

Case Study Series No. 6

Interfaith Grassroots Peacebuilding: Promoting Peaceful Coexistence in West Nile, Uganda



Interfaith Grassroots Peacebuilding: Promoting Peaceful Coexistence in West Nile, Uganda. Case Study Series No. 6

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgment	iii
About the Author	iv
Communities Richer in Diversity (CRID)	v
Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC)	v
Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL)	vi
Acronyms	vii
Abstract	viii
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Background	3
3.0 Grassroots Peacebuilding: A Conceptual Framework	8
4.0 UJCC/MCJL's Pathway for Change	12
4.1 Theory of Change	15
5.0 Methodology: Documents Review	17
6.0 Data Analysis and Evidence of change	18
6.1 Changing Individual Perceptions	18
6.2 Changing Relations Between Muslims and Christians	24
7.0 Discussion: Transforming Individual Perceptions and Group Relations	30
8.0 Challenges and Lessons	33
8.1 Challenges	33
8.2 Lessons	34
9.0 Conclusions	36
10.0 Endnotes	37

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Communities Richer in Diversity (CRID)

The four-year Communities Richer in Diversity project (CRID) aims at leveraging the influence of faith leaders and institutions to promote cultural diversity and respect for equal dignity in six African countries, namely, Burundi, Egypt, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania. It was initiated by a consortium of faith-based organisations and networks, including Faith to Action Network (F2A), Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA), African Council of Religious Leaders-Religion for Peace (ACRL-RfP), and All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) with financial support from the European Union (EU). The project started in April 2018, and by 31 January 2022, 12-country partners had reached at least 25,000 young men and women with interfaith and intercultural interventions. Such interventions enhanced the understanding, tolerance, and respect for cultural and religious diversity among the project participants and beneficiaries in the six countries. The activities can be categorised into four broad areas: edutainment and performance arts, peer education and capacity enhancement, community peacebuilding, and shaping of public discourse.

Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC)

Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) is a faith-based ecumenical organisation with a long history spanning more than 50 years. The founders established it in 1963 as a forum for resolving religious conflicts which affected Uganda. Religious affiliations lay at the heart of Uganda politics in the 1960s, while religious hostilities started in the 1870s and 1880s. Over the years, UJCC has emerged as a critical voice in the country, and the Government of Uganda pays attention to the opinions of UJCC's Chairperson and Executive Secretary on national issues. The organisation aims to promote harmonious co-existence in Uganda, and it addresses issues of economic and social justice through various programs and its member churches. Its programs and activities address education and social services; gender, health, children, and family development; ecumenism and interfaith; human rights and good governance; and justice, peace, and reconciliation. Through its justice, peace, and reconciliation program, the organisation joined the CRID project in partnership with MCJL to continue its peacebuilding interventions in Uganda.

Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL)

The Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL) is a Ugandan faith-based CSO dedicated to promoting and advancing justice, tolerance, and human rights. It primarily focuses on poor and vulnerable members of the grassroots communities. It aims at empowering local communities to effectively advocate for their rights and duty bearers to deal with dynamic social challenges, especially in the Muslim communities in Uganda. MCJL uses a multi-pronged approach to address human rights issues, access to justice, the rule of law, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health rights, poverty, and violent extremism. The organisation collaborates directly with local communities in all regions of Uganda and partners with both public and private sector actors. It joined the CRID project in collaboration with UJCC to advance its peacebuilding interventions in the Yumbe district in the West Nile region.

Acronyms

ADF	Allied Democratic Force
CDO	Community Development Officer
CORPs	Community Own Resource Persons
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FUNA	Former Uganda National Army
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
ICG	International Crisis Group
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MCJL	Muslim Centre for Justice and Law
MDD	Music, Dance and Drama
NRA/M	National Resistance Army/Movement
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
UCA/M	Uganda Christian Army/Movement
UHSA	United Holy Salvation Army
UJCC	Uganda Joint Christian Council
UNRF	Uganda National Rescue Front
UPDA	Uganda People's Democratic Army
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
WNBF	West Nile Bank Front

Abstract

This case study uses the concept of grassroots peacebuilding to assess the impact of interfaith peacebuilding activities in the Yumbe District in the West Nile Region, which the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) and the Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL) implemented from September 2018 to December 2019. The study assesses the impact by exploring two themes: changing individual perceptions towards members of the other religion and improving relations between Muslims and Christians. From analyses of 50 documents, the study finds that MCJL and UJCC utilised a pathway for change that started with the empowerment of a select group of young men and women, known as Community Own Resource Persons (CORPs), as the primary agents of change. These change agents then started changing the perceptions of their peers through peer-to-peer outreach in their villages and cultural and religious spaces. Supported by faith and cultural leaders, the change agents then mobilised Christian and Muslim communities to engage in dialogues, which faith and cultural leaders facilitated, and edutainment activities comprising music, dance, and drama (MDD) forums and sports for peace tournaments. The study also finds that UJCC and MCJL and the involved faith leaders combined aspects of grassroots peacebuilding with religious tools, values, texts, narratives, and vocabulary to improve relations between Christians and Muslims and promote tolerance, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence. Underlying that thinking is the premise that attaining tolerance and peaceful coexistence in different micro-locations can end hostilities at the grassroots level and serve as building blocks of peace formation at the national level.

Interfaith Grassroots Peacebuilding: Promoting Tolerance and Peaceful Coexistence in West Nile, Uganda

1. Introduction

After a trio of suicide bombers detonated bombs in Kampala City on 16 November 2021, killing four people and injuring 37 more, the government of Uganda blamed the attacks on the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed Islamist group that emerged in Uganda in the early 1990s and now operates from the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). ADF's linkage with the international jihadist group, the Islamic State (IS), exposed the fragile relations between religious groups and between Muslims and the state of Uganda. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported, the ADF "draws upon a wellspring of discontent among Ugandan Muslims, who make up roughly 14 percent of the population... Some Muslims accuse authorities of religious discrimination, as seen in particular in mass roundups of young Muslims after high-profile security incidents."¹ One of the regions where such fragile relations between Christians and Muslims existed until recently is the Yumbe district in the West Nile region.

Less than a decade ago, hostilities between the majority Muslims and the minority Christians in Yumbe District almost exploded into communal violence as the Christians complained that the Muslims used their numerical advantage to persecute them, while the Muslims blamed Christians for covertly converting the Muslim youth into Christianity. Their relations worsened as followers of the two faiths competed for the local government jobs and contracts, management of schools, land and water resources, and political positions in the district. To contribute to the resolution of the conflict, the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) implemented a project in May 2015, known as the *Yumbe Connector Project for Harmonious Coexistence*, whose goal was to improve relations and promote peaceful coexistence between members of the two faiths. Then UJCC partnered with the Muslim Centre for Justice and Law (MCJL) in 2018 to advance their aims of improving relations and promoting peaceful coexistence through the Communities Richer in Diversity (CRID) project. Targeting young men and women, the project utilised the existing interfaith and intercultural institutions in the Yumbe district.

This study examines the lessons and impacts of the CRID's activities in two sub-counties, Yumbe Town Council and Kululu, in Yumbe District. As an empirical review paper, the study scrutinises the project documents, such as activity, monthly, quarterly, and annual reports; baseline and endline surveys; and video recordings. It analyses the evidence using the framework of grassroots peacebuilding, specifically the notion of everyday peace and faith approaches to peacebuilding. Analysed evidence demonstrates how UJCC and MCJL activities improved relations between members of different faiths and promoted peaceful coexistence in the two sub-counties. Such changes occurred through changes in individual perceptions, which reduced youth violence and improved relations between members of different religious beliefs. The changes were in line with the intended levels of change in the overarching CRID framework of transformation; these levels are personal (individual), relational (community), and structural (institutional and policy). For cross-cutting issues and universal themes from the partners' localised interventions, the study scrutinises the empirical evidence within the broader literature on peacebuilding and conflict transformation and the recent political and historical developments in Uganda. Overall, the study is structured as follows.

After this introduction, the second section explains the context in which MCJL and UJCC implemented their interventions, including the effects of the civil war and the challenges of post-conflict peacebuilding. The third section presents a review of the literature on grassroots peacebuilding, everyday peace, and faith approaches to peacebuilding, which include the use of religious texts, narratives, and tools such as prayers. Further, espousing UJCC and MCJL's pathway for change, the fourth section highlights UJCC and MCJL's logic of intervention and the use of selected young men and women as agents of change. The fifth section explains the study's methodology, while the sixth section presents, analyses, and discusses the evidence, issues, and themes using the relevant concepts articulated in sections three and four. Lastly, section seven concludes the study. Overall, the paper demonstrates that improving relations between adherents of different faiths is an important outcome of interfaith collaborations and a guarantor of peaceful coexistence.

2.0 Background

Uganda's post-colonial history has been rather turbulent since the 1960s and 1970s. Nine years of political infighting in the 1960s were followed by the disastrous military regime of Idi Amin Dada in the 1970s, which collapsed in April 1979 after a devastating two-year war with Tanzania. The post-Amin era was characterised by political and economic instability and a five-year civil war in which the National Resistance Movement (NRM), led by the current President Yoweri Museveni, triumphed in February 1986.² While Museveni's government stabilised most regions of the country and rebuilt the state, economy, and state-citizen relations, various armed groups continued with the civil war in different regions at different periods.

The main ones in the late 1980s were the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), which operated in the North and the East from August 1986 until it was defeated in 1988,³ and the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) that operated in the North from March 1986 to June 1988.⁴ Following the defeat of the HSM, another Christian-based movement emerged in the Acholi regions in 1988. Initially named the United Holy Salvation Army (UHSA), it changed its name to Uganda Christian Army/Movement (UCA/M) and eventually adopted Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 1992.⁵ LRA devastated Northern Uganda, especially Acholi counties where it operated until 2006. There was also a movement known as the Former Uganda National Army (FUNA), which consisted of the former Amin loyalists that started insurgency after the fall of the Amin regime in 1980 and continued with armed conflict until 1997 when they disbanded, and their fighters joined other groups.⁶ Other movements emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s. These are the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), which operated in the West Nile region from 1995 to 1998⁷; the Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF II) that emerged in Aringa County (now Yumbe district) in the then Arua District from 1996 to December 2002⁸; People's Redemption Army (PRA) that started in February 2000 and folded in September 2006⁹; and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) that staged operations in Western Uganda in the late 1990s but expanded to Eastern DRC in the early 2000s. The ADF is still active in Western Uganda and has claimed responsibility for the recent spades of bombings in Kampala.

Thus, one of the regions that the armed conflicts affected was the West Nile, which derives its name from its geographical location on the western side of the Albert Nile. It is located in North-western Uganda, bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to the South and the West and the Republic of South Sudan to the North. Due to various factors, including its geographical location and ethnic and religious composition, the West Nile region experienced the effects of three inter-linked wars in the 1990s: civil war in Zaire (now DRC),¹⁰ armed conflict in South Sudan (now Republic of South Sudan),¹¹ and Uganda's armed rebellion. None of the districts that comprise the region escaped the vagaries of the civil wars. At independence in 1962, the West Nile region had two districts, Madi and West Nile, which were among the 15 districts

and four kingdoms that constituted the administrative units in Uganda. Over the years, however, a series of restructuring and decentralisation of the administrative units have seen Madi divided into two districts, Moyo (1979) and Adjumani (1997), while West Nile has produced seven districts, namely Arua (1979), Nebbi (1980), Yumbe (2001), Koboko (2005), Maracha (2010), Zombo (2010), and Pakwach (2017).¹²

As part of decentralisation, therefore, the government of Uganda elevated the Aringa County within the larger Arua district into Yumbe district in 2001. It was known as Aringa County because the majority (89%) of the population in the district are Aringa, a subgroup of the Lugbara people of West Nile, who speak the Aringa dialect of the Lugbara language.¹³ Covering a total area of 2,411sq km, the district has one county (Aringa County), 12 sub-counties, one town council, and 636 villages.¹⁴ The district mainly consists of three faiths, with Islam being the dominant (76%) followed by Christianity (Church of Uganda, Catholics, Pentecostals, Baptist and Seventh Day Adventists), and followers of the traditional Lugbara religion.¹⁵

Up to July 2018, when the CRID project started, Yumbe district was still experiencing post-conflict challenges because the war, which formally ended in December 2002 when UNRF II and the government of Uganda signed a peace agreement, lasted more than twenty years (1979–2002).¹⁶ In their assessment of the post-conflict peacebuilding in West Nile, Bogner and Neubert notes that, although the local population appreciates post-2002 improvements, most of the changes have not reached the majority of the population in Yumbe district because such changes take a long time to be felt after decades of civil war.¹⁷ Such slow post-conflict transformation is consistent with Kriesberg's argument that post-conflict "reconciliation is multi-dimensional and occurs, insofar as it does, through many processes over an extended period of time, it occurs at different speeds and in different degrees for various members of the opposing sides."¹⁸

One of the main challenges, which the district and West Nile region encountered, was a stalled disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) of the former combatants. Article II of the peace agreement prescribed disarmament, while Article III addressed demobilisation, reintegration, and resettlement of all the UNRF II combatants. Specifically, sub-section 3 of the Article prescribed a sum of 4.3 billion Uganda shillings for the resettlement of the UNRF II combatants. The peace agreement supplemented the Amnesty Act of 2000 which provided the legal regime for the disarmament of combatants from all armed groups and created an Amnesty Commission to monitor and coordinate demobilisation, reintegration, and resettlement of ex-combatants and their collaborators.¹⁹ Further, Article IV of the peace agreement provided for the incorporation of the qualified UNRF II combatants into the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF). While the government started the process, a report by the International Alert report notes challenges around the process, such as inadequate compensation of ex-combatants, incomplete resettlement, and selective reparations.²⁰



Interfaith dialogue with religious and cultural leaders in Yumbe in May 2019.

Another challenge relates to recovery from the war for the general population and redress to non-combatant survivors of the war in the region. Borner and Neubert observe that between 1995 and 2002, both the government forces and the armed groups preyed on the local population and engaged in looting, indiscriminate killings, torture, rape.²¹ These aspects constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes under Article 7 and Article 8 of the 1998 Rome Statute. As a result, Borner and Neubert maintain, “memories of incidents of this type endure, especially among people living in today’s districts of Yumbe, Koboko and Moyo” in nearly every small settlement even “when there is no systematic documentation of the war crimes.” The situation was worsened by “inter-community and inter-ethnic rivalries and tensions” which motivated some of the attacks on civilians. In essence, the effects of the war in the form of unhealed memories and unresolved individual and community trauma were still prevalent in Yumbe district in July 2018 and, thus, influenced popular perceptions towards post-conflict peacebuilding.

A third challenge centres on underdevelopment in West Nile as the region remains one of the most underdeveloped parts of Uganda. According to an International Alert Report, legacies of the past civil war interacted with persistent local grievances, such as marginalisation and neglect by the state, underdeveloped infrastructure, unequal development, and inequitable distribution of the national resources.²² The Yumbe peace process accepted this challenge and the government of Uganda committed to prioritising the issue under Article V of the peace agreement.

One of the consequences of these challenges was the emergence of localised conflicts in the Yumbe district and the neighbouring Moyo district. Although 93% of the population in Yumbe comprises of Aringa people, a sub-group of the Lugbara ethnic group, one line of the localised conflicts occurred between the majority Muslims and the minority Christians. In 2015, for instance, UJCC conducted a survey on religious relations in Yumbe, which revealed that Muslims and Christians clashed over ownership



Training of trainers in peacebuilding in Yumbe in October 2018

of schools and land.²³ While the Christians, especially the Church of Uganda, founded and sponsored these schools, the majority of the pupils were Muslims according to the local population. Complicating the clashes were interfaith misconceptions, stereotypes, and misinformation espoused by different religious schools of thought and faith leaders through sermons.

Another line of the localised conflicts was the clashes between settled farmers and the pastoralists. In January 2017, for example, residents of Moyo and Yumbe districts armed themselves with crude weapons, including spears, machetes, bows, and arrows, and violently evicted pastoralists in the area.²⁴ The residents accused the pastoralists of trying to process land titles for the areas they were grazing in without authorisation. The pastoralists are migrant Bantu people from the western part of Uganda who graze their livestock in sparsely populated areas. The third line of conflict constitutes disputes between the informal sector in Yumbe Town represented by the bodaboda operators and the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) over taxation. On 28 March 2018, for example, youths led by bodaboda operators rioted and burned URA and Council offices in Yumbe Town.²⁵ The informal sector blames the URA is too harsh on the bodaboda service providers despite their marginalised status.

Further, Yumbe has seen tensions between residents and South Sudan refugees following the influx and resettlement of at least 250 000 South Sudanese in the expansive Bidibidi refugee settlement, a few kilometres east of Yumbe town.²⁶ The main grievance is that the government of Uganda and the international organisations provide more services,

such as schools and medical facilities, to the refugees than the host community, yet the land on which the refugee camps sits belongs to the Aringa community. A closely related grievance regards disputes over jobs and economic benefits between the residents, especially the youth, and the international organisations which provide humanitarian support to the South Sudan refugees. For example, on 28 March 2018, local youths armed with crude weapons attacked and burned down the offices of the World Vision in Yumbe Town.²⁷

In essence, these are contextual issues which prompted UJCC and MCJL to implement grassroots peacebuilding interventions targeting the youth in Yumbe Township and Kululu sub-county within the Yumbe district. UJCC is an umbrella body of the Christian Churches in Uganda, specifically the Anglican, Catholic, and Orthodox Churches, while young Muslims founded MCJL to work on Muslims' human rights and access to justice. The two organisations employed faith approaches to resolve conflicts, improve relations between Christians and Muslims, and promote everyday peace between individuals and communities in the Yumbe district. In their interventions at the two sub-counties, the two faith organisations contributed to community peacebuilding, which involves creating peace structures and strengthening inter-faith relations. Therefore, this study reviews UJCC and MCJL's contributions and documents some of their achievements within the broader grassroots peacebuilding theory and practice.

3.0 Grassroots Peacebuilding: A Conceptual Framework

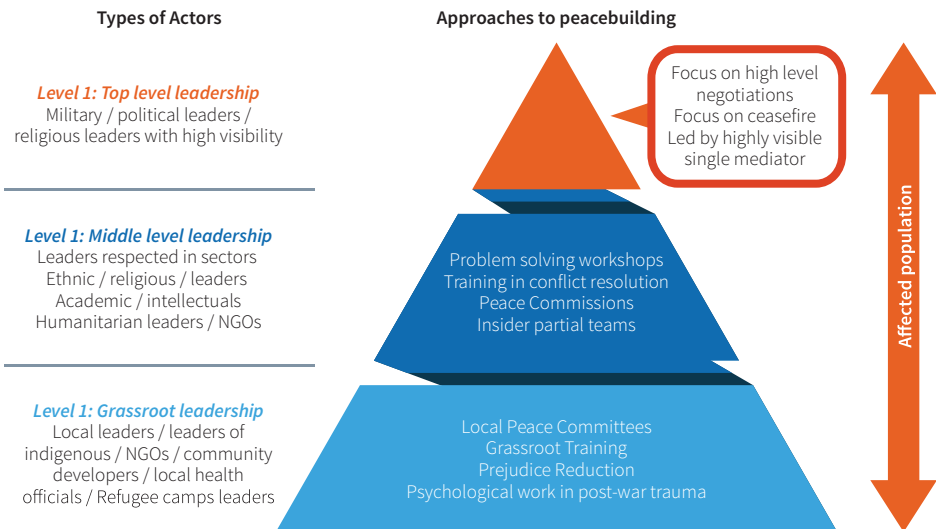
Uganda and Burundi country partners used the same approach to grassroots peacebuilding, although each partner aligned the approach to its context. Therefore, this section of the literature review will appear as it appears in Case Study No. 4, but there will be some variation to align with the Ugandan context. As it were, literature on peacebuilding highlights two broad approaches to post-conflict peacebuilding: liberal peacebuilding and grassroots (or local peacebuilding). Literature espouses liberal peacebuilding, or top-bottom peacebuilding,²⁸ as an effort “to bring war-shattered states into conformity with the international system’s prevailing standards of domestic governance.”²⁹ Richmond argues that the main ideas that underpin liberal peacebuilding, “democratisation, economic liberalisation, neoliberal development, human rights, and the rule of law”, have influenced conceptualization and practices of peacebuilding.³⁰ Further, liberal peacebuilding arises from the dominance of the Western industrialised countries in the post-cold war global order and the liberal assumptions that underpin contemporary peacebuilding processes. Accordingly, the liberal viewpoint interprets peacebuilding as the transformation of the war-affected countries into Western-style liberal democracies that views the liberal democratic framework as the gold standard of good governance and foundation for sustainable peace.”³¹

Therefore, the liberal approach prioritises state-building in which peacebuilding activities involve the re-organisation of politics and the reallocation of power, with the state and its institutions as the main actors. The approach emphasises the global norms around principles of good governance, views peacebuilding as state-centric, and stresses the structural and institutional aspects. In contrast, critics of liberal peacebuilding claim that the problem-solving approach of liberal peacebuilding fails to deliver sustainable solutions and grossly generalises the perceived causes of conflicts, leading to dogmatic, imposed solutions based on linear understandings of cause and effect.³² As Ramsbotham et al asserts, “much of the development of thinking about peacebuilding came during the course of experience gained in supporting local groups trying to preserve or cultivate cultures of peace in areas of armed conflict in the 1990s.”³³

Critics of liberal peacebuilding articulate a second approach which is variously known as bottom-top peacebuilding, peacebuilding from below, grassroots peacebuilding, community peacebuilding, citizen-to-citizen peacebuilding, or Track II diplomacy.³⁴ The approach is built upon the notions that attaining sustainable peace after a protracted civil war, especially in deeply divided societies, requires the involvement of all levels of the society, from top to bottom. Ramsbotham et al write that the central idea is that “effective and sustainable peacemaking processes must be based not merely on the manipulation of peace agreements made by elites but, more importantly, on the empowering of communities torn apart by war to build peace from below...”³⁵ Earlier

proponents of bottom-top approach include Adam Curle, who insisted that long-term peace can only be attained when survivors of armed conflicts are supported to espouse their diagnosis of, and advance their strategies, dealing with the effects of the violence they faced. Another early proponent of bottom-up peacebuilding, Joseph Montville, coined and popularised the term Track Two Diplomacy (TTD) in the late 1980s and early 1990s.³⁷ However, it was in the late 1990s and 2000s that academic studies on conflict transformation and bottom-up peacebuilding flourished.

Among the leading proponents of the conflict transformation school of thought is John Paul Lederach, who views long-term grassroots peacebuilding as the starting point when the elite leaders are stuck in protracted and mediated peace processes.³⁸ He maintains that peacebuilders ought to understand who acts at what level and what peacebuilding actions ought to be implemented at each level to determine whether peace ought to be built from the top or the bottom.³⁹ He conceptualises approaches to peacebuilding as a pyramid with three levels of leadership. While conflict affects various categories of actors in society differently, each level of leadership has a different position and authority in the overall peacebuilding process. Grassroots actors in this pyramid are critical to the transformation of the conflict and attainment of long-term peace because they witness the deep-rooted hatred and animosity at the local community level.⁴⁰ Therefore, the inclusion of all levels of leadership in the peace process would break the patterns of violence. Figure 1 shows Lederach's pyramid.



Lederach further argues that, while those involved in national peace negotiations may find it difficult to move towards peace agreements and post-agreement peace without public support, conflict entrepreneurs are likely to be insensitive to grassroots opinions. Moreover, top-level negotiations may fail due to a lack of easily identified and accessible negotiating partners with sufficient control to guarantee that peace agreements would be implemented. In this thinking, then, bottom-up peacebuilding is a powerful approach because it focuses on empowering the grassroots leaders and ordinary citizens to end direct violence and collaboratively transform their relationships and build better ways of resolving conflicts and promote reconciliation at the lower levels.⁴¹

An additional dimension to bottom-up peacebuilding is Mac Ginty's notion of 'everyday peace'.⁴² Mac Ginty observes that each context determines everyday peace which involves decisions and observations that individuals and communities make as they navigate their lives in the local situations.⁴³ Further, McGinty and Firschow insist that one of the indicators of everyday peace is tolerance and peaceful relations in the lower-level communities, and attaining everyday peace in different micro-level locations can contribute to ending the cycles of violence. Therefore, everyday peace "can be an important building block of peace formation especially as formal approaches to peacebuilding and statebuilding are often deficient."⁴⁴ Due to the complexity of the situation in the Yumbe district, including 23 years of armed conflict from 1979 to 2002, the proliferation of armed groups in the region over the years, underdevelopment when compared with other regions of Uganda, the religious bifurcation between Christians and Muslims from the same ethnic group, and clashes with refugees from South Sudan, this study holds that everyday peace approach is an appropriate way of understanding UJCC and MCJL's interventions. In other words, to attain everyday peace between neighbours and members of different faiths, the two partners employed a faith perspective rather than a secularist paradigm.⁴⁵

Such an approach is supported by insights from peacebuilding literature, which recognise that faith actors play a significant role in peacebuilding at the grassroots. For example, Bercovitch and Kadayifci-Orellana argue that faith actors employ "religious values, rituals, traditions, texts, and narratives... to promote peace and coexistence, (and) advocate human rights and democracy."⁴⁶ Also, faith actors explicitly employ spirituality and/or religious identity, religious texts, religious values, and vocabulary, and utilise religious or spiritual rituals that resonate with the grassroots communities.⁴⁷ According to Dubois, religious peacebuilding uses the spiritual elements of culture and is community-oriented, relationship-centred, and participatory.⁴⁸ While faith actors use the same set of activities as secular actors, they employ religious tools such as spiritual guidance, prayers, meditation, imagination in envisioning new possibilities, and empathy.⁴⁹

Moreover, reconciliation literature recognises the religious origin of concepts such as healing, forgiveness, and restorative justice.⁵⁰ For example, Peterson claims that all religions have language that describes ways of healing broken human relationships and acceptance that enables humans to coexist peacefully. “Islam emphasises mercy, Buddhism espouses compassion, Judaism and Christianity underscore forgiveness.”⁵¹ Despite its religious roots, forgiveness is widely practised, especially by communities that are emerging from a protracted civil war. Indeed, reconciliation theory postulates that “forgiveness is the culmination of the healing process, which starts when the affected population confronts their past.”⁵² Essential steps in the healing process include acceptance of the past, letting the past go, and the re-humanisation of the ‘Other’.

Reconciliation literature further asserts that forgiveness has three elements: memory, empathy, and imagination.⁵³ Memory is critical in forgiveness, as it is only through remembering the past that people can “call up the courage to forgive”;⁵⁴ while empathy involves recognition of the common humanity between the victim and the villain to stop revenge. In essence, all aspects of reconciliation are central tenets in the attainment of everyday peace at the grassroots. Therefore, this study uses bottom-up peacebuilding and the notion of everyday peace at the micro-level to assess MCJL and UJCC’s interventions. Specifically, the paper examines the change of individual perceptions and improvement of relations between Christians and Muslims.

4.0 UJCC/MCJL's Pathway for Change

Since its formation in the early 1960s, UJCC has promoted peaceful relations between faith communities in Uganda. The organisation has also implemented peacebuilding activities in the northern regions which have been affected by armed conflicts since the early 1980s. For instance, the UJCC 2018 project proposal states that the organisation teamed up with a local organisation, the Nile Dialogue Platform, in 2015 to implement a project that promoted peaceful co-existence between the majority Muslims and the minority Christians after the region recorded increased hostilities and clashes between the two groups. One of the main economic outputs of the project was a honey processing plant as a connector project that promoted cooperation between followers of the two faiths and improved incomes. Thus, UJCC embraced CRID as an opportunity to continue its grassroots peacebuilding interventions in Yumbe. Similarly, MCJL has been promoting access to justice and peaceful coexistence between different faith communities in the West Nile region through legal clinics and para-legal networks.⁵⁵ Therefore, the two partners collaborated in CRID to advance their peacebuilding interventions in the Yumbe district and the West Nile region.



A trainer during a training session for the Community Own Resource Persons



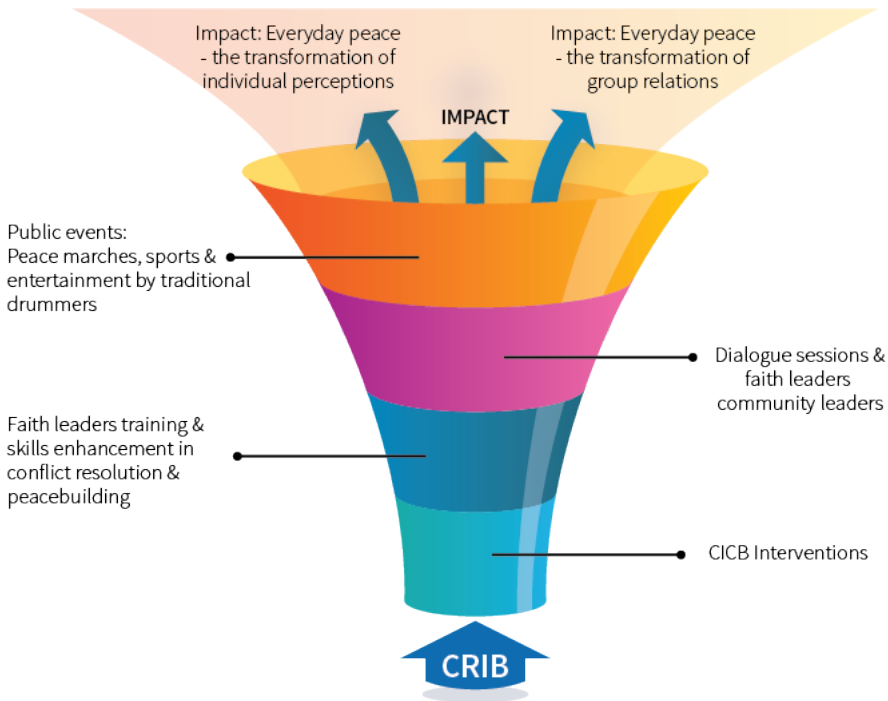
Some of the trainees during a session for the Community Own Resource Persons

According to the UJCC Project Officer, the two partners adopted a pathway for change that targeted young men and women as change agents because of the large youth population in the district and the fact that unemployed young men and those in the informal bobaboda sector led the recent incidents of hostilities and riots.⁵⁶ Indeed, the baseline survey reviewed data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBS) and found that the literacy rate in the Yumbe district is 55.5% while the national average is 69%. Only 22.8% of the population in the district has attained secondary education, while 16.4% of youths aged 18 to 30 years in the Yumbe Township sub-county and 13.8% in the Kululu sub-county are not in school or college. Among the baseline respondents, 60.2% left school at primary level while only 4.1% had attained tertiary level education. Thus, the district has one of the lowest literacy rates in Uganda. Further, the baseline review revealed that 64.8% of youth aged 18 to 30 years are unemployed, and 10.5% of the households with children aged five years and above consume less than two meals a day. Because the district is rural, based on a subsistence economy, and lacks infrastructure, only Yumbe town offers these young men and women opportunities in the informal sector. Hence, the Yumbe district has one of the highest poverty rates in Uganda.

The combination of low literacy rates, high poverty levels, unemployment, lack of infrastructure, and a large number of former combatants makes the youth vulnerable to religious and ethnic extremism and predisposes them to violent gangs. This is why UJCC and MCJL planned to use young men and women as change agents, opted to use a faith approach to effect change, and preferred activities that attract the youth such as sports, music, dance and drama, and radio presentations. Such interventions were consistent with the baseline data which showed that 44.4% of the Yumbe population relied on radio as the main source of information, 10.1% relied on the community megaphone, and less than 2% of the television. Due to low literacy rates and low usage of modern means of communication, such as mobile phones (46.5%) and the internet (11%), individual contacts and words of the mouth are very effective in everyday communication in Yumbe.

In essence, therefore, UJCC and MCJL developed a pathway for change that started with the training of a selected group of young men and women from Yumbe Township and Kululu sub-counties in peacebuilding. Aspects of the training included conflict mitigation, justice in Christianity and Islam, resilience and confidence-building, community dialogues, and communication across faiths. Referring to these young men and women as Community Own Resource Persons (CORPS), the two partners then deployed them to promote community dialogues in their localities using Christian parishes, churches and Mosques, and home-to-home outreaches. They also deployed them to organise and lead sports for peace and music, dance, and drama activities starting from the village level. As soon these activities began, the partners reinforced their messages with mass outreach through presentations on the Radio Pacis, which has the highest listenership in the Yumbe district.

Among the significant innovations in this pathway for change was the use of faith institutions and cultural leaders and the involvement of young men and women in every phase of the project roll-out. The logic of this pathway was to change individual perceptions towards the ‘Other’ and improve relations between members of different faith groups, and can be visualised as an inverted cone because the number of the reached grassroots actors increases upwards. According to UJCC reports, the interventions started with a small group of trained youth leaders (30). Then the numbers increased upwards to medium-sized groups of participants in dialogue forums (712), to large audiences in MDD and sports for peace activities (10,337), to the entire population in the Yumbe Town Council and Kululu sub-counties (71,850) through Radio Pacis. The figure below represents this logic.



The Logic of UJCC and MCJL's interventions in the Yumbe District

4.1 Theory of Change

A review of the UJCC and MCJL project documents shows that they implemented various activities which sought to change individual perceptions towards the 'Other' and improve relations between Christians and Muslims in the Yumbe Town Council and Kululu sub-counties. After coding and analysing the empirical data, the research produced the table below which summarises UJCC and MCJL's theory of change, activities, the planned outcomes, and the expected impacts.

Theory of change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If UJCC and MCJL change individual perceptions towards the 'Other' through interfaith interventions, THEN • They will improve interactions and relations between individual young people from different religious groups, THEN • Improved interactions between individuals will improve relations between members of different faiths, LEADING TO • Tolerance, everyday peace, and peaceful coexistence in Yumbe Town Council and Kululu sub-counties in Yumbe district. 		
Process: Implementing interfaith activities in the three project locations: training; peer outreach; community dialogues; sports for peace; music, dance, and drama; and presentations on Radio Pacis.		
Participants: 30 trained CORPS, 712 dialogues participants, 10,337 MDD and sports for peace, and 71,850 through radio presentations.		
Activity	Intended outcome	Intended outcome
Training of CORPS - A trained team of 30 CORPS who would promote the project objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased knowledge of CORPS • CORPS would be convenors of the other activities • CORPS would impart their peers with knowledge and skills gained • Changed individual perceptions towards the 'Other' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved interactions among individuals and groups • CORPs resolve conflicts at the micro-level • CORPs would continue with peacebuilding work after the end of the project

Community dialogues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peaceful resolution of disputes • Tolerance and development of collective social actions • Understanding of common humanity. • Demystification of religious stereotypes • Improved interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced hostility • Transformed view of the 'Other' • Improved relations between Muslims and Christians • Increased integration of religious groups • Continuous communication
Edutainment (sports for peace and music, dance, and drama)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of integrated youth groups across faiths • Understanding of common humanity • Transformed view of the 'Other' • Improved interactions • Development of values of empathy, respect and tolerance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced hostility and violence • Tolerance and respect for religious and cultural diversity • Improved relations between Christians and Muslims • Peaceful resolution of conflicts • Collective actions • Continuous communication • Enhanced leadership
Radio presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforced messages of change, tolerance, and acceptance of the 'Other' • Support for transformed individual views towards the 'Other'. • Increased knowledge of the 'other' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced public narratives of common humanity • Reduced stereotypes • Improved relations between Christians and Muslims • Transformed view of the 'Other'

Tracking change along the above pathway and theory of change required collating and reviewing empirical data as presented in the UJCC and MCJL reports during the project life cycle.

5.0 Methodology: Documents Review

Research for this study collected empirical data through a review of the UJCC and MCJL documents, which include project reports, baseline survey, endline research, and face-to-face interviews with the UJCC and MCJL teams. The researcher did not reach directly to the project beneficiaries. Premising documents review was the understanding that the implementing partners and the baseline and endline reports had reported the project activities comprehensively and their reports contained sufficient evidence of change. This qualitative analysis targeted 50 documents as summarised in the table below.

No.	Document	Number of documents
1	Endline survey	1
2	Baseline survey	1
3	End-of-the-project reports (small and micro-grants)	2
4	Quarterly reports	3
5	Monthly reports	12
6	Annual project reports	3
7	UJCC and MCJL's presentations during Faith to Action Network's convention in Nairobi	1
8	UJCC and MCJL's presentations during the CRID exchange visit in Mombasa, Kenya	1
9	UJCC and MCJL's presentations during CRID training in Kampala, Uganda	1
10	CRID video clips from the endline survey in Yumbe and Kululu	12
11	CRID video documentary and short-time video clips after media tour in Yumbe	13
	TOTAL	50

Table 1: Reviewed documents.

Both endline and baseline surveys used quantitative and qualitative methods that targeted participants and beneficiaries of the project. The two studies utilised the same standard questionnaire and a semi-structured approach that combined KIs with FGDs. The endline survey collected data from 67 project beneficiaries, 38 from the Yumbe Town Council and 29 from the Kululu sub-county, while the baseline research collected data from 171 respondents, 111 from the Yumbe Town Council and 60 from the Kululu sub-county. This study presumes that the evidence as represented in the endline and baseline surveys is fairly representative across the two sub-counties. Further, the study analysed evidence that is documented in the form of videos which a CRID research team collected a media research in September and October 2020. The German Channel DW aired findings of the research in its radio channel on 3 February 2021.

6.0 Data Analysis and Evidence of change

MCJL and UJCC's pathway for change has four categories of interventions: empowerment of select young men and women with peacebuilding skills, peer outreach, community dialogues, and edutainment activities (music, dance and drama, sports for peace, and radio presentations). It started with empowering young men and women with peacebuilding skills. These young men and women then became change agents, who led peer outreach in their localities, mobilised different religious groups to participate in community dialogue forums, and organised edutainment activities such as MDD and sports for peace. Drawn from both Christian and Muslim faiths, these change agents used religious spaces, tools, values, texts, and narratives to change individual perceptions, improve relations between Christians and Muslims, and promote everyday peace in the communities. MCJL and UJCC then supported and reinforced the improved relations between Christians and Muslims and messages of everyday peace with radio presentations, whose central theme was tolerance and peaceful coexistence. In essence, therefore, the core aspects of everyday peace at the two sub-counties are changes of individual perceptions towards the 'Other' and improvement in relations between the majority Muslims and the minority Christians.

6.1 Changing Individual Perceptions

Due to the prevailing situation in the Yumbe district, UJCC and MCJL opted to start their interventions with activities that would change individual perceptions towards the 'Other', specifically mutual perceptions between young men and women from the Christian and Muslim religious traditions. The duo's approach was in line with the baseline survey that found that 97% of the respondents knew someone from the other faith, 87% had a neighbour from another faith, yet only 24% engaged with a neighbour from another religion, while only 29.2% always engaged with a friend or someone from a

different faith. Thus, the overwhelming majority of the Yumbe residents had a neighbour or knew someone from the other faith, but they did not engage them in conversations. Also, the baseline survey found that only 42.7% of the respondents respected neighbours or someone from the other religion, 2% of the survey respondents knew a lot about any other religion, 47.4% knew very little, and 34.5% knew nothing at all.



Leader of the Aringa Cultural Institution speaks to CORPS

Although they were from the same Aringa ethnic group and spoke the same Aringa dialect of the Lugbara language, the religious divide, Muslims vis-à-vis Christians, had separated them, and, in turn, such separation had led to tensions between followers of the two faiths. Due to this reality, it was imperative that UJCC and MCJL start the interventions with activities that targeted changing individual perceptions towards members of the other faith. The changes would lead to an understanding that all residents of Yumbe shared common humanity, had the same ethnic heritage and historical narrative, and occupied the same socio-cultural sphere and geographical space. Thus, UJCC and MCJL planned interventions which included training sessions for young Community Own Resource Persons (CORPS), who became the pioneer change agents, youth-to-youth peer outreach, and community dialogues.

Empirical data illustrates that the interventions had considerable impacts and contributed to changing the perceptions of young men and women towards the 'Other'. The end-line survey showed that the project participants had increased their engagement with neighbours from the other religion to 58%, they had raised their engagements with a friend or someone from the other religion to 37%, and they had increased their respect for a neighbour or someone from another religion to 63%. The highest rise according to the survey was knowledge about the other religion. As the survey recorded, those who knew nothing about another religion dropped from 34.5% to 0%, those who had a little knowledge dropped from 47% to 2%, while those who knew a lot increased from 2% to 73%. The immense improvement illustrates that the UJCC and MCJL's goal of imparting knowledge about each faith through training, peer-to-peer outreach, and community engagements had achieved the intended impact. Additional evidence from qualitative research collaborates the claim.

An Anglican priest informed they targeted youth, and they helped them engage in activities, such as football, netball, and music and dramas.⁵⁷ When young men and women from the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, and Muslims did all these activities together, he added, they started realizing that they are not different and started uniting with us, faith leaders, as Anglican, the Catholics, and the Muslims, and among themselves. "The situation now is calm, there is no violence between Muslims and Christians, and all government departments, including the police, can confirm that there is peace," he concluded. A Catholic priest from Yumbe parish echoed the same viewpoint.

"Christians are very few in Yumbe district, about 22% because we are about 170,000 Christians while the rest of the population is Muslim. Following the dialogue meetings, all participants started understanding the other religion. Kadhi himself often invited me to go and speak in the Mosque and they were happy."⁵⁸

These two pieces of evidence from the two priests, an Anglican and a Catholic, highlight that UJCC and PACWA activities provided space for young men and women to understand the other faith, interact with the believers of other religions, and do collective actions. These two pieces of evidence from the two priests, an Anglican and a Catholic, highlight that UJCC and PACWA activities provided space for young men and women to understand the other faith, interact with the believers of other religions, and do collective actions. Collective activities helped them realise that they shared common interests and heritage, and, therefore, they started viewing each other positively. In essence, they understood each other and realised that they shared common humanity and occupied the same socio-economic sphere. Young men and women who participated in the activities confirmed these changes. One example is a young man from the Kululu Sub-county who dropped out of school and had no gainful employment when MCJL found him. He explained his change as follows. .

“I am from Kululu sub-county, I am a Muslim, and I was one of the peers that UJCC and MCJL trained at Moyo on how to relate with other religions, cultures, tribes, and communities. From the training, I learned how to solve conflicts, especially in my community, how to advise young men and women on issues such as drug abuse, and I now relate well with young men and women from the Christian community.”⁵⁹

Like other young Muslims from the sub-county, the young man who shared this piece of evidence shared the prevailing negative stereotypes and prejudices against Christians who are a minority in his location. While his involvement with the UJCC and MCJL activities was his first serious engagement in life, it provided him with spaces to interact and engage with other young men and women from all religions. UJCC/MCJL activities helped him realise that there are many ways that he could use to change his social and physical environments and earn an income. The UJCC/MCJL pathway for change and the grassroots peacebuilding literature posited that such interactions provided spaces for individuals to reduce their prejudice and hostilities and encouraged them to form social networks and perform collective actions. The respondent concedes that he learned from all young men and women that were involved in the activities and other community members regardless of their religion. As the UJCC/MCJL pathway for change postulates, such mutual learning from the ‘Other’, is central to the change of individual perceptions. This study infers that participating in MCJL/UJCC activities changed his views towards ‘Others’, reduced hostility, changed his enemy images, and encouraged him to partner with Christians in social networks.



Young women prepare during a Music, Dance, and Drama forum in the Kululu Sub-County.

Another young man from Kululu, who had a similar background, also testified how he changed his perceptions towards the 'Other'. "It is difficult to get employment in the district. ... When I heard about the UJCC/MCJL project on the youth, I decided to join," he explained.⁶⁰ "Most of the youth are idle and spend most of the time causing trouble in the community. I became passionate after the first training, and I joined the other activities. Then I reached out to other youth in the Kululu sub-county." The young man not only changed his views towards the 'Other', but he also decided to acquire gainful skills which enabled him to earn an income. "During the training, most of the participants were more educated and skilled than me," he revealed. Therefore, I decided to acquire gainful skills by "enrolling in a short training program in building and construction provided by the Finn church Aid."

Subsequently, he and his peers formed a youth association that applied for a government of Uganda registration and constructed houses for people. Their breakthrough came when they received funding from Peace Wind Japan to advance their work. This study avers that the decision to acquire gainful skills and his efforts to reach out to other young men and women in the villages, mosques, and Christian churches in the Kululu sub-county indicate that UJCC and MCJL's approach and interventions had changed his perceptions and the way he viewed others. A Catholic priest from Yumbe confirmed this change as follows:

"We have seen a lot of positive changes. The project has trained many young men and women, drug abuse in Yumbe and Kululu has reduced, and some youths in Kululu have started savings associations. I know some young men from Kululu who joined training courses and a technical school. I know one young man who joined a training conducted by the Finn Church on building and construction and then started a building association. I know another one who went to a technical school. I am very happy about these young men because they have changed their lives, their homes, and their communities."⁶¹

The priest's evidence confirms the change of individual perceptions and views towards the 'Other' and affirms the postulates of the UJCC/MCJL's pathway for change and the bottom-up peacebuilding approach that such interactions provided spaces for individuals to reduce their prejudice and hostilities and encouraged them to form social networks and engage in collective actions. Such changes were also reported by a young Catholic woman from Yumbe Town Council explained,

"I was one of the trainees from Yumbe Town Council. When we started the activities, the Muslims and Christians were fighting; they did not want to understand each other. The Muslims were not listening to

Catholics; the Catholics did not listen to views from the Muslims. I led the team that brought them together in dialogues, and we explained to them why they ought to live together. After participating in our activities, including dialogues, MDD, football, and netball matches, they accepted our message and started interacting with each other. Over time, they became friends and that is how we build peace in the villages around Yumbe Town.”⁶²

The power of this evidence lies in the fact that it is from a young Catholic woman, who was probably disregarded because of her gender and age in an area where patriarchal norms and combat heroism, which is associated with young men, are prevalent. She concedes that it was difficult to change the prevailing hostilities and views towards the ‘Other’ when they started the activities because of the legacies of the past violence. However, UJCC and MCJL’s approach, which uses tools of religious peacebuilding, such as spiritual guidance, prayers, empathy, texts, narratives, and envisioning of new possibilities, when combined with activities that appealed to the youth, built confidence, transformed perceptions, and enhanced abilities of the individuals to form networks across faiths and undertake collective actions. In turn, participating in collective actions changed the participants’ overall perceptions and attitudes towards others from different religions.



Some of the sports teams

In summary, MCJL and UJCC grassroots intervention approach considered all the challenges of post-conflict peacebuilding in the Yumbe district and the West Nile Region in general. The two organisations developed and implemented activities based on a pathway for change which started with the training of young men and women and built on it with peer-to-peer outreach, dialogue forums, and mass edutainment events – MDD, sports for peace, and radio programs. These interventions changed individual perceptions towards others from different religions, as illustrated by data from endline and baseline surveys and primary evidence. This study infers that MCJL and UJCC designed mass edutainment activities to support and reinforce changes in individual perceptions achieved during training, peer-to-peer outreach, and dialogue forums. In turn, changes in individual perceptions and attitudes towards the ‘Other’ formed the foundation for improving relations between Muslims and Christians.

6.2 Changing Relations Between Muslims and Christians

Mutual hostility and occasional direct violence characterised relations between the majority Muslims and the minority Christians in the Yumbe district before MCJL and UJCC implemented the CRID project in the district. As the MCJL’s programs coordinator explained, one of the main issues which informed their project was “wrangles between members of different faiths as a result of faiths, the different faiths, because Yumbe is a predominantly Muslim district and the Muslims had differences with other faiths.”⁶³ Therefore, the main aim of the UJCC and MCJL project was to address the hostilities between Muslims and Christians, attain everyday peace and long-term peaceful coexistence between members of the two faiths in the district. Affirming their aim, the MCJL Programs Coordinator stated that they “intervened mainly to promote peaceful coexistence among the communities.”⁶⁴



Participants of the interfaith dialogue with religious and cultural leaders in Yumbe in May 2019.



Commenting on the hostile relations between Christians and Muslims, the baseline report recorded that “UJCC needs to understand that most people in Yumbe only know about their religion and lack the world view or understanding of other religions.... UJCC needs to create awareness among the different religious groups of the need to appreciate diversity and different beliefs targeting religious leaders...” Other factors, especially the large number of unemployed young men and women and low literacy levels, aggravated the hostility between Christians and Muslims. As the Community Development Officer (CDO) at the Yumbe Town Council asserted,

“You see most of the young people here are not in school and are not working. Some are at the tax park, and the majority play games all day. This is too much idleness, and a lack of what to do is another big problem in the district. Anyone can use them for any price.”

While the issue of unemployment was beyond the scope of the project goal, collected evidence illustrates that the UJCC and MCJL project contributed to the improvement of the relations between Christians and Muslims in the Yumbe Town Council and the Kululu Sub-counties. According to a young woman from Yumbe town, they were grateful to UJCC and MCJL for promoting peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians, who were previously fighting.⁶⁵ Since the entry of the MCJL and UJCC project, she revealed, they had seen the end of hostilities and improvement in relations between Christians and Muslims. Affirming improvement in relations between Christians and Muslims, the Yumbe District Kadhi stated that

“The project gave us the platform to engage young people and speak to them on issues of peace and living together as brothers and sisters. I can assure you that young people have transformed. There are few incidents of violence among the youth and we religious leaders live as examples. We need to teach more youth and Imams to do the same.”

These are two pieces of evidence from two different people, a young woman and a Muslim Imam; however, the two respondents articulate the same viewpoint that MCJL and UJCC contributed to changing the views of the project participants and beneficiaries in Yumbe. These changes concurred with UJCC and MCJL’s pathway for change and the postulates of the grassroots peacebuilding approach. In addition to changing their perceptions, the project participants and beneficiaries accepted that all neighbours and residents of the Yumbe Town Council and the Kululu Sub-counties shared a common civic identity and humanity and could tolerate each other and live peacefully in the same neighbourhoods despite their different religious beliefs. This study suggests that UJCC and MCJL interventions probably changed the perceptions of the majority of the population in the two sub-counties through MDD, sports for peace, and radio presentations. Commenting on this point, the Yumbe district police commander stated,

“UJCC has brought a great impact to the district. Before they started their project, the youth used to be violent, they never listened to security, they could not listen to their parents, but now with the help of UJCC, they have been trained, they know what to do and abide by the laws of the country.”⁶⁶

The power of this evidence lies in the authority of the speaker. As the head of security in the district, who is responsible for maintaining peace and security in the district, he explicitly confirms that UJCC and MCJL activities contributed to changing the mindsets of the youth, reduced violence, and promoted peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians. The evidence supports one of the indicators in the CRID’s outcomes which required confirmation by law enforcement officers that the project activities decrease youth engagement in violent activities.



Participants in one of the community dialogue meetings

Also confirming the change is an Anglican priest from Yumbe whose evidence speaks to the UJCC and MCJL's pathway for change, and use of religious texts and tools, and the grassroots peacebuilding approach.

"UJCC implemented activities that targeted the youth. We brought the youth together regardless of their faith and they organised music, dance, and drama together and played football and netball together. Then they realised they were not different and started uniting with us, all of them Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Muslims. Now they interact freely, work together, and there is no violence between Muslims and Christians."⁶⁷

The priest lived in Yumbe even during the years when UNRF II was active in the Yumbe district. His evidence buttresses previous claims that UJCC and MCJL's use of religious tools, texts, and narratives in dialogue sessions and mass events such as MDD and sports for peace contributed to changing the perceptions of the youth of Yumbe towards members of different religious beliefs. It also confirms that the UJCC and MCJL tactic of encouraging Christian leaders to visit Mosques and Muslim Sheikhs to visit Christian churches promoted peaceful coexistence in the villages. This study infers that such visits

were indicators that followers of different faiths embrace each other, accepted each other in their moral framework, recognised their common humanity, and promoted everyday peace. Such acceptance was critical for tolerance and long-term group relations and peaceful coexistence. Two additional pieces of evidence buttress these arguments.

The first one is from a young man who is a Muslim from Yumbe and was one of the CORPs that UJCC and MCJL trained and deployed in the Yumbe Town Council sub-county. In his evidence, the young Muslim confirms that he was one of the young men and women that UJCC and MCJL trained from the Yumbe and Kululu sub-counties. “Some were from the Christian side and others from the Muslim side,”⁶⁸ he explained. They were then “sent to go and sensitise the community and became the unifying force in Yumbe”, and brought Christians and Muslims together using a verse that is in the Holy Quran and the Christian Bible: they may be one (John 17:21 and Quran 49:13). The second piece of evidence is from a young Muslim who participated in sports for peace.

“Before the project came, we used to hang around Yumbe without doing anything because we were idle. We would chew khat the whole day and young men would engage in petty crime. Christians and Muslims were not staying together; they were hostile to each other. The program helped us form football teams which brought us together; we played together, shared meals, and used similar jerseys. These sports change us because we realise we are one people; they brought Christians and Muslims together.”⁶⁹

The participant concedes that the hostile relations between Christians and Muslims before the project activities started and collaborates the evidence of the CDO. However, the essential part is his acceptance that the project helped them improve groups’ relations because participating in the same sports promoted a change of views towards the ‘other’, tolerance, and everyday peace. Collective actions opened them to the fact that they share a common humanity, moral framework, socio-economic sphere, and Ugandan citizenship. The desired outcome of these changes was reduced hostilities between Christians and Muslims, improved relations between members of different religious beliefs, and led to better collaborations between leaders of Muslim and Christian faiths.



Drama followed by community dialogue in Kululu in April 2019

These changes were in line with UJCC and MCJL's pathway for change and the postulates of the grassroots peacebuilding approach, and CRID's overall goal of promoting tolerance and respect for cultural and religious diversity. As summed up by UJCC's Deputy Executive Secretary in charge of Programs, "now there is a positive attitude and people are showing oneness.... They work together, they eat together and move together...and they help each other during social activities like burials and weddings." Such changes agree with the postulates of peacebuilding from below and the everyday peace approach. In essence, MCJL and UJCC's pathway for change helped Yumbe residents embrace each other, and accept tolerance and everyday peace.

7.0 Discussion: Transforming Individual Perceptions and Group Relations

Yumbe district was still in a post-conflict phase when UJCC and MCJL implemented the CRID project in the Yumbe Town Council and the Kululu Sub-counties in 2018. Among the post-conflict challenges, which affected the district, were legacies of the past civil war, including the presence of many ex-combatants, an incomplete DDR process, unresolved individual and community trauma, underdevelopment, low literacy rates, high unemployment, localised conflicts, especially hostilities between the Muslims and the minority Christians, and the presence of at least 250,000 South Sudan refugees in the Bidi Bidi refugee camp. Because of the enormity of the challenges, and the small size of the budget, both UJCC and MCJL opted to respond to only one issue: hostile relations between Christians and Muslims.

Therefore, they developed an intervention model which combined grassroots peacebuilding, as articulated in the peacebuilding literature, with an interfaith approach that uses religious texts, values and vocabulary. Underpinning this model were activities that appealed to the youth, such as MDD, sports, and radio presentations. Targeting the youth, the underlying theory of change in this model prioritised changes in individual perceptions towards members of the other religion and improving relations between Christians and Muslims. In this model, changing individual perceptions and improving relations between Christians and Muslims was the needed foundation for everyday peace, tolerance for religious diversity, and long-term peaceful coexistence in the district.

The evidence discussed in the preceding sections illustrates that their interventions started with training sessions which imparted the foundational skills and then provided spaces and opportunities for the targeted young men and women to change their perceptions towards members of the other religion. As the primary change agents, the young men and women used religious spaces and other public forums to conduct dialogue forums and peer-to-peer outreach and implemented public events, such as MDD, sports for peace, and radio presentations at the Radio Pacis. The peak of these interventions was a district sports-for-peace forum during the International Day of Peace in 2021. As cumulative evidence from the project participants and beneficiaries shows, these interventions contributed to changing individual perceptions towards members of the other religion and improving relations between Muslims and Christians.

The approach of changing individual perceptions and improving relations between members of different faiths was consistent with the findings of the baseline survey that 97% of the Yumbe residents knew someone from a different religion, while only 24% engaged with a neighbour from the other religion and only 29% engaged with someone from a different faith. The baseline survey also found that 47.4% knew very little and

34.5% knew nothing about the other faith, and only 23% believed that the two religions could coexist peacefully. Since 89% of Yumbe residents are from the Aringa ethnic group and speak the same language, a lack of understanding of the Christian religious practices, beliefs, and doctrines by Muslims and vice-versa probably contributed to low trust and mutual hostility.



Music and dance followed by community dialogue in Kululu in April 2019

Findings of the end-line survey show immense improvements in all indicators. Those who engaged with others from a different religion increased by more than 20%, those who respected a neighbour or someone from another religion rose by 30%, those who advanced their knowledge about the other religion increased by 70%, and those who believed that the two religions could exist peacefully rose by 45%. Qualitative evidence from faith leaders, government officers, security agencies, and young men and women who participated and benefitted from the project supports the quantitative data. A young Muslim man from Yumbe, for example, explained how he utilised the small amount of money that he received from UJCC and MCJL as transport reimbursement to organise a football team in his village that competed at the district level.⁷⁰ A Yumbe police commander confirmed that the project contributed to the reduction in violence and crime as two priests, a Catholic and an Anglican, affirmed that the project improved relations between Christians and Muslims in the district. Additionally, three young men from the Kululu Sub-County explained how they changed the perceptions of their fellow youth and how they used the opportunity to advance their skills. A Catholic priest from Yumbe narrated how the project improved the lives of young men and women, some of whom started savings associations and generated incomes to support their families. This study concludes that such improvements illustrate that the UJCC and MCJL goal of

imparting knowledge about each faith, changing individual perceptions, and improving relations between Christians and Muslims achieved the intended impact.

As informed by the contextual issues in the Yumbe district, the UJCC and MCJL's pathway for change contained practical activities, starting with foundational training, that involved changing individual mindsets so that those young men and women could become change agents and role models to other youth. The logic of this pathway was pretty straightforward: JCC and MCJL could not end hostilities between Muslims and Christians without changing the views of a few individuals, who would then become change agents to spearhead mass changes and improvement in relations between Muslims and Christians.

Therefore, the building blocks of this model were training and peer-to-peer outreach as the first phase, followed by community dialogues led by faith leaders, and, lastly, edutainment events that appealed to the youth, such as MDD, sports for peace, and radio presentations. According to the end of the project report, the two partners reached 11,049 young men and women (6,428 males and 4,736 females) through training, peer-to-peer outreach, dialogue forums, MDD, and sports for peace activities. Further, they reached at least 5,000 people through IEC materials and at least 100,000 people through Radio Pacis, which broadcasts from Arua town and has listenership in Yumbe and the neighbouring districts: Koboko, Arua, Marachi, and Moyo.

To conclude, this study argues that MCJL and UJCC build their pathway for change upon two pillars: the grassroots peacebuilding approach, which emphasises community orientation, relationship-building, and participation of grassroots actors, and the religious approach that uses faith values, tools, texts, and narratives. Combining these two approaches, MCJL and UJCC contributed to breaking of Christian vs Muslim social boundaries, improvement of communication between participants, increasing knowledge of each other, and demystifying of pre-existing prejudices. Accordingly, this study postulates that MCJL and UJCC's approach of combining religious tools, vocabulary, and narratives with secular peacebuilding tools resonated with the participants. That explains why the two partners changed individual worldviews toward the other faith and improved relations between Christians and Muslims.

8.0 Challenges and Lessons

8.1 Challenges

Literature on peacebuilding emphasises that the grassroots peacebuilding approach is appropriate for locations emerging from intractable conflicts. It was, therefore, appropriate for UJCC and MCJL to use the bottom-up peacebuilding approach because the West Nile Region in general, and the Yumbe district in particular, were still recovering from a 22-year armed insurgency against the government of Uganda. However, the district faced many challenges, while the CRID project targeted only one issue: hostile relations and violent clashes between Christians and Muslims. Therefore, the first challenge that the MCJL and UJCC project encountered was that the hostile relations between Christians and Muslims were interwoven with many other challenges, including underdevelopment, high poverty levels, low literacy levels, unemployment, and incomplete DDR process, and the presence of more than 200,000 South Sudan refugees. Peacebuilding interventions in such a context requires investment in time and resources that CRID could not provide. Because UJCC and MCJL did not have sufficient resources, they opted to use a model based on small, practical steps that involved grassroots actors who would continue with peacebuilding work even without funds from international partners.

A second challenge is guaranteeing the sustainability of the UJCC and MCJL interventions because the resolution of the many challenges that Yumbe faces falls under the realm of the national government and international actors. Since these actors are beyond the control of UJCC and MCJL, the two partners mitigated the challenge by opting for everyday peace between Christians and Muslims at the micro-level with the understanding that attaining many islands of peace would influence peace formation in the entire West Nile region.

The third challenge centres on the agents of change. Using faith spaces and targeting the youth as agents of change was a great approach because they are versatile and, as the evidence shows, they easily reached out to their peers. However, UJCC and MCJL do not have mechanisms for following them after the end of the CRID project because some of the trained CORPs may move out of Yumbe as circumstances change. Thus, there is no guarantee that the trained young men and women will continue with peacebuilding work after UJCC and MCJL pull out of Yumbe. Related to the third challenge is a fourth one that centres on the ability of the two organisations to raise resources to continue with peacebuilding interventions. As long as UJCC and MCJL's capacities to raise resources are limited, there is no guarantee that they will advance peacebuilding interventions in the Yumbe district and the West Nile region.

8.2 Lessons

Analysing the adduced evidence and the UJCC and MCJL pathway for change and activities leads to the following lessons.

1. Using local faith leaders and combining the grassroots peacebuilding approach with an interfaith approach helped UJCC and MCJL build trust and improve relations between Christians and Muslims. The core lesson is that the dissemination of similar messages in faith spaces led to the acceptance of the project by both Christians and Muslims because it promoted mutual respect and tolerance. This approach can be universalised and applied in other situations that experience hostilities between different faith groups.
2. UJCC and MCJL's use of religious texts (the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran) as the primary reference documents and sources of narratives and messages of tolerance and peaceful coexistence resonated with the project participants and beneficiaries. The universal lesson here is that religious values can be unifying tools in locations that are recovering from protracted civil wars, such as the Yumbe district and the West Nile region.
3. The UJCC/MCJL premised their pathway for change, and their logic of tolerance and everyday peace at the micro-level, on horizontal linkages. However, national and local level state agencies, such as the Town Council, security agencies, and the Resident District Commissioner's office, provided crucial support that contributed to the achievements of the outcomes and impacts. Therefore, as much as the MCJL and UJCC seek to attain everyday peace at the micro-levels, they may consider increasing their engagements with state actors, particularly middle and lower-level state officers, to buttress tolerance and peace at the lower levels.
4. The MCJL/UJCC model of empowering young people in groups such as CORPs and using them as change agents to promote tolerance, diversity, and everyday peace is viable and can be universalised. In particular, the logic of building islands of peace at the micro-levels, which contribute to ending cycles of violence, is powerful and widely applicable.
5. MCJL and UJCC successfully used CORPs and involved local faith and cultural leaders in their activities. These leaders include the District Kadhi, Representative of the Anglican Arch-Deacon, Representative of Catholic Dean of Yumbe, and Aringa Cultural Institution. The involvement of these leaders demonstrated that local actors are not just passive recipients of peacebuilding interventions designed by international actors. Rather, they are active agents, and those in Yumbe were committed to changing the views of young people towards others from different religions and improving relations between Christians and Muslims in the district. In essence, the lesson here is that using local resources and recognising the utility, agency, and power of the local leaders contributed to the achievement of the intended impacts.

6. Although MCJL and UJCC focused on a single issue, Christian-Muslim relations, in a context of myriad challenges, their activities achieved quantifiable impacts, as the evidence has demonstrated. Therefore, UJCC and MCJL interventions can be scaled-up by increasing the volume of activities in the Yumbe district and expanding the activities to other locations in West Nile and Uganda.

In summary, this study has shown that UJCC and MCJL employed an approach that combined grassroots peacebuilding activities, namely training, peer-to-peer outreach, community dialogue forums, and edutainment (MDD, sports for peace, and radio presentations) with religious values, texts, narratives, and vocabulary. The approach proved effective in changing individual perceptions and improving relations between Muslims and Christians in the Yumbe district.

9.0 Conclusions

This study has examined UJCC and MCJL's pathway for change and activities in the Yumbe and Kululu Sub-Counties in Uganda's West Nile using the framework of grassroots peacebuilding. It has explored the planned outcomes and impacts and reviewed empirical evidence documented in more than 45 documents, including project reports, endline and baseline surveys, and videos. The study has noted the reality of the Yumbe district, which includes interlinked problems such as challenges of recovery from a protracted armed conflict, incomplete DDR process, underdevelopment, widespread poverty, low literacy rates, high unemployment, and hostile relations between Christians and Muslims.

Due to these challenges, the study has argued that MCJL and UJCC opted to focus on one issue: hostile relations between Muslims and Christians. Consequently, the two partners developed a pathway for change and implemented activities that aimed at changing the perceptions of young men and women towards others from different religions and improving relations between Christians and Muslims. The starting point in their pathway for change is the individual young man or woman, who then leads the process of changing others through peer-to-peer outreach. Subsequently, a group of the changed young men and women, whom the project referred to as Community Own Resource Persons (CORPs), organised community dialogues that brought Christians and Muslims together.

In turn, faith and cultural leaders used their legitimacy, moral power, and religious values, spaces, tool, texts, and narratives to support CORPs, provide guidance, and facilitate dialogue forums. Further, CORPs organised edutainment forums such as Music, Dance, and Drama (MDD) and sports for peace. Then the MCJL and UJCC teams supported these activities through radio programs, which reached the entire population of the Yumbe district. The power of the radio lay not just in informing, educating, and entertaining but also in its role of privileging narratives of tolerance, respect for diversity, peaceful coexistence.

The study has adduced and evaluated empirical evidence which shows that MCJL and UJCC changed individual perceptions towards others from different religions and improved relations between Muslims and Christians. Such changes concur with the postulates of the grassroots peacebuilding approach and probably contributed to long-term peaceful coexistence in the Yumbe district and the West Nile region. Informing UJCC and MCJL's choice of small, practical steps of promoting tolerance and everyday peace at the micro-level was the complex context of West Nile and lack of sufficient resources. Nonetheless, the project encouraged residents of the Yumbe district to accept that they shared common humanity and civic identity and, thus, needed to coexist peacefully.

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