

AVP Workshop in Burundi 19-21 February 2003

By Ray Boucher

I'm sending this written report to follow up my verbal report on the AVP workshop Carolann Boucher and I did with Charles Berahino and Jean Berchmans in Burundi. We started with a Team Building session on Feb 18 where we shared information about ourselves, strengths & weaknesses, and our experience with AVP. We set the Agenda for the first day and guided ourselves by the customary agenda they have been using in Burundi. A couple of unique things was that Jean led an exercise the 1st morning on "What is Violence" but kept it to a brainstorm and discussion to get at what **people in the room** think Violence is. He did a great job in making the participants take the lead, including the writing on newsprint by a participant of the ideas suggested. He then broke the participants into 4 groups to discuss further how they view violence. The usual **Roots** of Violence was not done at this time but was a separate exercise planned for the morning of the 2nd day. This format worked very well. The other thing done the 1st day was a Trust Walk, where one individual is "blinded" (eyes closed) and led through an obstacle course by a sighted partner. Roles are then switched. We commonly do a trust exercise near the end of the workshop to reinforce Trust that has been building throughout the workshop. However, doing it on the 1st day requires trusting someone else whom you don't know well or have developed a relationship with yet, which challenges the individual even more. It went well.

One thing that stood out for me was how much they enjoyed the Light & Livelies. We couldn't do enough of them and they loved playing and laughing. It must be uplifting from their everyday lives to play and be able to act like children and be carefree for awhile.

A new Gathering which I thought was quite appropriate and built on one of the session topics was "If I had the power, I would....." It was very interesting to hear many of the answers which mostly would provide remedies to social ills.

The last day was mostly taken up by role plays. Again, every role play looked to a third party to be the intervening force which tempered the conflict, i.e., the Transforming Power influence came from a neighbor or family member but never from the combatants. We talked about this.

It was a very enjoyable workshop. There were 18 participants, of which 6 were women, 10 were Peacekeepers (explained below), and 2 other men (a Muslim and a Christian). The Peacekeepers were all men. Of course the workshop was in Kirundi which meant that Carolann and I were often on the fringe of what was going on. We intentionally did not have Charles translate everything, only the essential pieces. We trusted him to use his judgement. Of course, he had to translate whenever we were speaking.

All of the participants were from Buterere district and came in on one crowded bus to the facility we used on the outskirts of Bujumbura. The uniqueness of this group was in the large representation of peacekeepers who were mostly young men in their twenties and a few that were older. What is a Peacekeeper in Burundi? They are young men (mostly) who have been given the responsibility for security in their village or cell. They are all unpaid volunteers. To be sure that we had a clear understanding of their role and how AVP could be integrated, I did an interview of the "Chief" Peacemaker while others listened in. Following is a summary of that interview: The interviewee is Mdimurwanko Leonard (Lion Leonard).

1. *What is expected of a Peacekeeper?* Someone who works for the security of the population or between two citizens who are in conflict. To protect the rights of and respect for all citizens.

2. *How does he do that?* I have a gun. At 5:30 p.m. it is issued to me and it is returned in the morning. What gives him the power to enforce security is the gun and his eldership.

2.(a). *Have you had to use your gun?* Yes, shot back when attacked by rebels and another time by thieves.

3. *Does AVP make a difference in how you do your job?* Already I know about "Thinking before reacting" which I can use. I know that I can listen first and that there are ways to keep peace that don't use violence.

4. *How many people are protected by one peacekeeper?* There are 18 Peacekeepers. Each night, six work per quarter (Cell). They have the job of protecting about 3,000 people.

5. *Can the position a Peacekeeper holds with possession of a gun be abused or misused?* Sometimes this can happen.

6. *Is there anything we can do in AVP to assist them in doing their job?* I would like to learn from others. It would be good to include Peacekeepers from different areas together (in an AVP setting) so we get to know more from each other.

7. *Does the Government pay you anything?* We get NOTHING.

8. *Do you think the presence of Peacekeepers has made a difference?* Before there was stealing and killing everyday and now that is not happening. (Must make a difference!)

9. *Can you do this job without a gun and still be effective?* We need a gun to deter "government soldiers" as well as rebels and thieves.

10. *Will you do your job any differently now that you have learned about AVP?* Yes. We have been transformed. We will have different reactions in dealing with problems.

This last question was also responded to by Pfakurera Issa as follows: As representative of all Peacekeepers in Buterere zone, I have an office where I receive people with conflicts. The workshop has benefited me a lot. Previously, I would usually use force. I now know that "force creates force" so I will no longer suggest it. I realize there are other ways to help people without using violence. I saw that violence cannot resolve conflicts.

One other issue: Sometimes some can use guns to do bad things because they have no jobs, i.e., nothing to do to survive. What will become of the Peacekeepers if there is a cease fire?

I think the last bit is a plea or a warning that if they no longer have a purpose or role as Peacekeepers, what will keep desperate people from doing desperate things? I'm not sure if he is referring to the Peacekeepers or the population at large.

Keep in mind that these responses were translated as we spoke and may not be wholly accurate of what was intended to be said but, I think, by and large, the answers reflect what was meant.