the differences of running ESPERE with the groups in Africa over the workshops you have done in Colombia and Latin America. Were there any language barriers or cultural differences that either made it more (or less) difficult for you? How did you deal with these challenges and keep everything going to plan?

The barrier of language was a little bit difficult, first off, we all have different accents, as they were coming from 5 different regions and I'm Latin-American, however it was just matter of time to get to know each other's accents and if something was not understandable one of the tools was writing on the board in order to confirm what they or myself was saying.

In the workshop methodology, we use two main ways of sharing experiences and ideas; one is called grupiños and the other one is called grupaos. The grupiños are small groups of three that are formed at the beginning of the workshop and they work together during the whole workshop until the end of the phase of Reconciliation. The grupao is the whole group in circle; I realized they feel much more comfortable talking in the grupiños than in the grupao. When we were at the grupao, it was a little more difficult for them to get to talk.

In the workshop phase of reconciliation, we have one module that talks about principles and we have an exercise where three people have to agree

in the meaning of three different words related with values and principles and then they have to share in the grupao the meaning that they have agreed upon. In that exercise I realized that because of the culture, the meaning of some words is totally different that the meaning we have in Colombia for that word. And this has a lot to do with the sense of family and community they have in their society.

There was always (a fear) because of the high component of religion they have in Africa, and the high component of male chauvinism. It was important to get to know about the culture ahead of time, because that helped me to not create some bad environment when giving examples about some situations of forgiveness and reconciliation between couples or between women and men. And in terms of religion, it helped me a lot because I gave a little bit more emphasis in the idea that forgiveness is not just something that is part of a religion, I emphasised in the academic part of forgiveness, the importance of realizing every human (needs) it as a part of their lives, even if they are or not religious, and also the importance of a real forgiveness in the societies in order to be able to mend the social fabric.

There was one inconvenience with one of the rituals where we use flowers, water and fire, one of the participants said he felt that was against his religion. It turned out that this was very important to have happen, because it helped me to teach the others that making the rituals or commitments at the end of each module is not mandatory, that it is dependent only on what each person wants to do, it's important to show respect with the exercise and with the rest of the people who wants to (make) some commitment with themselves, but is not mandatory to do it, and also it's important to show respect with the person (who doesn't) want to make it.

I have found that for them it was kind of difficult to follow instructions when walking or going out of the room (having them not talk or laugh), as there are some moments that need some kind of solemn environment. I realized that was because they felt some kind of shame about using mirrors or masks (props used in the exercises) or because they were required to have a more near approach (physically) with the others. For example, when giving a hug or looking directly into the other person's eyes, or smiling for the other, or laying down on the other person legs, those kinds of course-exercises that have to be (comfortable) with the body, were kind of difficult for them, but that said, were very important (to the process). So in those cases, the instructions (to not) laugh or to remain quiet, instructions to not talk and so forth, had to be given many times.

Because of heat and the amount of time we were in the workshop, the last three days, people felt tired very easily and that's why instead of having 3 days of Reconciliation we did just 2 and half – I had to give them time to rest. Also, we implemented at the end of each day some time for exercise,

whoever wanted to relax by doing exercise, we chose one person who knew about it (and to lead) us with a small (exercise) routine.

What kinds of plans did the local teams create? How will you follow-up with them and when will the action plans start being enacted?

From sixteen people some of them decided to work in their action plans and some of them in groups. At the end there were three groups: two (made up) by three people and one (made up) by two people. And we have 8 people working alone.

The action plans were created for working during the next six months:

1. The first group formed by three people, have decided to work in *Alokolum Kirombe, Layibi Division, Gulu Municipality*. They wish to train 90 people - some of them for the community and some of them former child soldiers in order to promote peace and harmony among the community and the former child soldiers through the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. They decided to train 15 people each month.
2. The second group formed by two people are going to work in Kitgum District, their main objective is to promote peace and harmony in order to strengthen peaceful coexistence amongst the school and community. For doing that, they have planned to do 3 ESPERE workshops: one with 15 selected students from one secondary school. The other one with 15 teachers from 5 selected secondary schools and the last one with 15 community members in a selected Sub County that suffered the two decade LRA insurgency.
3. The third group formed by three people have decided to implement the ESPERE methodology in 4 selected Sub-Counties of Gulu. They want to train 60 people in total consisting of 15 formerly abducted women at Palaro, 15 students from St. Janani Loum Vocational Institute, 15 students from Labora Youth Centre and 15 survivors and victims of Lokodi massacre in Gulu.

Apart from this action plans we have received 5 more from the participants who decided to work alone, the action plans are as follows:

1. First action plan: To train 30 people (drop out girls, former combatants, disadvantaged girls and rejected children) from northern Uganda by doing two ESPERE workshops.
2. Second action plan: To train 36 people in the ESPERE methodology, this people are formed by teachers of war-affected children, the communities

affected by the war in northern Uganda, War affected children and formerly abducted persons. These workshops will take place in Laroo Boarding Primary School, School of War Affected Children (SOWAC).

3. Third action plan: To train in the ESPERE methodology 30 people formed by child mothers and former child soldiers male and female. This training will be developed at Atiak Technical School localized at Amuru District, Gulu, Uganda.
4. Fourth action plan: The training shall target 30 people. 15 of which shall be the former child soldiers and the other 15 shall be those who suffered physical harm (Those whose limbs, lips and ears were chopped off by rebels). From Agago District, Uganda.
5. Fifth action plan: This action plan has as an objective to train 30 students (drop out children and former combatants) in the ESPERE methodology in order to teach them to understand the good advantages of forgiveness and reconciliation (ESPERE) between them and the community.

This action plans will be followed up from Colombia through e-mails and Skype, by giving them advisement about materials, the best way to conduct the ESPERE depending on the target people, and advising about the activities that may be changed (tailoring) to the target people. The action plans will start as soon as the organizations approve the budget and the action plans proposed by the participants and will have a maximum of six months for implementation.