ACTION RESEARCH BY ORDINARY PEOPLE: HOW COMMUNITIES ARE CREATING PEACE COMMITTEES IN SEKE DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study is an appreciation of the contributions of the action research methodology and its usefulness in creating space for ordinary people who develops an interest to take responsibility for their own peace and development. It seeks to demonstrate, by means of specific examples of existing peace committee formation created by ordinary people in ward 8 of the Seke district, Zimbabwe. At the heart of informal peace committees is the human-service-oriented approach and this fits closely with developmental social work ethos. The strengths of informal peace committees are that they are self-initiated; they represent the interests of the host community and can be replicated. As such, the creation of informal peace committees through a participatory approach can provide space to developmental social workers to implement the model of the informal peace committees in different contexts so as to try and replicate their successes elsewhere as a way of promoting human service at local community levels. As a result of the human-service-oriented approach that underpins informal peace committees; developmental social work can transform these structures and increase their strengths in advancing community well-being and aspirations.

KEY TERMS: *developmental social work, participatory, peace, Zimbabwe*

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the 2000s, Zimbabwe's economic and political arenas have embarked on a downward trend, putting the lives of ordinary people at risk of poverty, hunger, conflict, structural violence and disrupted livelihoods. The adverse economic environment and escalating violence during election time and which reached a peak from 2008 onwards saw communities, who felt let down by political structures developing an interest to create parallel structures entitled informal peace committees (IPCs). Through these institutions, local communities took responsibility for their own peace and development needs and aspirations.

This study is framed within discourses, which began in the 1990s, on possibilities of collaboration between developmental social work and peacebuilding (Kafula, 2016; Lucas, 2013; Yesufu, 2009). Developmental social work is another type of social work practice whose approach to service-provision stems from a strength-based as opposed to needs approach (Gray, 2002). A strength-based approach considers recipients of services as partners rather than clients (Chivasa & Harris, 2019). In this study, IPCs are regarded as assets and resources at the disposal of local communities because they are largely drawn from local culture, traditions and the collective interests of local people (Adan &Pklya, 2006). Peacebuilding in the classic sense is about rebuilding the social, political, economic and cultural life of a society prior or after a violent episode. IPCs contribute to peacebuilding by addressing socio-economic and cultural issues such as interpersonal conflicts, small-scale violence (such as fist fighting, intimate partner violence), poverty, hunger and coming up with modalities to improve livelihoods of individuals and groups at household level (Chivasa & Harris, 2019).

Moyo (2014) defines IPCs as structures created by community members to be responsible for peace within the community. In other words, these structures create space for inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding. They spearhead "dialogues in divided communities, resolve community conflicts and protect their communities from violence" (van Tongeren, 2012: 108). Accordingly, IPCs are known for helping their host communities to prevent and resolve conflict, broker peace between conflicting individuals, ethnic groups or communities (Issifu, 2016). All these attributes facilitate the creation of conditions that contribute to peace and development.

This aim of this study is to reflect on collaborative work between local communities in Seke district and myself in creating a ward peace committee initiative through the action research (AR) methodology. The study was sparked by two factors: Firstly, there is dearth of information on processes and activities surrounding the creation of IPCs by local people. Second and last, there is an under-reporting of initiatives by ordinary people who develop an interest to learn from their own practice and the implications of such interventions on developmental social work. Literature is awash with the establishment of peace committees by local people (for example, the Wajir peace and development committees, peace committees in Burundi, Uganda *inter alia)* but little information is available on what procedures and activities were employed when communities are involved in forming peace committees. Details on the creation of peace committee are discussed below.

The researcher was one of the trained participants that worked closely with Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum (ECLF) between 2010 and 2015 respectively. Owing to the researcher's participation in conflict resolution workshops, he formed a partnership with local people, which culminated into the creation of a ward-level peace committee and three village peace committees between 2014 and 2015 (Chivasa, 2017). The researcher's experiences and participation in conflict resolution workshops occurred during five successive episodes. The first was a one-day workshop in 2010 in Harare city. The second was a five-day workshop in 2011 in Marondera city. Third was a three-day workshop in 2013 in ward 8 of Seke district. Fourth was a one-day inter-ward peace committee workshop at Wedza Township in 2015. Fifth and last was a five-day workshop in 2015 in Bulawayo city. On this basis, the researcher is not writing from abstraction but from experience, from the angle of a workshop participant, stakeholder involved in the design and establishment of IPCs and a researcher. Given the participatory nature of the study, AR methodology was employed from the initial design of the ward peace committee (WPC) intervention to its implementation.

AR is a family of participatory methodologies that integrate theory and action with a goal to facilitate collaboration between researchers and local people to address social problems bedeviling them (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Bradbury, 2015). It involves a professional researcher forming a partnership/collaboration with local people and together takes the responsibility to co-define the problem, co-design the initiative, and co-implement and co-generate the solution to the problem (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993; Stiefel, 2001; Bradbury, 2015).

Originally, AR was limited to the field of education, in particular relevant to school settings with the goal to improve teaching and learning skills for both teachers and pupils (Lesha, 2014). AR has been applied in different disciplines such as agriculture, health, social work, and various sectors of rural development to mention but a few. In the recent past, AR has also been implemented in peace interventions (Elder, 2016). The thrust of AR is the implementation of plans/projects and to carefully studying the impact of interventions, assessing existing practices and determine what positive changes may need to be made. Consequently, findings from an AR research process are used for modifying existing practices/operations and for improving planning for new initiatives.

In the current study, ordinary people in ward 8 collaborated with the researcher in designing and forming a WPC using the AR methodology. A peace committee framework was envisaged as a peacebuilding mechanism that provided the inhabitants with a platform to take responsibility for conflict issues bedeviling them. In other words, conflict issues bedeviling residents in ward 8 were the impetus behind the plan and action to form the WPC. These include among others, hunger and food insecurity at households' level, unavailability of finances to pay school fees, rape cases involving the girl child, domestic violence, stock theft, robbery, fist fighting at beer parties and disputes over land boundaries. Some of these conflict issues emerged during the planning stages while others were identified after the WPC was already established (Chivasa, 2015). This study reflects on the implementation of the AR methodology by individuals who designed, implemented and evaluated their peace initiative in order to improve the quality of life of their communities and families in Seke district.

BRIEF HISTORY OF IPCS IN ZIMBABWE

The first appearance of peace committees in Zimbabwe is attributed to the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET), a grassroots organization founded in 2000 following electoral and farm-invasion-related violence. ZIMCET (2014) defines a peace committee as the liaison grouping that seeks to promote peace and tolerance between individuals and groups. This liaison group is comprised of individuals representing various constituencies in a community. For example, a peace committee may comprise political leaders, traditional leaders, church leaders, war veterans, women and the youth (Moyo, 2014). The composition differs according to each particular community.

Nationally, ZIMCET has facilitated the creation of peace committees throughout the ten Provinces, beginning in 2002. By the end of 2004, an estimated nine peace committees had been created in the Harare-Chitungwiza region, 11 in the Mashonaland region, comprising Mashonaland West and Central, 13 in the eastern region, comprising Masvingo, Manicaland and Mashonaland East, and 16 in the southern region, comprising Bulawayo, Matabeleland South and North and Midlands (ZIMCET, 2014).

Before creating peace committees, ZIMCET facilitated conflict resolution workshops. These workshops were focused on sensitising communities about conflict management, gender issues, and violence against women and children. Approximately 72 workshops, which drew close to 3,804 participants, were held in Mashonaland West, while Mashonaland Central had 54 workshops attended by an estimated 3,982 participants (ZIMCET, 2014).

Another civic organisation that helped to set up peace committees is the ECLF founded in 2008. ECLF was created in response to the upsurge of electoral violence in 2008 and was registered as a trust in 2010 (Cele, 2013). As mentioned already, the researcher worked closely with ECLF between 2010 and 2015 both as a workshop participant and a stakeholder involved in the design and in forming peace committees (Chivasa, 2017).

Other civic organizations which have also advanced the peace committee framework in Zimbabwe are the Heal Zimbabwe Trust, which has facilitated the creation of peace clubs in Birchenough Bridge, Buhera West and South in Manicaland Province, Gokwe in Midlands Province, Muzarabani in Mashonaland Central Province, and Zaka in Masvingo Province (Heal Zimbabwe Trust, 2015). In addition, Envision Zimbabwe established peace committees in the Hurungwe district of the Mashonaland West Province and elsewhere (Envision Zimbabwe, 2014). Not all civic organisations and communities involved in setting up peace committees in Zimbabwe are covered in this article, but insights from those mentioned provides a basis upon which the contributions of IPCs to peace in Zimbabwe and their implications for developmental social work can be understood.

Creation of IPCs

Overall, IPCs are set up by the community to advance their common interests. Similar structures have been created in the Wajir district in South Kordofan, Sudan; in Colombia and in certain districts in the DRC, Burundi, Uganda, and Afghanistan, *inter alia* (Adan &Pkalya, 2006; van Tongeren, 2012; 2013).

In Zimbabwe, IPCs have been created using self-selection, where local people volunteer to join the committee, but with the community subsequently approving those individuals with qualities such as faithfulness, honesty, and trustworthiness, or who have abilities in resolving conflict (Sangqu, 2014). IPCs comprise of individual people representing different constituencies on community level such as people with different cultural, ethnic, political, religious, economic status and power dynamics existing in communities (Sangqu, 2014). However, although IPCs embrace inclusivity in their composition, which represents multiple perspectives, they have some challenges.

Challenges and strengths of IPCs

The volunteer nature of IPCs is both a strength and a challenge. IPCs depend upon individuals volunteering and serving but if volunteers are not forthcoming, or do little after joining the committee, an IPC can fail both in the short and long term (van Tongeren, 2012). Another challenge is that gender dynamics within communities can impede the participation and involvement of women in IPCs (Moyo, 2014). If a community is male-dominated, the composition of the peace committee will be predominantly male. In Nepal for example, male domination of IPCs resulted in women losing confidence in the committees and subsequently avoiding participation thus, deterring their participation in local peace committee (Frogh*et al*. 2010). As Adan &Pklaya (2006) have pointed out, although peace committees draw most of their norms and values from both customary and cosmopolitan frameworks, they are faced with the reality of the exclusion of women and the youth, because traditional communities usually insist on maintaining the gender status quo. In spite of this challenge, Richmond (2009; 2014) suggested that peace formations such as IPCs are sustainable, resilient and legitimate in their host communities because they meet local needs. As such, the strengths of IPCs are essential for both developmental social work and peacebuilding, because these structures complement the values of participation and social cohesion at community level.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The study employed the AR methodology. This methodology was useful because members of the community participated from the design stage through to evaluating their own activities. The AR, as a participatory process ensured that if the intervention was to be rejected or accepted by ordinary people that was to be done upfront. As a result, the participatory nature of the process ensured ownership of the intervention by the community, and the greater the involvement of the community in all facets of the intervention the more the community would be predisposed to carrying the intervention forward. In terms of sectoral composition, the group that participated in the design and formation of the WPC comprised two ministers of religion, one businessperson, the ward 8 councilor, one representative of the ministry of women's affairs and community development working in the ward, one representative of the ministry of youth working in the ward, one village head, the neighborhood police officer working in the ward, one political party member representing Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), one retired army officer residing in the ward, a self-help area coordinator working in the ward, three subsistence farmers residing in the same ward and myself. Of the 15 WPC members, 14 had participated in a three-day conflict resolution workshop conducted in May 2013, at Murisa township in ward 8 with the exception of the ward councilor. Although one of the criteria for would-be peace committee members to qualify into the committee involved participation in conflict resolution workshops run by the parent organization ECLF, we overlooked this criterion in order rope in the ward councilor on the basis of his strategic position in the ward. The involvement of the ward councilor in WPCs was not unique in ward 8 of Seke, we borrowed this model from others districts that formed WPCs ahead of us such as Wedza and Marondera where ward councilors either held chairperson positions or secretaries. In ward 8 the chairperson's position was held by a minister of religion based on the understanding that a councilor being a political figure would potentially deter members in other political parties from participating in peace issues in the ward. For that reason, the ward councilor was co-opted into the WPC as one of the committee members to make a total of 15.

Eight were female while seven were male adults. Regarding their economic status, four were formally employed; the rest relied on informal mechanisms to eke out a living. As regards educational status, one had a degree, three had diplomas and the rest had attained primary-level education. Their ages ranged from the mid-40s to late 60s. All people that participated in the design of the intervention became peace committee members and automatically became partners in my study whose primary aim was to test whether and under what conditions a peace committee framework can be an effective peacebuilding mechanism.

Action research in Ward 8 of Seke district

AR is not a linear process as is the case with traditional research; rather it is cyclical. These cycles are by nature knowledge producing and thus bringing about a new practice. In ward 8 of Seke district these cycles involved problem identification; action planning; acting; evaluation and re-planning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). To test the peace committee intervention in ward 8 of Seke district, I made use of prior contacts with other stakeholders and the minister of religion who played the role of the interim chairperson while I facilitated the process as both an under-secretary and researcher. As a result, the first stage leading to the formation of the peace structure involved identification of the criteria and composition for the would-be peace committee members. For that reason, we resolved that the peace committee was to have 15 members inclusive of both male and female adults. The idea of settling for 15 members was borrowed from the focus group in which six people are considered a

small group while 15 are considered a larger group. Procedures leading to the recruitment of would-be WPC members to become 15 are subject for a companion article in the making. After two months of planning, a call for the information day was made and would-be peace committee members attended the meeting.

The next stage involved putting resolutions from planning meetings, discussions and reflections into action. For example, on the day of the information meeting, the interim chairperson consulted with would-be members that turned up and we agreed to form the WPC using the self-selection process in which individuals volunteered to occupy certain positions while at the same time the entire group approved their appointments. I was appointed secretary of the peace committee. As the section: *reflections on my position as secretary of the committee* in this report will illustrate in detail, team members approved me to take up the secretariat position. The minister of religion was endorsed to take up the position of chairperson by all group members. Following the formation of the WPC, a meeting was convened in which the chairperson deliberated on how we were going to form a partnership in the context of my research to which all group members agreed. From that point on, they became my advisory team, which came to be known as participatory action group (PAG). To conform to the basic tenets of AR, the PAG played a leading role in planning meetings and discussions in search of solutions to peace and development challenges in the ward while I took a facilitation role.

Subsequently, formal and informal meetings and discussions were convened presided over by the chairperson. Given that I was the as secretary of the group I was studying, a trustful relationship was established and sustained during the period under review. A trustful relationship was facilitated because the position of the secretary gave me the opportunity to discuss both formally and informally with fellow WPC members regarding what worked and what did not work during meetings and in other fora. As a matter of fact, this relationship has outlived the nine months period we worked together in the peace committee.

As a result, the first cycle of the AR in ward 8 was completed over a period of nine months after forming a peace committee. The WPC engaged in a self-evaluation process, which marked the completion of the first cycle of the AR. For a companion article entitled '*A participatory approach to peacebuilding evaluation in Seke district*' (see Chivasa, 2019). In this article, the evaluation process was aimed at assessing the immediate impact of the WPC on members of the peace committee's understanding of the concept of peacebuilding and the extent to which the committee should continue to promote peace in the ward. Ordinary people in Seke district demonstrated local agency through the creation of peace committees in their villages and the implications of this local agency on developmental social was the impetus behind this study.

DISCUSSION

Participation is a social construct. In other words, societies create it implying that participation does not just happen naturally. In Shona society, participation is played out in institutions such as the chief council or village assemblies. Mudenge (1998) in agreement with Gombe (2006) point out that Shona society is governed by a council of elders popularly known as *Machinda amambo* (Chief's councilors), while villages are governed by village assemblies. They note that the responsibilities of these institutions involved among other things: facilitation of disputes, and sustenance of law and order in society. The availability of a council of elders and village assemblies signify a participatory approach on matters of common interest in Shona society and villages. At village level, although the village head is hereditary, he/she is expected to embrace the participatory approach where people have opportunities to participate and discuss matters together and come up with common agreement whenever there is an issue that calls for collective efforts or not. From this point on, I began to understand that the WPC operating in Shona communities is another formation which replicates the chief's council or village assembly in one way or the other. Thus, I began to accept that the chairperson's role to take a decisive action to appoint people to positions was not an isolated approach because in Shona culture the process of appointment involves the participation of members of the community who approves and disapproves certain individuals to positions. This participatory dynamic was played out on the information day by the would-be members of the peace committee. Among all these dynamics, as the secretary I occasionally conducted member checking and all the members were very cooperative.

In my view, the experience of collaborating with local people as an insider was a learning curve for me in that when one is dealing with local community members, there is the need to learn how a community works. Also, I have come to understand that things do not just happen the way individuals want in a community, and members of the community cannot be pushed around. The reality in the context of ward 8 of Seke district is that life in the community is more habitual than cosmetic and, therefore, adjustment, patience, focus, commitment and courage should be embraced to achieve any desirable goal. Accordingly, the applicability of participatory methodology in local communities requires the identification of individuals or groups who share a common concern, securing buy-in from them, creating space for all stakeholders to participate equally in decision making, and collaborating towards the resolution of the perceived problem; then one is assured of having embraced a participatory approach to a peacebuilding initiative. While the participatory process was a success story in terms of the creation the peace committee intervention, it was not without huddles. One major hurdle we

faced was that planning, design and implementation of the intervention with local people in rural areas was time consuming especially in the face of timelines for research as in my case. As such, I feel that there was not enough time for us to learn, share and transfer our skills and perspectives because it was difficult for all the 15 members to meet as some became more and more engaged with their daily activities. In rural communities people become more and more involved with their daily duties between November and March. Despite this hurdle we could not change the creation of the peace committee to a later month since local people themselves were the ones who had the desire to create the peace committee in November of 2014.

Following the creation of the peace committee, we conducted weekly and monthly meetings. Peace committee members who participated in the meetings sometimes got excited in the process of discussion. Some topics were over-exhausted and others were left raw. In both cases committee members brought in lots of varied perceptions, which have the potential to pose a threat to the researcher trying to synchronize data into coherent themes. In such a scenario, the researcher is likely to be overwhelmed with large chunks of data, which becomes a challenge if the researcher is not fully skilled in the technical aspects of research to ensure validity, reliability and minimization of bias. While I do appreciate the benefits of using participatory methodology, a point has to be made that there are some challenges with this methodology. One of the challenges is that the researcher becomes an insider and therefore too much into the process, which we now turn to.

Reflections on my position in the peace committee

My entry into the social space was to set up a WPC in Ward 8 which occurred within the context of prior contacts with some of the peace committee members that I collaborated with. In the context of a research study, prior contacts can pose some potential risks to the shared social space. The risks border around over-familiarizations or manipulation of the process by the researcher which can potentially distort the results (Burns *et al* 2012). Being cautious of these possibilities, I had to be honest with my co-researchers as to why I preferred to work with people I already knew than with those I had no prior contacts with. One of the major reasons was that I wanted to understand how community structures function from an insider's point of view. The merits of gaining access to individuals I had prior contacts and interactions with outweighed the interactions with individuals with whom I had no prior contacts. Thus, this report was written from an insider's point of view.

Regarding the creation of the WPC, participants in ward 8 had no intention of taking on board the AR framework because the creation of the peace committee had no academic component from the outset. I was not the only one who came up with the idea of creating a WPC, the idea came from a group of participants which included myself after having undergone a three-day conflict resolution sensitization workshop which was administered by ECLF. After the workshop members were urged to decide what to do next to ensure their community sustains peace. The 30 participants, including myself resolved that creating a peace committee was a worthwhile investment. The creation of a peace committee coincided with my post-graduate study in Seke district which had already secured ethical approval from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The objective of my study was to test whether and under what conditions IPCs can be effective peacebuilding mechanisms. Thus, creating a peace committee was one of the processes. AR was my proposed methodology.

There was no standing committee to spearhead the creation of the peace committee. Two months after we had made a resolution to create a peace committee, I approached the minister of religion who was coordinating the workshop, and later became the interim chairperson of the WPC. I explained the purpose of my research to him and asked for possible collaboration and he agreed. During the planning sessions I appointed myself to the position of an under-secretary for planning purposes. After recruiting the 15 would-be peace committee members including ourselves we proposed for the information day to be called. On the day of the information meeting I was endorsed by the team members to take up the secretary position. Because of the flexibility and open-endedness of the process, I was appointed deputy chairperson of the peace committee at first, but I declined that offer and opted for the secretary's position and all the members who were present approved my self-appointment. I opted for the secretary's position because I was hoping to continue documenting events and processes I had begun prior to the creation of the peace committee. The position of the secretary was helpful for me because I had access to data and I could easily do member checking during meetings to validate data. The flexibility of the AR framework made the setting up of the WPC easier and the process more flexible.

Two factors contributed to the adoption of the AR methodology prior to the creation of the peace committee by the chairperson. Firstly, it was my brain child in line with my research and my involvement in the planning process that led to the use of AR in setting up the peace committee. Prior to the creation of the peace committee I took time to coach the chairperson and to highlight to him the advantages of using AR method that it was going to benefit would-be participating committee, given its propensity to create spaces for collaborative planning, reflection, decision making and problem-solving.

 Furthermore, I highlighted that the AR was going to help us assess the processes used for creating peace committees, provide us with insights to understand how community structures function and help us improve future planning for other peace committees. Since he was conversant with both reading and writing English

language I did not experience any hassle after explaining and illustrated to him by way of pictures using some pictures of the AR to get him on-board. I borrowed the idea of sharing the AR pictures to co-researchers from van Niekerk & van Niekerk (2009) who also shared pictures with co-researcher that they worked with using AR methodology.

Secondly, given the scientific nature of AR, its adoption led us to make use of structured interview guide in the evaluation process. Owing to the participatory nature of the process, my co-researchers were actively involved in coming up with thematic areas in designing the evaluation guide. Because the process took place ordinarily within the context of our routine activities, my co-researchers did not consider me as an outsider and I was at liberty to voice out my opinions but also exercising caution not to dominate on-going discussions and end up reporting events that I would have created myself as such a practice was potentially going to pollute my research results. Thus, the formation of the WPC took place within the scope of the normal life of people in their community in what Denskus (2012: 153) termed "part and parcel of the way things are done". This was so because the peace committee intervention was self-initiated by members of the community without the involvement of any external agent from start to finish. Simply put, the involvement of local people in the creation of the WPC influenced the writing of this report in that the activities they conducted were the basis upon which this report was built. The report therefore is based on the deliberations of members of the peace committee.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK

Although no empirical evidence exists to date, to substantiate the correlation between IPCs and developmental social work, hypothetically, it appears, the creation of IPCs through a participatory approach can provide space to developmental social workers to implement the model of the IPCs in different contexts so as to try and replicate their successes elsewhere as a way of promoting social cohesion at local community levels (Chivasa & Harris, 2019). The strength of developmental work is that it seeks to identify resources at the disposal of local people experiencing social problems with a view to utilize them to address problem affecting people's well-being. It "focuses on strengths, potential, capacities, assets, and resources rather than needs, problems and deficits" (Gray, 2002:1). Mugumbate & Chereni (2019) contend that social work embraces a strength-based approach to community development. Since IPCs are largely drawn from local culture, traditions and the collective interests of local people (Adan &Pklya, 2006), they constitute one of the local assets at the disposal of communities. Moyo (2014) notes that IPC are responsive and supportive mechanisms drawn from the participation and collective interests of local people to address peace and development challenges at village level. In other words, IPCs are human-service-oriented structures designed and created to represent the interests of local people. Through these structures, local communities take responsibility for their own peace and development needs and aspirations (van Tongeren 2012, 2013). Given the human-service-oriented approach that underpins IPCs, developmental social work can transform these structures and increase their strengths in advancing community well-being and aspirations.

Over and above, the strengths of IPCs that developmental social work can ride on are that these formations are locally-owned, autonomous and there are slim chances at risk of being abandoned as they are working in the community for the community. They help to increase community participation in taking responsibility for their own peace and development because they are created to address community needs. In some sense the strengths of IPCs are critical for developmental social work practice because these structures represent the on-ground initiatives and practices that help to advance the human-service approach of Social Work at community level such as social justice, human rights and peaceful resolution of conflicts (Chivasa & Harris, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to reflect on collaborative work between local communities in Seke district and myself in creating a WPC initiative through the action research (AR) framework and its implications for developmental social work. From hands-on experience, it became clear that the setting up of peace committees is relatively less expensive in terms of logistical issues (physical and economic) especially when a participatory approach is adopted. Self-initiated peace committees are less expensive because of their reliance on available resources in the community and propensity to work as a collective. This is unlike peacebuilding projects run directly by an external agency who are likely to spent huge amount of time looking for venues, monetary issues, mobilisation of people and seeking approval by gate keepers, and acceptability of the initiative in the community and its work.

Overall, the issue of ownership is critical for community initiatives and by extension for developmental social work. In this study, it became clear that if individuals who already know each other well create a peace committee, sustainability is fully guaranteed because self-initiated peace committees are part of the everyday life of the members and for the rest of the community. This was true of the WPC in ward 8 of Seke district. I

was resident in ward 8 of Seke district and I had regular contacts with individuals I cooperated with in the creation of the peace committee. As mentioned above, my entry into the social space to set up a peace committee occurred within the context of prior contacts with all WPC members. I had interacted with some members of the WPC in different social and religious forums prior to sharing the social space as co-researchers. From this experience, I realised that creating a peace committee is achievable when the initiative is situated within an already existing network of prior contacts. Ownership and sustainability become automatic when community members participate in the process from the design phase to implementation of the initiative. Given the above, it can be argued that developmental social work as a profession becomes critical because it gives the community opportunities to participate in the design and ownership of the initiative thereby creating spaces for host communities to take responsibility for their own peace and development.

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