

SHARED SECURITY

CASE STUDY: BURUNDI

Breaking cycles of violence

Through healing, reconciliation,
and shared livelihoods



American Friends
Service Committee

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Frederic underwent a remarkable transformation from child soldier to trusted husband, father, and shop owner. His is one of many stories that demonstrate the possibility—and urgency—of helping individuals and communities heal, reconcile, and commit to resolving problems peacefully in the immediate aftermath of war.

Frederic Ngenzebuhoro was 14 years old when he fled his hometown and joined a Burundian rebel movement in the bush, taking up arms in the country's civil war. When the war ended in 2003, he found himself traumatized by his experience as a combatant, feared by his neighbors at home, and uncertain of how to survive without a weapon.

These circumstances could have trapped Frederic in new cycles of violence. Instead, he settled in a Peace Village where ex-combatants like himself, returning refugees, and others internally displaced by the war were actively supported by the international community, including AFSC, in healing, rebuilding their communities, and laying foundations for lasting peace.

In the Peace Village where Frederic lived, AFSC helped establish a savings and loan association. Participants met each week to administer a community banking system they created, and members added money to both a savings and solidarity investment fund. Members accessed the savings fund for loans that helped with income-generating activities while the solidarity investment fund provided gifts to members in times of crisis such as a family illness or death.

Members participated for a year, taking and repaying loans or gifts as needed. At the end of the year, each member received their entire savings with accumulated interest, which provided additional capital for their income-generating activities. Each person would then decide whether to rejoin or leave the group.

It's a simple, effective system that AFSC has replicated in other parts of Burundi where we work. The associations help to increase individual and family income while building cohesion in new communities like the Peace Villages. They provide a network and an entry point for healing and reconciliation that helps build long-term peace.

As household incomes improve, AFSC works with association members on trauma healing and activities



Association of Saving and Lending, Makamba Province.

that promote social cohesion. Participants attend weekly meetings where they acquire new skills in management and conflict transformation, and support each other to build peace.

After one year, our focus shifts to helping the associations become self-reliant. At the end of two years, the associations are strong enough that they only need limited technical assistance. We can then redirect resources to help create similar groups in other locations or new associations in the same village.

In one clear marker of success, the associations become more than an observed need by AFSC; they become an expressed need by local communities committed to fostering everyone's well-being.

Their success is measured by individual and community change. Frederic underwent a remarkable transformation from child soldier to trusted husband, father, and shop owner. His is one of many stories that demonstrate the possibility—and urgency—of helping individuals and communities heal, reconcile, and commit to resolving problems peacefully in the immediate aftermath of war.



Association of Saving and Lending, Rutana Province.

I. Executive Summary

After decades of conflict, the people of Burundi have begun to reknit the social and economic fabric necessary for a resilient, thriving society. It remains a fragile process, one that AFSC is helping to strengthen with an integrated, three-fold approach to peace building that involves:

- Income-generating activities to support economic recovery and sustainable livelihoods.
- Trauma healing to promote trust and overcome the wounds of war.
- Social cohesion and reconciliation activities that strengthen relationships within communities.

One of the pillars of AFSC’s peace-building work in Burundi, and other places, is a commitment to shared security. Shared security is a state in which people, communities, and countries derive their sense of security from mutual well-being, just policies, and a

shared commitment to resolving problems peacefully. In post-conflict environments such as Burundi, a focus on shared security can help people take concrete steps toward a safe, prosperous future for themselves and their families.

Burundi endured many years of violent conflict that had both ethnic and political dimensions. Thanks to the Arusha Peace Agreement of August 2000, Burundians began working together for peace. This broad-based desire for peace—which included a strong commitment to restore broken bonds and support one another in regaining their human dignity—encouraged the international community to support these efforts.

AFSC’s experience in Burundi has made it clear that work at the local level—what peace-building experts often call “peace writ little”—can and must be extended to influence larger political and transitional processes, or “peace writ large.”¹ This helps ensure the

¹ See *Reflecting on Peace Practice* and other works by Mary Anderson and the Collaborative for Development Alternatives.

structural change needed for peace to take hold more broadly in society.

To these ends, AFSC has regularly brought together key policymakers and national leaders with members of civil society to promote reconciliation, healing, and economic recovery. The work includes a focus on transitional justice mechanisms such as Burundi's truth and reconciliation process. AFSC has facilitated study tours and exchanges that have exposed decision makers and grassroots organizers to the lessons learned from similar processes in other countries.

Through convenings such as these and support for dialogues to address national concerns critical to peace, AFSC connects its partners and civil society to policymakers, all the while ensuring that community voices are heard.

Community members often consider policymakers as difficult-to-reach segments of the population. AFSC uses dialogue and exchange opportunities to create enabling environments where information can be shared from the top-down and the bottom-up. As community members and policymakers listen to one another, they start to build trust as everyone's concerns and opinions are heard and valued.

Moreover, AFSC's approach helps communities and key decision makers reinforce one another's efforts in important moments.

This program brief highlights AFSC's work toward a path to peace in Burundi that may prove useful to others working in regions recovering from violent conflict. Among the lessons learned from AFSC's experience in Burundi are the need to:

1. Engage communities in post-conflict processes of reconciliation, healing, and rebuilding social cohesion and livelihoods.
2. Link local efforts to broader national transitional processes.
3. Move from short-term efforts such as preventing election violence to the long-term goal of building sustainable peace.

While international policymakers and donors are learning that the work of building a durable peace goes far beyond signing an agreement, resources remain heavily concentrated on governmental processes such as electoral and constitutional change. Few resources are available for the hard work of community-level reintegration and reconciliation. Yet history shows that it is often the revival of local-level grievances that can destroy a fragile peace.

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II. Background: Burundi

Burundi is a small, densely populated country in the heart of central Africa. Its population of around 10 million includes diverse ethnic and religious groups, and many people live on just a few dollars a day.

Since its independence from Belgian colonial rule in 1962, Burundi has experienced repeated cycles of violent conflict and war, including mass killings of civilians along ethnic lines (Hutu and Tutsi) in 1972 and 1993. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of Burundians have been displaced by violence, fleeing to neighboring countries like Rwanda, Tanzania, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Regional conflicts further contribute to Burundi's ongoing instability.

In the mid-1990s an African-led mediation, facilitated by former South African President Nelson Mandela, led to the signing of the Arusha Peace Accords in 2000 and the creation of a peace process that was fragile from the start. However, the process created a vital window of hope and opportunity for positive change in the country and region.

While the peace agreement largely silenced the guns, established a political power-sharing framework, and set the country on a path out of war, it did not heal



Landscape in the south of Burundi.

the wounds suffered by communities over decades of violence or provide a means for rebuilding the social and economic fabric of a society in ruins. Proposals to establish a formal truth and reconciliation process were brought forward beginning in 2004 but remained stalled for years before getting back on track in December 2014.

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III. Strategies in the aftermath of war

The path to peace is neither simple nor straightforward. From the beginning of AFSC’s engagement in Burundi, we recognized that restoring peace after a long period of war and violence would require a variety of efforts, functioning at different levels of society, the full impact of which could only be measured over decades. AFSC also understood that in order for this work to succeed, the people of Burundi needed to lead the way.

In 2004, AFSC made a long-term commitment to support Burundians in laying foundations for lasting peace. We saw our role in terms of “accompaniment”—a commitment to strengthen local initiatives with resources, knowledge, and interventions that help make them independently functional, sustainable, and more resilient.

With this in mind, AFSC began working with communities in post-war Burundi to help people rebuild their lives. Initially, programs focused on restoring livelihoods and rebuilding social cohesion. However, it became apparent that Burundians needed to overcome the negative experiences of war before sustainable peace or development could take hold.² We responded by integrating community-based trauma healing into the work. This focus is unique among organizations working in the region and has become critical to AFSC’s success, and more importantly, the success of the communities we sought to support.

The integration of community-based trauma healing in Burundi was a gradual process that we first introduced in three of the six provinces where we worked. A subsequent evaluation revealed a significant positive impact in communities where trauma healing had been implemented. In first-person testimonies, project participants noted that trauma healing provided a level of support they had not received from other partner groups in the past. They also expressed a need for support in dealing with their pasts, which haunted them despite economic improvements in their lives and the availability of basic social services. Based

on the evaluation and participant feedback, trauma healing was incorporated into the remaining provinces where AFSC worked.

To date, more than 2,500 Burundians have benefited from trauma healing. The film “Life after conflict in Burundi: Socio-economics and trauma healing,” produced by AFSC, documents the success of our approach.³

The effectiveness of AFSC’s three-fold approach to peace building adds to its interventions at the political level. Our ongoing efforts at behind-the-scenes, “quiet diplomacy” have allowed us to engage with key actors and decision-makers and create an environment conducive to open discussions about issues critical to peace. With our support, participants bring a cross-regional perspective to gatherings where they exchange ideas, share best practices and lessons learned, and learn from experts in other countries. They then develop ways to influence national policies that further peace as well as social and political change.

Examples of this work in action include, but are not limited to, exchange visits that helped decision-makers refine the country’s National Truth and Reconciliation law and allowed Burundian parliamentarians to learn from South Africa’s experience; behind-the-scenes work that helped pave the way for Burundi to adopt the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014; and our ongoing support for a nonviolent electoral process.

Having seen the success of these approaches, AFSC now supports local organizations in Burundi in adopting strategies that integrate economic reintegration, social cohesion, and trauma healing, and that connect local work to national peace building. We also see a potential for others to replicate these strategies in Burundi and other countries where communities are recovering from violent conflict.

² Since 1999, Quakers in Burundi had been working with American Quakers to develop trauma healing approaches appropriate to Burundian culture and experience. These developed into a number of programs led entirely by Burundians, including the Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) program that AFSC now supports.

³ afsc.org/video/life-after-conflict-burundi-english-version

IV. AFSC's peace-building work in Burundi

Since AFSC's work in Burundi is done in partnership with local groups, we undertook a stakeholders' analysis to identify which local partners had the right comparative advantages to implement our three-fold approach to community-level interventions. It became clear that no one partner had the required capacities to implement trauma healing, social cohesion, and community livelihood projects. Instead, we needed to develop joint projects that would bring together at least two local implementing partners.

We then conducted a similar stakeholders' analysis for our national peace-building efforts.

Once these analyses were completed, we brought together our local partners to develop strategies for implementing the work.



A youth project participant in Makamba Province become autonomous after life skills training.

Community livelihoods through income-generating activities

With AFSC support, community members voluntarily form savings and loan associations and are trained on how to manage them so they can succeed. Members develop internal rules and regulations that help them respect agreed upon commitments. Members learn how to choose and manage the right income-generating activities, and are given starter-kits

(registers, a locally made safe with three locks, pens, etc.). They decide how much they want to contribute to their weekly savings and how much they have to contribute to the group solidarity fund. Members then vote for an executive body that takes responsibility for directing the affairs of the group. They learn to manage their savings accounts, how to give out loans, and determine repayment conditions. They also decide how to support members through the community solidarity fund. The associations allow members to run their income-generating activities, and they work hard to repay their loans on time. At the end of one year, members share savings and any accumulated interest, then they start the cycle again. The end of the year is also a time for members to think about strengthening their income-generating activities and, in some cases, diversifying them. This experience prepares members to access micro-financial institutions that will give them more opportunities and facilitate their economic independence, leading to better living conditions. The associations also evolve and begin to function as more broad-based community groups, extending their work beyond the economic sphere to include trauma healing and social cohesion.

Trauma healing

For the trauma healing to succeed, we first need to identify the target population that needs support. This is done through the community associations that allow those affected by the conflict (internally displaced persons, ex-combatants, returnees, etc.) to gather. During weekly meetings, the implementing partner with skills in trauma healing observes the group dynamics and takes note of any trauma symptoms that surface. Once those exhibiting signs of trauma are identified, they participate in group trauma healing sessions. In this way, individuals share their experiences and understand that they are not alone in their struggles. The group sessions are followed by individual accompaniment until each person completes her/his healing process. Participants then testify at the larger association meetings about their transformation and what association members can learn from one

another. Those individuals feel more confident, better able to engage in routine activities, and support other community members who may show similar symptoms of trauma.

Social cohesion

The traumas experienced during times of war and violence—which can include witnessing the killing of loved ones—can lead to feelings of fear and mistrust. Community associations provide opportunities for rebuilding bridges of trust and solidifying relationships. In addition to the savings and loan function, the associations are encouraged to plan different socio-cultural activities such as working together on group farms, organizing sporting activities, and undertaking joint community development projects. This gives people the chance to stand together, support one another, and build trust.

National peace-building efforts

Apart from political power struggles, conflict often arises as a result of policies that do not benefit—and may even harm—local populations. People blame such policies for preventing them from enjoying their rights as citizens. AFSC has undertaken critical conflict analyses to understand some of the key driving factors (KDFs) of conflict, who are the key driving actors (KDAs) of conflict, and what dynamics exist between



Association of Saving and Lending, Cibitoke Province.

the KDFs and the KDAs. After further analysis of best practices in peace-building work in other countries, key actors from government and civil society are brought together with peace-building experts in an enabling environment to exchange ideas and lessons learned. As a result, key actors are “re-conscientized” about current policies and whether or not they benefit citizens. In most cases, they are pushed to make amendments or even develop new policies. This allows AFSC to support both the government actors and civil society in coming together and working to bring positive change for the population.

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V. Markers of success

Since beginning our work in Burundi 10 years ago, we have seen evidence of positive impacts and transformative change, even while the risks of reoccurring violence persist. This evidence is most clearly seen in the improved lives of the people with whom we work, as well as the evolution and changes in the program work itself. We have seen that supporting healing, restoring social cohesion, and rebuilding integrated livelihoods can create a sense of shared security within communities that were once torn apart by war. Not only have they begun to thrive and develop, but they are reaching out to other communities to help heal the broader society. It is our hope that this sense of shared security becomes a binding element that can help strengthen community resilience against future violence.

AFSC and our implementing partners realized from the start that these vulnerable communities needed support to recover from many years of conflict. We help train and transform community members to have a different perception about life. People gradually move from leading dependent to leading independent lives because they can afford to support themselves. They gain new skills, learn to identify the needs of other community members, and call on AFSC and our partners to support others in becoming more self-sufficient. They learn to manage their own resources instead of waiting for support from others, and they have improved their living conditions. They have truly taken the future into their own hands.

Impact A:

As people heal, they learn to trust. As trust is restored, survivors from all sides of a conflict can begin to reconcile.

AFSC's support to trauma healing programs has helped hundreds of individuals re-engage with their own lives and the lives of their communities in positive and transformative ways. In addition, scores of community-based trauma healers have been trained to continue and expand the programs. A key part of the trauma healing program is the restoration of trust—trust in



Strengthening social cohesion and building trust among project participants of Burundi.

self and trust in others. Restoring relationships of trust within communities that were divided by violence and fear is a key step in the reconciliation process.

Trauma healing workshops bring together those who have suffered violence and those who have perpetrated it (sometimes one and the same) so they can understand the effects of traumatic experiences of war on individuals, families, and entire communities. Through the workshops, individuals begin to see and share with each other again as human beings, to confront the effects of their trauma, and sometimes to ask for and offer forgiveness. Participants consistently report that the programs help them overcome their fear and anger, regain their sense of dignity, and see the “other” as a person with whom they can relate and even trust. They learn to connect and communicate with their families and communities again, live as neighbors, and seek alternatives to violence when dealing with problems.

Impact B:

As communities develop interdependent livelihoods grounded in trust and reconciliation, a sense of shared security and social cohesion takes hold. As this deepens, they begin to reach out to help other communities heal and rebuild.

Personal healing is required but not sufficient for rebuilding peace. AFSC's program in Burundi is grounded in the understanding that reconciliation requires not just regaining trust and healing the wounds of war, but also restoring the practical social and economic bonds that help keep communities working together to meet shared needs and resolve shared problems nonviolently.

AFSC's support of economic autonomy (savings and loan circles) creates an enabling environment that allows communities to undertake the healing work necessary to overcome past traumas. These savings circles often include a mix of ex-combatants, returnees, internally displaced persons, ethnic groups, and community members who had once feared, or even harmed, each other. These activities create an additional way of developing trust and rebuilding social cohesion. Working together in collaborative projects that generate mutual economic and social gains re-enforces the healing process initiated through the trauma healing workshops and supports ongoing community reconciliation.

These programs have tremendous potential to create impact at both the individual and community levels, and local communities learn that they have the power to lead their own peace-building processes. For example, communities that participated in the trauma healing and saving circles programs identified the need to work with other neighboring communities where the programs had not yet been implemented. Program participants recognized that they could not feel fully secure in and reconciled with their own communities if others nearby were not healing and rebuilding as well. With AFSC's accompaniment and financial support, they began joining with other communities to undertake more rebuilding and reconciliation projects together, such as building hospitals, roads, and schools, and establishing peace villages. This innovation in the program demonstrates how small-scale peace-building efforts can grow and expand when local communities are allowed to lead their own rebuilding and recovery.

Impact C:

As communities heal, rebuild, and reconcile, the ground is laid for broader national peace and reconciliation processes. As national leaders are educated and

influenced to develop effective national reconciliation processes, the potential for more durable peace flows from the ground up and the top down.

AFSC's programs have had a significant impact in the communities where we work, but even the most successful local-level peace building can be upended by broader political conflict and violence. Recognizing the need to re-enforce the bottom-up healing and reconciliation of communities with broader work at the socio-political level, and to engage local communities in the ongoing national reconciliation process, AFSC also began working to influence the development of Burundi's national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

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A project participant in Makamba Province with a prosperous business thanks to saving and lending groups.

Through dialogue and exchange programs, AFSC engaged key Burundian leaders in government and civil society to share and learn from experiences of other truth and reconciliation processes. In 2011, AFSC organized an international conference in Burundi on the lessons learned from other TRCs in Africa. In 2013, AFSC brought a delegation of Burundian parliamentarians and a member of the civil society to South Africa to learn from its law content and process of Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This process contributed to shaping the National Truth and Reconciliation law in Burundi that was enacted in May 2014.

While AFSC had advocated for passing a comprehensive law, its staff and partners also recognized that if not implemented well, it could

re-trigger trauma or even re-spark violence in communities where healing had begun. AFSC is now supporting capacity-strengthening for Burundi's commissioners, including linking them with the South African TRC so they can learn lessons from that experience as well. This will help ensure that Burundi's TRC is implemented in ways that strengthen community healing and reconciliation and help prevent future violence. AFSC is also continuing its work with local communities on healing and rebuilding since the national reconciliation process will have a greater chance of finding fertile ground in communities where perpetrators and victims are already learning to live together again.

By exposing Burundian parliamentarians to other African truth and reconciliation processes and educating them on the processes of community healing underway in their own country, AFSC and its partners contributed to the thinking and development of the country's own Truth and Reconciliation Commission. AFSC is now working to contribute to the capacity-building of its commissioners on restorative justice approaches. This will help shape how the commission is implemented and advance the same kind of integrated approach to reconciliation at the national level that has proven effective in helping communities heal and rebuild a shared future together. In this way, AFSC is drawing on its experience and learning through community-based trauma healing and reconciliation in Burundi and elsewhere around the world to bring best practices in critical areas of peace to the institutional level, and helping link "peace writ small" with "peace writ large."

VI. Lessons for peace building in post-conflict situations

Based on AFSC's experience in Burundi, it's clear that increasing support at the community level can help ensure the sustainability of post-conflict recovery efforts. AFSC's recommendations for policymakers, donors, and the international peace-building community include:

- Sustain long-term engagement and funding that supports community-level peace building, and links local and national transitional processes, in post-war contexts. Wars can last for decades, but international and donor engagement in peace processes often wanes after just a few years. Support more durable community-level efforts for reconciliation, recovery, and social cohesion through multi-year funding and long-term engagement.
- Support and fund trauma healing programs as a critical part of national peace and reconciliation processes. Communities affected by violence and war cannot rebuild and avert future violence completely while they remain traumatized. Community-based trauma healing programs that engage survivors of violence, ex-combatants, returnees, internally displaced persons, marginalized populations, and other community members have proven effective in Burundi and have spread to neighboring countries as well.
- Link and integrate trauma healing, reconciliation, social cohesion, and sustainable livelihoods projects to re-enforce trust-building and promote positive economic interdependence. Conflict-affected communities need to rebuild relationships and livelihoods in order to recover. Linking participants, projects, and communities across programming can leverage greater impact and ensure more sustainable results.
- Support programs that strengthen the capacities of civil society to engage with local and national policymakers and that link local-level peace efforts with national transitional processes. Engaging local communities in national peace and reconciliation processes strengthens societal buy-in, improves governance, and ensures more durable outcomes. Educating and engaging key leaders improves national processes.

Engaging local communities in national peace and reconciliation processes strengthens societal buy-in, improves governance, and ensures more durable outcomes.



Participant in the launching ceremony of the Strategic Plan 2014-2018 and the documentary film "Life After Conflict in Burundi."

- Develop regional dialogue and exchange programs on truth, reconciliation, healing, elections violence prevention, and other locally identified needs, for African policymakers and civil society leaders to share lessons and promote networking. Experiments in various truth and reconciliation processes across the continent offer critical lessons for countries experiencing or transitioning out of violent conflict. There are glaring examples of matured democracy on the continent where citizens in leadership roles understand the need to give the relay baton to their compatriots because the time for change has come and is clearly defined in national policies. Providing space and support for exchanges among African leaders themselves can encourage and improve locally-led solutions.

- Strengthen civil society violence prevention efforts in the lead up to elections, including early warning, early response networks, elections monitoring and reporting, and local mediation and dispute resolution mechanisms. Burundi's elections risk a return to violence and undoing of the important work of healing and rebuilding that is being achieved in many communities. Burundi's government, civil society, and the international community have a strong shared interest in ensuring future election violence does not erupt and the elections process is fair, inclusive and transparent.

Next steps

Moving forward, AFSC will be focusing on three key areas that can help reduce the potential for a renewal of violent conflict and strengthen deeper roots for peace in the months and years to come:

1. Promote community livelihood recovery, social cohesion, and trauma healing initiatives.
2. Promote youth development through skills training and livelihood support.
3. Enhance the participation and engagement of CSOs and state institutions in national policies around the electoral process and national reconciliation to prevent conflict.



Young people playing a sketch in the aftermath of the 2015 election violence in one of the unstable quarters of Burundi.

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The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. Drawing on continuing spiritual insights and working with people of many backgrounds, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems.