

Exploring Educators' Perceptions of the Role of Education in Peace- Building in the African Great Lakes Region

Elavie Ndura, Ed. D.
George Mason University
endura@gmu.edu

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Overview

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The Context: The African Great Lakes Region



Includes countries
surrounding
Lake Kivu, Lake Tanganyika,
& Lake Victoria:

- Burundi
- Rwanda
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Kenya
- Tanzania
- Uganda

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Context



The Context (Continued)

- AGL region shared colonial history:
 - ❖ French-speaking former Belgian colonies (Burundi, DRC, Rwanda)
 - ❖ English-speaking former British colonies (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda)

Theoretical Framework

- Legacy of Belgian colonial policies in Burundi, DRC, & Rwanda (Chrétien, 1985, 2003; Lemarchand, 1994; Makoba & Ndura, 2006; Mamdani, 2001; Ndura, 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Reyntjens, 2000)
- ❖ Post-independence colonial educational policies and practices: inequity and discrimination
- ❖ Cyclical ethnic conflicts and violence, particularly in Burundi & Rwanda

Theoretical Framework (ctn'd)

- Lasting images of ethnic conflict and violence (Lemarchand, 2004a, 2004b; Melady, 1974; Ndura, 2003)
- ❖ Burundi: 1972 genocide (Target: Hutu)
- ❖ Rwanda: 1994 genocide (Target: Tutsi & moderate Hutu)
- Victims of cyclical ethnic violence: ALL (Hutu, Tutsi, Twa)
- Need to transform education to foster interethnic coexistence and societal reconstruction (Ndura, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006; Ndura & Makoba, 2006, in press)

Purpose of Presentation

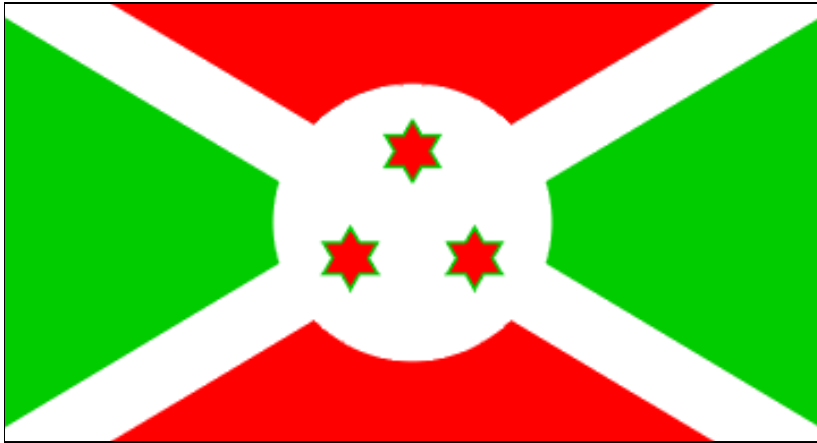
Share findings from a study that explored educators' perceptions of their responsibilities and the role of education in the quest for sustainable peace in the African Great Lakes region

Study Focus: Burundi

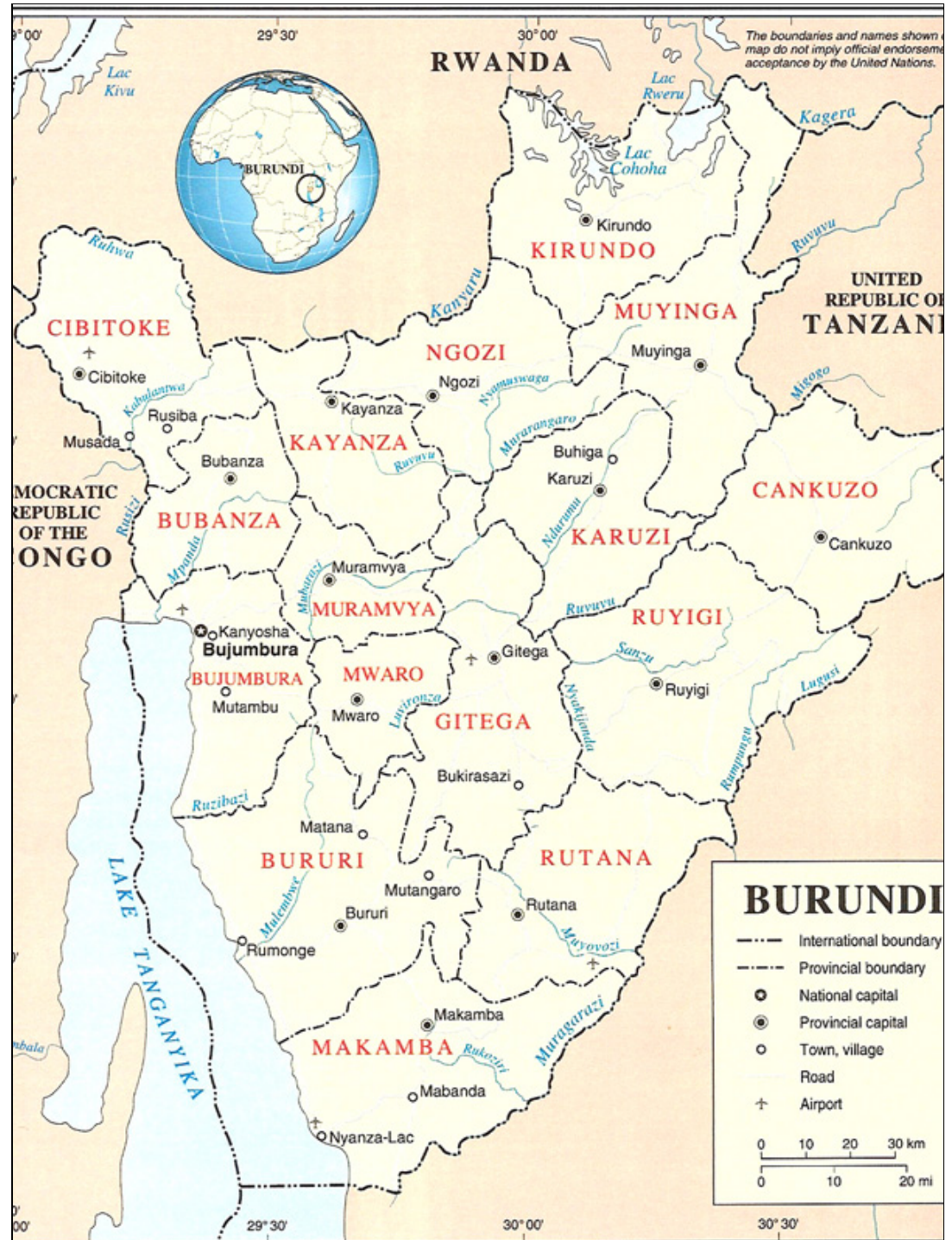
Rationale:

- Marked by history of ethnic conflict (1965, 1968, 1972, 1988, 1993-2005)
- Emerging from 12 years of civil war
- Relatively little attention from International Community
- Homecoming opportunity after 17 years of life in exile

Burundi Profile



- 6.8 million people (85% Hutu, 14% Tutsi, 1% Twa)
- Mostly Christian; 5% Muslim
- Languages: Kirundi, French, Kiswahili, English
- Literacy rate: 37%
- Economy: Mostly subsistence agriculture



Research Questions

- How do educators characterize their experiences with ethnic conflict and violence?
- How do they characterize the role of education in the peace-building process?
- How do they characterize the role of education in the process of societal change and reconstruction?
- How do they characterize their roles in the quest for sustainable peace?

Data Sources

- 31 individual interviews
- One focus group interview (5 participants)
- Classroom observations

Participants

- 36 participants from three provinces
- 12 females ; 24 males
- 11 administrators; one book keeper;
24 teachers
- 12 secondary; 23 elementary; one university positions
- 7 identified as Tutsi; 20 Hutu; one mixed
- 35 Burundian; one Congolese
- Age range: early 20's – early 50's
- Two widows ; 8 unmarried; 26 married
- Three students; 33 professionals
- Time in profession: Novice to veteran

Findings: Major Themes

- Suffering and trauma from the conflict
- Material losses
- Rebuilding education from infrastructure to the courage to attend
- The critical role of education
- Educators as agents of peace
- Challenges of educators' task

Suffering and Trauma from the Conflict

➤ **Immaculée's story**

- ❖ Hutu, 36 years old
- ❖ Secondary school principal in countryside
- ❖ Had to interrupt her college education due to war
- ❖ Lost father in 1972 genocide of Hutus by Tutsi government and military
- ❖ Barely survived 1988 violent clashes
- ❖ Attacked by soldiers when 6 months pregnant in 1995 and spent 2 years in hiding

Immaculée's story in Her Own Words

“We had a watchman...some time around 1 o'clock in the morning [in 1994], he warned us that he could hear vehicles, but could not see them...It was a procession of army vehicles...at least 12 of them...with their headlights off. They were 10 meters away from our house. Around 3 AM, the watchman warned, ‘please be careful. I can see some people...silhouettes.’ I ran through the fence...I hid far away in the bushes...[when I returned] 37 people, including my housekeeper, had been killed...with hammers, machetes, bayonet or bottles filled with primus...they just crush your head...there were children, old men and women, and so forth...We just returned to bury the dead...Two weeks later, they staged a similar attack...This time they caught me...It was around 5AM...They caught me. I was pregnant...They struck me on the stomach with a gun...I was six months pregnant...They took my money...they made me carry a gun...I was barefoot, in my pajama...They ordered me to sit and wait in front of the health center...When I saw them leave, I hid behind the parish...I saw patients who were hospitalized run with IV's in their arms...pregnant women were running...and I, too, started running as fast as I could.”

➤ **Steve's story**

- ❖ Tutsi, 32 years old
- ❖ Secondary school teacher in big city
- ❖ Graduated from college with BA during the war
- ❖ Has traveled to Europe
- ❖ Claims that war had already ended in 1997 when he went to university
- ❖ Says that his native region had a difficult time, but does not elaborate
- ❖ Says that relatives were killed, but does not elaborate

➤ Trésor's story

- ❖ Hutu, 50 years old, married, father of 5 children
- ❖ Elementary school principal in 1994 when he was arrested by government soldiers
- ❖ Accused of capital murder, on death row for more than 11 years without trial or legal representation
- ❖ Moved from prison to prison, and often tortured

Trésor's Story in His Own Words:

“I saw soldiers enter my office. It was 1994. I was an elementary school principal...They entered my office. They found me there. They picked me up. They tortured me. They took me to the [provincial] brigade...Nothing suggested that I had done anything wrong...They took me away in front of the teachers...They took me away in front of the entire student population...Some students left the school crying...They accused me of murder...Nothing showed that I had killed anyone...It was a lie. It was a pretext...because it was during the crisis...I was tortured for six months...on these two fingers...with metal bars...they hit us on the hands...and the forehead, too...I have scars...They broke two ribs on my left side and three ribs on my right side...These two fingers cannot be straightened...they are bent for ever...In addition, they starved me quite often, sometimes for three or four days...They convicted me of capital murder...I asked for a lawyer...and witnesses to assist me...My request was denied even though it was the written law...They convicted me without giving me a chance to defend myself...I was incarcerated for 11 years and 6 months..”

Material Losses



“[When I returned] in 1997, our houses had just walls...Doors, windows, and anything that was inside had been stolen...They had even stolen the roofs...We had to rebuild everything...We had nothing...We had to buy a fork...Rebuilding a house is difficult...We lived in miserable conditions...To this day [2006], we have not yet completed the repairs...We just put outside doors on my mother’s house...but inside, everything is open...We can’t afford to pay attention to the inside...” (Immaculée)

Rebuilding Education

From infrastructure...



To courage to attend...



“I began teaching here in 1995...but I couldn't work because the entire classroom, the entire school had been destroyed...Doors had been stolen...windows had been stolen...the school was empty. The principal had been killed. I was asked to replace him...I said, 'How can I replace him...there is nothing here...It's a building occupied by soldiers...It's a military camp. How am I supposed to enter the building?' So, I tried to reach out to the parents...I started with 11 students in the 7th grade. I tried to recruit students who had been run off from their schools...So I got 22 students signed up for the 8th grade...The student population increased to 40 and then to 80, and I continued like that. I have 602 students right now...We have already graduate four classes...Our students are brilliant...We have been ranked first in the province more than five times...Some of our graduates are attending the university...but many live in very difficult conditions...Some have to walk 18 km each way every day to attend school...” (Immaculée)

The Critical Role of Education

Common Themes among Participants:

- Education shapes ideas and actions
- Education shapes future of people and nation
- Education should open new horizons into human experience
- Education should open space for interethnic dialogue

“When children are educated about peace building, nothing will prevent them from following the teachings because they will grow up with these lessons in their mind...They are being prepared to take our place because today’s leaders will not live for ever. These children that we are educating are the future leaders. Peaceful dispositions will not emerge from anywhere when in leadership positions if they are not developed from childhood.” (Steve)

“Students trust education. If they are taught that killing is a good thing, they believe it. If they are taught that killing is a bad thing, they believe it. Since students believe what they are taught in school even probably more they do what they are taught at home, education play a critical role...because today's youth are the ones who will build and lead the country in the future...We must therefore educate them to become peace agents.” (Immaculée)

Educators as Agents of Peace and Societal Transformation

❖ Common Themes among Participants:

- Role models
- Courage to bring ethnicity discourse into the open
- Challenges to their work

“Before we can achieve peace, we must show the youth the reality so that they can grow up understanding that ethnic conflict does not help anyone...that when you instigate a war, the enemy is not the only victim as you lose your own people as well...We must teach them that war does not spare anybody...We must teach them to choose between right and wrong...We must teach them what they should do and what they should not do.” (Steve)

“[Educators] have a critical responsibility. They play a very important role because education is not just Mathematics and Chemistry or Physics. [Students] must learn how to manage their personal lives during and after their schooling...”
(Immaculée)

“Educators, i.e. teachers, principals, inspectors, and all of us who work in education constitute the educational elite. We must have peace...We must understand what peace means...We must give what we have. Therefore, educators must first inform the students and teach them to work toward sustainable peace...We must live in peace. We, the older generation sometimes don't have a clear vision. But our children don't have to continue living in these problems. We must erase what has confused our generation from the minds of our children. We should not keep the children confined in this conflict. We must find ways to teach them to work towards peace.” (Trésor)

Challenges to Educators' Task

❖ Common Themes among Participants:

- Lack of instructional materials and resources
- Educators' poor living conditions
- Overcrowding
- Student poverty



Lack of teaching resources

“We have one shelf that we use to hold some instructional materials. We don’t have reference materials. We have no reading books and no dictionaries... We have two French-English dictionaries and one English-English dictionary. It’s reserved for the teacher. We don’t allow students to use it...We need books...we need a Xerox machine to copy exams...We need a computer...We really need books...”

(Immaculée)

Educators' poor living conditions

“You have heard that ‘It’s no use reasoning with a hungry man.’ We cannot do a good job teaching...for instance you are paid 70,000.FBU when you have a BA...It’s a shame. Housing is very expensive...a kilogram of beans used to cost 600 at the market, now it cost 1,200. And you have to make it through 30 days. How can you teach when you are so poor that you have no means to survive?” (Steve)



Student poverty...

“There are many students who are orphans here...Even when they are not completely orphans, they lack the necessary means...Because of this war, I have problems. There are many students who are smart and want to get an education, but who lack the means. The policy says that every student must pay. So, at the end of the year, I admit them without knowing their situation. During the year, I realize that they are destitute.” (Immaculée)

Overcrowding...

“We have at least 85 students in each classroom. They sit in three’s in the desks. So, they come and crowd the rooms. They accept the bad conditions because I tell them “Study and you will learn. Don’t remain confined in ignorance.”

(Immaculée)

Discussion and Conclusions

➤ **General observations**

- ❖ Pervasive awareness of cross-ethnic impact of ethnic conflict and violence
- ❖ Most participants believed that education should and can contribute to the quest for sustainable peace
- ❖ Most participants believed that all educators should assume leadership in the peace process and model peaceful dispositions
- ❖ They were comfortable raising critical questions that can help restore hope for Burundian students and educators...and the country

Discussion and Conclusions (ctn'd)

➤ **Recommendations for professional development**

- ❖ Articulating educational philosophy that is relevant to the national context
- ❖ Placing peaceful interethnic coexistence at the center of education in policy and practice at all levels
- ❖ Instructional materials development, evaluation, and adaptation (to make the most of available resources)
- ❖ Provide educators with sustained professional development opportunities to become empowered, reflective, and critical practitioners
- ❖ Provide professional development in humanistic, student-centered methodologies

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About the Presenter



Elavie Ndura, Ed. D.
Associate Professor
Initiatives in Educational
Transformation
College of Education and
Human Development
George Mason University
endura@gmu.edu

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