

Conflict transformation in Zimbabwe

This learning summary highlights the main successes, challenges and lessons learnt from Envision Zimbabwe's (EZ) Conflict Transformation Programme implemented together with Peace Direct in Hurungwe and Murewa Districts from 2008-2017 with funding from a large range of UK and US donors. Envision, a long-standing partner of Peace Direct, aims to contribute to ending the pervasive and persistent culture of violence in Zimbabwe by creating a community-wide mechanism to identify and respond to conflict, improve social cohesion and build peace.

Since 2008, Envision has worked to tackle the culture of violence in Hurungwe and Murewa, building on existing community structures for a locally-led and participatory approach to conflict transformation. The main aims of the project are to train traditional and community leaders in conflict resolution, leadership and gender equality, to empower communities to resolve political differences through non-violent means through Peace Committees and Peace Festivals, to train the Zimbabwe Regional Police to use peaceful techniques to resolve conflict, and to increase the economic resilience of women and address inequality and gender based violence.

This summary is based on the findings of an independent comparative evaluation completed in 2017, which sought to identify changes in the communities where Envision works since the project started in 2008. By comparing findings from communities where Envision has worked to findings from communities where Envision has not worked, the evaluation sought to understand what distinctive contribution to peace Envision's work has made in the target areas.

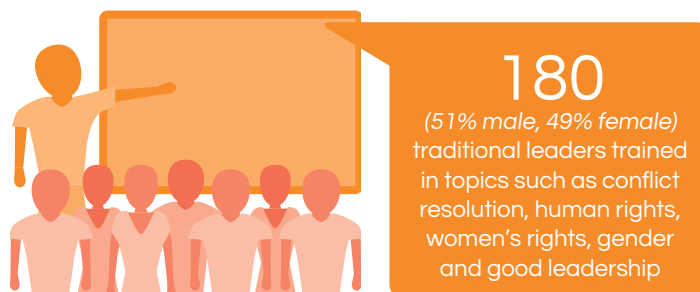




Picture International Citizen Service

Evaluation of Efficiency and Effectiveness

- **Building on local structures:** The project was rooted in traditional structures that were adaptive to the local context. Envision used the concept of Peace Committees (PCs) to prevent, manage and transform conflicts at the local level. Four PCs were created and supported, using an open democratic process to elect trusted local leaders and followed policy guidelines developed by Envision. PCs were found to be the driving engine of the conflict transformation model, effective in mobilising the community against violence.
- **Integrating the participation of women into decision-making structures:** PCs were effective in supporting women's active role within the community. Inheritance of traditional leadership positions is patrilineal in Zimbabwe, often excluding women from decision making forums. Envision ensured women not only participated, but led Committees with its policy guidelines requiring women in key positions and ensuring a majority of female members. Interviewees also testified that levels of gender based violence had reduced.
- **Community support and local legitimacy:** The project's success in supporting the transformation of violence was due to its ability to gain the support of community leaders and members and integrate into existing community structures. Envision was approached by leaders of neighbouring communities requesting that the project be extended to their communities allowing them to exceed the target of training 80 community leaders, eventually reaching 180. Envision achieved this because they conducted a stakeholder analysis, followed by consultations to ensure full stakeholder understanding of the project.
- **Influencing the influencers:** Envision managed to work directly with people who had both the potential to maintain and reject the current



culture of violence, namely community and traditional leaders and the police force. These are groups that have been known to use violent methods, but also hold potential to transform the behaviour and attitudes of their peers.

- **Initiative, sustainability and independence:** Despite a general lack of funding, which has limited the amount of support that Envision was able to offer project participants, projects have continued without Envision's support. The evaluation also found participants stayed in the project for a considerable period, with 67% staying for three-four years, 22% for one year and 11% for one - two years.

Challenges

- **Measuring change:** No baseline study was conducted before the start of the project which made it difficult to assess changes. To overcome this, results were compared to the situation in two control wards with similar socioeconomic contexts that had received no peacebuilding support.
- **Movements of participants:** Following up with trained police officers and understanding the extent to which they have stopped using violence in their policing is challenging because police officers are regularly moved to new duty stations.
- **Limited funding:** A lack of funding for Zimbabwe in general and to local organisations in particular has forced Envision to make staff cuts, preventing the organisation from expanding their work and limiting the ability of Peace Committees to respond early to conflicts.
- **Lack of neutrality:** Political interference with Peace Committees jeopardised their ability to work neutrally, with criticisms from communities there was too much political interference at the start of the project in Murewa (Ward 27). This

“ I loved violence a lot and would fight with others, but now I am able to live in peace with my neighbours. ”
Project participant

required a high level of support and presence from Envision to overcome, requiring them to emphasise that the role of Envision was nonpartisan.

- **Gender:** Reaching a gender balance in training women leaders and police was challenging as these are traditionally male dominated positions. Although a few women attended training sessions as leaders, most joined as wives of traditional leaders.
- **Political climate:** Envision had to operate within a severely restrictive environment because of the current political climate which closely monitors civil society organisations.

Impact

- **Accountability:** Traditional leaders expressed there was better access to police and higher-level community leaders. One leader said: “Our Headman and police personnel were unapproachable but because of this project they are now free to the public and more approachable.”
- **Reduction in violence and cases of conflict:** In both project areas, respondents saw a reduction in the level of violence, with a significant reduction in crime, domestic violence, fighting, land conflict and accusations of witchcraft. In Hurungwe the Headman said: “People are now free to talk about issues of violence and how they can deal with it or prevent it,” and that there are no more cases of violence in his village. In Murewa respondents said that: “As a result of many workshops on how to resolve conflict, conflict between people and fighting [has] significantly decreased.” A decrease has been seen in the number of cases brought to the higher-level chief’s court, which is highly likely to be due to the improved capacity of traditional leaders in lower level courts to handle local disputes. Control wards, in contrast, have not experienced a reduction in crime rates or cases of criminal and public violence.
- **Preventing political violence:** Respondents from Hurungwe and Murewa project communities said their communities had not experienced any political violence around the time of the 2013



Four

peace courts were created with a total of 45 members (23 male, 22 female)

“ Because of the project we would meet for soccer matches and it helped to reduce tensions between our communities. ”

Project participant

elections, unlike during the 2008 the elections when Hurungwe and Murewa were among the worst affected. Respondents said: “Political violence was concentrated in certain villages but because of peacebuilding workshops, people are now living in peace despite their political differences.” Despite being located next to the project communities, control wards did experience violence during the 2013 elections.

- **Behaviour change:** Reflecting on their behaviour in the past, participants in project communities acknowledged their behaviour had changed because of the project. One respondent said, “I used to have a temper problem, and villagers were scared of me because I would beat people at our township, but now this has changed.” The evaluation found participants internalised the conflict transformation skills and testified on how they were using them practically.
- **Improvement in the capacity of traditional leaders and community members to handle disputes non-violently:** 100% of respondents said that conflict transformation training influenced their personal life positively, giving examples such as: “I am now able to solve conflict in a professional way.” During Peace Festivals community members testified that they now had capacity to resist conflict because of Community Security Forums which enabled communities to deal with local conflict situations without the help of outsiders. Leaders in control wards showed low capacity in dealing with problems affecting them.
- **Improved negotiation and mediation capacity of police:** There was a shift in attitudes of police officers towards non-violent policing methods. Respondents said the conflict transformation training improved their ability to solve conflicts peacefully, be more professional, and better analyse their perceptions towards conflict. One result of this was an increase in the number of cases resolved at one police camp with a consequent decrease in the number of cases referred to courts.
- **Improved community relations harmony, trust and cohesion:** Community members expressed that leaders are now more responsive to their communities, with 50% expressing that there is now more community cohesion, important

in healing divisions that opened along political lines following the election violence in 2008.

- **Greater participation of women:** Although respondents from both project and control communities expressed the view that women are inferior to men, female participants in project communities showed an increase in their level of participation and confidence. One female participant said: “We are now given more space to express our views than before”, “we now have women chairing meetings in our village.”

Reflections from Peace Direct and Envision

Envision

The security sector is one of the most difficult areas human rights and peacebuilding organisations can operate in Zimbabwe, with high levels of mistrust and fear. In order to operate, we worked to gain the trust of communities and the Zimbabwe Republic Police through highly sensitive and strategic forms of relationship building, being transparent about intentions and goals and by using less threatening initiatives to build trust with communities. We deliberately sought to address issues around economic, social and cultural rights before implementing project activities aimed at addressing civil and political rights.

Peace Direct

With very limited resources, Envision has managed to achieve very significant results in countering a culture of violence in project communities. Their membership, respect and acceptance in these communities has helped Envision to work with key stakeholders of accepted community structures, which has enabled the organisation to integrate conflict resolution knowledge

into these structures, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the project despite limited funding. However, Envision has also recognised that similarly to the national police, traditional structures have the potential of being both the source and solution of violence and gender inequality and the need to address this. These findings show their ability to not only implement projects, but also change mindsets away from the normalisation of violence.

Recommendations

The recommendations set out for Envision are dependent on the direction of Zimbabwe's political future and the real threat of violence and instability around the scheduled 2018 elections. Many are relevant for others wishing to support local peace structures in Zimbabwe and beyond.

- Scale up and replicate the project's work with community leaders, traditional leaders and Peace Committees, given the similarities in both need and existing social structures in neighbouring wards and communities.
- Expand livelihoods projects to address poverty as a root cause of poverty and to support women's economic independence as a way of encouraging their level of confidence and participation in conflict resolution mechanisms.
- Maintain good relations with authorities by sharing information sensitively and upholding communication on project activities with authorities.
- Develop a strategic plan to for clearer short and long term goals to strengthen results and improve fundraising efforts.

