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This month, two of our Associates from Kenya, Nelly Nduta Ndirangu and James Karanja Kamau, talk about their work in their community delivering a curriculum that looks at ways of going on together, even in times of conflict.

Relationship building to mitigate conflicts before, during and after national elections in Kenya



By [Nelly Nduta Ndirangu](#) and [James Karanja Kamau](#)

We work with a local NGO in Kenya called the [KIMO Wellness Foundation](#). Our mission is to work towards peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and community-building. We want to share with you a story about our recent project. After each election in our country, there is unrest. We wanted to work on finding ways to lessen that unrest following the election this year. Our journey began with the hope of creating reconciliation in conflicting communities, and working with victims of ethnic and political conflicts.

Our team developed a curriculum and a dialogue process that we took into the communities and villages in our area. The goal was to train, teach and create opportunities to learn together about what strengths we have as communities, how we can support each other, and find ways to keep the peace after the election. We invited the various local organizations, youth, schools, religious organizations, etc. to be part of this project.



We thought that we had everything we needed to nurture relationships with organizations and diverse communities with which we would need to work. The composition of the Kimo training team was culturally and professionally diverse, including Counselors and Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Social Workers, Addiction Practitioners, Teachers, Public Health Workers and Medics We carefully embraced the symbol of the young fig tree from the Aberdare forest which grows in our hilly ancestral land of Muranga County in Central Kenya. The fig tree is a symbol of peace and unity in the African culture. This is a sacred place that prohibits the shedding of human blood. Our curriculum was aimed at empowering leaders and institutional teams and was based on ideas drawn from social constructionism and Appreciative Inquiry. With everything ready, we invited the local community teams to come and sit down together.

Our first encounter

Our program team experienced challenges as we began interacting with the local communities. Our professional status had little significance to the community groups in resolving their present issues. The Kimo team realized that we had to learn to appreciate and adopt the local ways of being and realized that we would have to borrow practices from local cultural strengths. The program team took on the slogan, “Tukae Tusemesane,” which in the Kenyan local language means “Let’s sit down and reason together,” in order to create a strong relationships within the communities.



Our second encounter



We also recognized that there was a need to develop a language of “strengths” and we used the Appreciative Inquiry process to do this. We invited community leaders to discuss through dialogical processes how to co-exist together without trying to reconcile political and ethnic differences. We were able to identify a set of character strengths and core virtues that seemed to be present and recognized within and across all the conflicting communities.

With these strengths and values we were able to challenge the communities to embrace processes that would create peaceful co-existence with each other following the elections. As we sat together under the indigenous fig tree, we identified common ground to resolve their long existing conflicts. The communities resolved that they could live together even without trying to reconcile their ethnic practices and different political affiliations.

Kimo also worked with the youths in the communities and explored ways that their talents could help them to stand as ambassadors and become an army of peace in their communities and institutions. They created a display that showed a green cloth as a representation of our golden land of Kenya full of plenty while the red cloth is an indication that we attained our freedom by shedding blood regardless of ethnicity or political grouping. White dots indicate peaceful co-existence with each other.



They realized that together as a community, they had pushed their colonizers out of Kenya. This realization helped them realize that they wanted to remain united without having to shed any brothers’ or sisters’ blood. They would do this by working with their strengths such as love, gratitude, hope, bravery and worked on ways to spread the strengths outward throughout the community. In their social life, and through the dialogic practices, the youth learned to deepen their vocabulary of strengths as well as their capacity for dialogue about ways to unite them as one Kenyan community with common goals in life.

Through appreciative practices and dialogue, both the leaders and the youth began to appreciate the fact that they are bound by a common bond of citizenship as Kenyans. Furthermore, they uncovered that each community has a right to land ownership and to enjoying their own cultural practices as set by their creator. Indeed, we “sat down and reasoned together.”
