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WINTER 2007



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Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! I hope 2007 brings you happiness, health—and peace. We here at Oxfam could think of no better way to celebrate the promise of a fresh year than to take as this issue's subject, peace.

Oxfam's work includes peace building, although you may not readily associate it with our mission. We see it as intimately related to our commitment to ending global poverty and injustice. Resource disparities—the gap between “haves” and “have-nots”—spark many conflicts around the world. In turn, conflict and violence make long-term development impossible. In Africa, for example, violent conflicts are at the root of 50 percent of the continent's current food crises. Ten years ago, at the World Food Summit, governments committed to halving global hunger by 2015. Since then, the number of hungry people in the world—instead of dropping—has risen by 54 million.

As part of our strategy to address global hunger, Oxfam has called on the international community to build the capacity of national and international bodies to achieve peaceful solutions to armed conflicts. Fostering peace will not only reduce violence, it will target the root causes of much hunger and poverty.

While examining violence can be uncomfortable work, it is only through understanding that we can achieve peace. We hope that this issue of OXFAMExchange, while disquieting in parts, will ignite your imagination and highlight the responsibility we each have to create peace. The individuals profiled in this issue are just some of the many people doing this important work. If we can draw from their experiences and tap into their sense of hope (in the face of much greater challenges than many of us face), our new year will surely be a very good one. Indeed—more than a new year—it will be a new chapter for us all.

Sincerely,

Raymond C. Offenheiser
President, Oxfam America

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 **ANNOUNCEMENT:** Readers may notice some content and format changes to OXFAMExchange. We researched the associated costs carefully. Printing advances have reduced the expense of color printing dramatically; color adds less than one-half cent per copy to our cost. What's more, in this issue we have moved from a heavy, coated paper stock to a lighter, 100% post-consumer waste stock. This decision cuts our costs by 2.25 cents per copy. **Net savings on our redesign: 1.75 cents per copy, or just under \$5,000 per issue!**

We welcome your feedback on this or other issues. Please direct letters to editor@oxfamamerica.org or Editor, OXFAMExchange, 226 Causeway Street, 5th Floor, Boston MA 02114-2206.

UNTOLD STORIES, UNHEARD VOICES

This issue of OXFAMExchange is devoted to peace building. Our focus is a celebration of the efforts of our staff and local partners working in Africa. (Of course, violence is by no means an exclusively African problem; we could as easily profile violence in our hometowns.) As you read the stories included on these pages, please keep the following two things in mind. First, for each story we share, there are others worth telling—stories that might well shed light on situations little understood by Americans or focus attention on the injustice of unnamed regimes. Relating these stories, however, could jeopardize our access to the very people who need us most. So we face an uneasy calculation, weighing the benefits of speaking out versus the value of being able to do our core work in politically volatile settings. Some stories therefore remain untold. Second, the courageous women and men presented here—like Nouraldeen Abdalla Nourein, below—are simply those known to us. There are many around the world who fight violence and whose words you will never hear because they live and die in relative (and undeserved) anonymity. So, as you read, think also of their unheard voices.

Darfur is a dangerous and deadly place. Nouraldeen Abdalla Nourein probably knew that as well as anyone. It was his home—and in July, he lost his life there helping people struggling through the conflict.

His name could have been quickly forgotten by Westerners or, like nearly 200,000 others killed by this endless conflict, never known. But Nourein's fate was different: We knew him. He was a driver for Oxfam.

For a year and a half, he jounced along the dirt tracks linking remote villages around the town of Saraf Omra in North Darfur. Dodging deep ruts and snaking along dried riverbeds, he ferried aid workers and their equipment to people holed up in far-flung villages in dire need of clean water and safe ways for disposing of their wastes.

In May, while collecting sand to construct a well, Nourein was abducted by armed men during the hijacking of an Oxfam truck. His disappearance was complete: Neither the UN, the African Union, local authorities, nor his own family were able to secure his release.

And then, about seven agonizing weeks later, the news came: Nourein was dead—caught in a flash of fighting in Helelat village near Kulbus in West Darfur as he tried to make his way back home from Chad, where it is believed that he had been taken and held.

"It is with deep sorrow that I have to announce that an Oxfam staff member, Nouraldeen Abdalla Nourein, is believed to have been killed last Friday, 28 July, in West Darfur," wrote Caroline Nursey, Oxfam's country program manager for Sudan, in an email sent across the agency. "He will be greatly missed."

The words are chilling, and final: A colleague—a young father of four children—is dead. He was killed doing humanitarian work in a place so rife with violence that aid groups can no longer reach hundreds of thousands of people who need their help. And Nourein was not alone in his sacrifice. Between July and September 2006, 12 aid workers lost their lives in Darfur—more than had died in the previous three years combined.

"Darfur has become increasingly tense and violent, which has led to the tragic deaths of far too many civilians and aid workers," said Paul Smith-Lomas, a regional director for Oxfam, at the time of Nourein's death. "A full and comprehensive cease-fire must be implemented immediately."

But three months later, no cease-fire is in place. The daily headlines about Darfur grow more ominous. And Nourein's small family is now left—like innumerable others across Darfur—to struggle on its own.



▲ Dawit Guteta (See profile on page 13.)

◀ Nouraldeen Abdalla Nourein

LEARN > In early 2003, two rebel groups—the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)—both from Sudan’s western region of Darfur, launched major offensives on government bases there. The rebels claimed that Darfur had suffered decades of political marginalization and economic neglect from the Sudanese government in Khartoum. Government forces responded and the fighting escalated. Arab militia, commonly known as Janjaweed and widely believed to be supported by the government, attacked villages, forcing inhabitants from their homes—particularly in villages and among ethnic groups thought to be sympathetic to the rebels. Today, the situation has grown increasingly complex. The rebels have splintered into factions. Despite the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in May 2006—by only two of the many warring parties—the conflict shows no sign of abating.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: GET INVOLVED

What can you do to help stop the death and destruction that has consumed the remote western region of Darfur, Sudan, for more than three years?

EVA-LOTTA JANSSON/OXFAM AMERICA



RAISE AWARENESS > Share what you know and get others talking about the crisis in Darfur.

THROUGH THE PRESS Though the crisis has dragged on for more than three years, it has only recently begun to receive more focused attention. Don’t let the press fall down on the job. Keep Darfur in the news by writing letters to the editor or offering to write opinion pieces for your local paper’s editorial pages.

AT YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP Write a piece about Darfur for your church, temple, or mosque bulletin. Organize an educational discussion. Or ask the leader of your congregation to make Darfur the topic of a sermon or discussion.

AT YOUR SCHOOL Write a piece about Darfur for your school paper. Host a brown-bag lunch to educate people about the situation.

SPEAK OUT > Make sure that peace in Darfur becomes a priority for decision makers. Write your members of Congress or call the White House and tell key people that you are deeply concerned about the situation. Sound inconsequential? It’s not. Senator Paul Simon of Illinois was quoted as saying that if each member of Congress had received just 100 letters urging them to help Rwanda during the events of 1994, that would have been enough to get the political system lumbering into action.

SUPPORT THOSE AFFECTED > Until peace efforts in Darfur are successful, you can take steps to be sure that those on the ground have what they need to survive. Using what you know, think creatively about events that you could host to help. The conflict has forced more than two million people from their homes, driving hundreds of thousands of them into temporary camps in Darfur while 200,000 others have fled across the border to seek safety in Chad. About 3.4 million people—more than half the population of Darfur—now rely on international aid.

Writer: Coco McCabe



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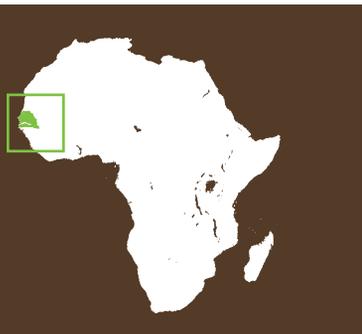
To learn more about the situation in Darfur, go to www.oxfamamerica.org/darfur.

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◀ Senegalese students write about the importance of peace. For the past three years, primary schools in the Casamance region of southern Senegal—where a recent cease-fire ended a long, violent conflict—have instituted a peace curriculum made possible by grants from Oxfam America.



Building a Culture of Peace in Senegal

In a region reeling from more than 20 years of war, Oxfam's **Chris Hufstader** reports on students learning about peace, respect, human rights, and how to resolve conflicts peacefully.

In the Faye Coly primary school in southern Senegal, a drama of war and peace plays out in a dimly lit classroom. And the students, about 30 between the ages of 10 and 14, crammed eight to a table, are fairly bouncing off the walls in excitement.

"What are some countries now at war?" the teacher asks. The kids explode into a mass of raised hands; they snap their fingers, pleading to be called on, shouting "Monsieur! Monsieur!" Several get their wish, and the countries in conflict come spilling out and onto the blackboard.

"Bissau!" The first one is Senegal's southern neighbor Guinea Bissau, just a few kilometers away, where the army had been trying to drive out guerrillas fighting for the independence of Senegal's southern Casamance region. The students are well aware of this conflict.

Other African countries soon follow: "Congo!" another student shouts. Then: "Abidjan!" "Abidjan is in what country?" asks the teacher. "Côte d'Ivoire!" "Very good," the teacher applauds the student. "Any others?" One student—eager to be called on but unable to think of another country in conflict—blurts out, "France!"

Well, no, France is not at war, so the lesson turns to peace. The teacher asks the children to write sentences on the importance of peace and how it can be

achieved. They read them before the class, and the messages are as noble as any diplomat's address to the UN: "We have to forgive each other and be as one." "We have to stop fighting each other and respect one another."

One of the smallest boys in the class walks to the front, tucks in his shirt, and hitches up his pants. Most of the class starts laughing. His smile changes to a serious look, and everyone settles down for a moment. He says, "In Senegal we

“One of the smallest boys in the class walks to the front, tucks in his shirt, and hitches up his pants. Most of the class starts laughing. His smile changes to a serious look, and everyone settles down for a moment. He says, ‘In Senegal we need solidarity for peace. We want to live in a region of nonviolence.’ ”

need solidarity for peace. We want to live in a region of nonviolence.”

A Peaceful Future

This class, taught by Vieux Malang Diedhiou, is based on curriculum developed by a Senegalese organization: Research Group for Education on Children's Rights and Peace (known by its French initials GRA-REDEP). Working closely with Senegal's Ministry of Education, the curriculum was created over three years

ago with about \$40,000 from Oxfam America. Gaspard Onokoko, a committed Congolese human rights educator and president of GRA-REDEP, has crisscrossed Senegal, traveling in "bush taxi" mini-buses and on foot in the heat and dust, to work with education officials to introduce the curriculum to 195 elementary schools in the troubled Casamance region alone. GRA-REDEP is expanding to other areas near the capital, Dakar, and in western Senegal. Since 2003,

more than 1,500 elementary school students have studied peace, human rights, and nonviolent conflict resolution, and nearly 300 teachers have been trained in the curriculum, which also covers basic issues of governance and citizenship.

Onokoko has seen firsthand the destruction of war; he was a political prisoner in Burundi for his work promoting human rights. After his release and exile to Senegal, he founded GRA-REDEP in order to build a more peaceful future.

Children lie at the heart of his strategy. A tall man with a broad smile, Onokoko speaks very formally and deliberately when asked why children are so important. "If their parents engage in violence and crime, children will learn at a young age to do the same," he says. "These children are the future of Senegal; they represent the wealth of Senegal. They must become citizens who can build a country based on peace that respects

violence to redress their grievances, and the resulting suffering and poverty have plagued the region. Tragically, many young people joined in the fighting rather than pursuing their studies. A lengthy counterinsurgency campaign by the government finally led to a cease-fire, and, despite a recent flare-up of cross-border violence between guerilla factions and Guinea Bissau's army, prospects for peace in Casamance look strong.

"These children are the future of Senegal; they represent the wealth of Senegal. They must become citizens who can build a country based on peace that respects human rights. Schools are an important place to do this, to create a culture of peace. Otherwise, it is a lot harder to teach this later in life."

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GRA-REDEP launched the peace education program in Casamance because it was a region at war for more than 20 years. Sandwiched between Gambia to the north and Guinea Bissau to the south, Casamance is a place apart from the rest of Senegal, a lush region of forests and rivers dominated by the Diola people. A separatist movement emerged in the 1980s among those who felt overlooked by economic progress in Senegal since independence. Separatists have used

The students at Faye Coly have taken on their citizenship lessons with great enthusiasm. They created a student government, electing a president and a cabinet of ministers. Claire Sagna, who at 13 has been the minister of human rights for the past two years, says that the teachers have taught the students to learn how to mediate conflicts among themselves and between students and the faculty. "When there are fights between students, or with students and teachers, our government will come together as a group to develop a solution," she says in a very brisk, businesslike manner.

High School Students Take the Lead

The program to train student mediators has been such a success at the primary school level that GRA-REDEP and local school administrators expanded it into secondary schools in the beginning of 2006, when they trained 100 students.

About a dozen students came from Lycée Djinagbo in the city of Ziguinchor, a vast campus of low buildings scattered around dusty grounds bounded by withered trees and walls. On a windy day, clouds of dust blast between the buildings, obscuring the walls and students walking to class in their khaki uniforms. With nearly 4,700 students and 125 teachers, it is the biggest school in the city.

Keeping a school like this running has its challenges: The Casamance conflict has destabilized the entire region, and Lycée Djinagbo as well. There are fights among students and problems between students and teachers. Like many high schools in Senegal, students sometimes go on strike to protest funding cuts and other school policies, making it hard to finish studies within the academic year.

Abdoulaye Sidibé, an adviser to the student mediators at Djinagbo, says that the school is a bit less chaotic since students underwent the mediation training last January. "Since this program was initiated, there's a lot more stability. Fewer problems between students, between students and teachers, and between



◀ Teacher Vieux Malang Diedhiou leads a class about peace at the Faye Coly primary school in Bignona, Senegal. He uses a curriculum developed by the Senegalese organization GRA-REDEP with grants from Oxfam America. The students and teachers at Faye Coly organized a student government and trained student mediators in nonviolent conflict resolution. It is all part of the long-term objective of creating a culture of peace in the Casamance region.



REBECCA BLACKWELL/OXFAM AMERICA

▲ Maty Thiam, 17, is a student mediator at the Lycée Djinagbo high school in Ziguinchor, the main city in the southern Senegalese region of Casamance. Since 12 students from her school participated in a conflict mediation training program last year, teachers say there are fewer problems among the 4,700 students.

Muslims and Christians.... It's partly due to the team we have here responsible for the solution of these conflicts. When they are confronted with a conflict, their first reaction is to ask themselves, 'How can I help resolve this in a peaceful manner?'

Mamadou Lamine Diatta, a 21-year-old literature student and mediator at Djinagbo, explains how his training helped him stop a fight between two students and teach them a lesson in nonviolence: "One student got a bad grade...and the other was teasing him; they came to blows. I broke it up and took one aside to talk it over and to allow him to express his frustration. Then I did the same with the other. After that I brought them together—but I did not ask them to repeat their story in front of the other, so as to avoid more anger. Instead, we focused on the merits of friendship and the need to tolerate one another."

Maty Thiam, one of Djinagbo's 1,876 female students, is also a trained mediator with a confidence and wisdom well beyond her 17 years. She greets visitors, looking them directly in the eye, with a firm handshake. The mediation training changed her outlook on conflict completely. "Before the training, I understood conflict existed, but I did not know it

could be mediated," she explains. Thiam has keen analytical skills, which help her understand the issues and move those in conflict toward peaceful resolutions. The most important thing she has learned from the training? "It is how to listen to people in conflict to get to the heart of the problem. Always avoid telling one or the other he is right. Then create a way to resolve it to show both that they have contributed to the resolution, but also that they have both gained something from the resolution."

High school students see their training in resolving school quarrels as important preparation for their professional life. Boubacar Baldé, 18, a trained student mediator at an agricultural technical school outside Ziguinchor, says he wants to create a more peaceful relationship between farmers and livestock herders, two groups who routinely come into conflict all over Africa. "I am a Fulani," he says with pride. "We are known for cattle. But we live near people who grow crops, so we struggle to find grazing lands. And there are many conflicts. My experience will help me negotiate to reserve part of the land for pasture and the rest for growing crops, and educate villagers in ways of mediating any problems that come up."

COUNTRY PROFILE



Capital > Dakar

Population > 11,658,000

Languages > French (official), Wolof, Pulaar, Diola, and Mandinka

Poverty > 63% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day, and about 22% of the population lives in severe poverty, or less than \$1 per day. On average, citizens of Senegal can expect to live to age 56 and earn about \$700 a year.

Education > 63% of primary school-aged children attend school, up from 43% in 1991. The percentage of first-grade students who remain in school through grade five, however, has dropped from 85% in 1991 to 78%. Adult literacy stands at 40%.

Health > Fewer children are dying before their fifth birthday: 137 out of 1000 now compared with 279 of 1000 in 1970. About 75% of the population has access to clean water.

History > The Republic of Senegal is the westernmost country in Africa. In ancient times this region was part of empires based in what is now Ghana and Mali, and it became predominantly Muslim in the 11th century. Starting in the 15th century, European traders arrived and launched the slave trade out of Dakar. France consolidated its power in the late 17th century. Senegal became independent in 1960, and the well-known poet Leopold Senghor became its first president. His Socialist Party ruled until 2000, when Abdoulaye Wade won the presidential election and assumed power—one of the few peaceful transitions of power in postcolonial Africa. An armed separatist group in the Casamance region has clashed with the government intermittently since 1982. This conflict ended in 2005 with the signing of a peace agreement.



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Women as Peace Builders

Oxfam's **Coco McCabe** reports from Ethiopia on women speaking out against violence, reasserting their authority, and leading peace efforts.

The red earth outside Tato Boru's round, mud-walled hut is tamped hard with the comings and goings of goats and family members. One could imagine that other visitors must beat a frequent path to her door, too, not just for her warmth but for her counsel.

Tato Boru, 48 and the mother of five children, is a peacemaker.

One day last summer, lithe and wrapped in a yellow shawl, she skidded down the path from her hut, known as a *tukul*, to meet an old friend, a peace practitioner

from the Research Center for Civic and Human Rights Education (RCCHE), based in Addis Ababa. In a rapid-fire greeting, she showered him with shoulder taps—not the usual two or three, but five ebullient bumps—and then invited him and a second visitor back to her *tukul* for a talk.

Talk is what women are good at. Everybody knows that. But now, with encouragement from RCCHE, women around Moyale are bringing their communication skills back to a task that was traditionally theirs: peace building. And at the head of this

“We teach them, by recognizing the mounting number of deaths, to sympathize with each other and not to kill each other with fiery bullets,” says Tato Boru of the peace-building work she has undertaken in villages on the Ethiopian border with Kenya. “If we sympathize with each other, the coming generation will be educated and our future hope will be ensured.”



local initiative—standing out in a culture where men are the recognized leaders—is Boru: unflinching and intense. She leads the Moyale-area women’s peace council, which RCCHE, an Oxfam America partner, helped to found.

Here, near the Kenyan border, many people make their living as herders. Droughts plague the region frequently, and their consequences—shriveled pasture and water sources sucked dry—are particularly severe for families of herders and their animals, as they depend on those resources for survival. Tension over shortages can trigger disputes, as can concern about land demarcation lines drawn by the government. Add guns to the mix, and conflicts quickly turn lethal. Over the years, fighting in the area around Moyale has taken many lives.

One of several similar committees, the council Boru heads advocates for peaceful coexistence among the different ethnic groups in the region and helps mediate between them when conflicts start to simmer. There are also councils for young adults and village elders.

Giving an example of how her group works, Boru told about a recent dispute that erupted when a group of Somalis settled in a nearby village predominantly occupied by Gabra.

“There was a stone attack, and there were a few gunshots, but no one was hurt. We felt it was time for our intervention,” she said. “We went...and told them that land is the gift of God and we all can share it.”

““Before this, we weren’t in a position to disclose our feeling about conflict,” said Boru. “We simply suffered with it. But now, we’ve got a chance to speak on peace and work on it. Our awareness and participation bring change.””

Accompanied by members from the other two councils, the women urged the sparing groups not to resort to violence but to engage in discussions first and, if that didn’t work, to take the matter to court. In the heat of disputes like this, council members try to visit the troubled village at

least once a week. As things cool down, they cut back their visits to one a month.

Raising awareness is one of the key objectives of the peace council, and something its members take on regularly in both formal and informal settings. Occasionally, the women will ask community officials to organize a gathering of local people at which the council will then make a presentation. Other times, community events, such as weddings, can serve as opportunities for peace teachings.

Recovering Traditional Roles

Peace initiatives like these are helping women reclaim a degree of authority that was once theirs—and that gun-fueled violence has severely eroded. With RCCHE’s help, women are now speaking out about the suffering that armed conflicts shower on their families. They are finding a voice and sharing their burdens of loss and sadness.

“Before this, we weren’t in a position to disclose our feeling about conflict,” said Boru. “We simply suffered with it. But now, we’ve got a chance to speak on peace and work on it. Our awareness and participation bring change.”

Traditionally, women in some of the Oromo ethnic groups served as peace messengers, said Dawit Guteta, a project officer for RCCHE. Approaching enemy turf, they carried a treasured stick known as a *lichu*, which signaled readiness to end hostilities. The *lichu* messengers enjoyed great respect, and upon their arrival community members would slaughter animals in the women’s honor.

The warring groups, which battled with spears and shields, would then participate in a series of rituals to seal their reconciliation.

Women also played a role in preventing conflicts from erupting, said Guteta.



▲ “One of our strategies is raising awareness of people whenever we get the opportunity,” says peace practitioner Dawit Guteta (see profile on page 13) with pen and pad in hand. This peace circle was one of two he convened that day among families scattered in the Arero hills of southern Ethiopia. Violence in their villages had forced them to flee.

If they saw men getting ready for battle, village women would come together and shout, holding sticks known as *sinqes*.

“Men often do not dare to override such peace appeals from their women counterparts,” Guteta said. But all of that changed when the arms tap started to gush, flooding the region with guns and death.

“After the introduction of guns, every male member of the community—young, adult, and even old—ended up as fighters. Women faced unbearable confusion on how to discharge their peacekeeping roles,” said Guteta.

“Arms change the power dynamics,” said Muthoni Muriu, Oxfam America’s director of regional programs. “When you have a gun, that power releases you from respecting your traditional ways of fighting.”

And as those traditions disappeared, so, too, did the old ways of restoring peace—until now.

“In the late 90s, there was an awakening to the value of traditional conflict resolution methods,” said Muriu. “That’s when the role of women in peace building really came onstage.”

The Toll Armed Conflict Takes

It’s a role that is rightfully theirs: Women bear the brunt of hardship when violence rips through a community, leaving husbands dead, homes in ashes, and livestock looted.

“They lose fathers, brothers, and sons,” said Boru, seated on a low stool in the cocoonlike quiet of her tukul. “They take care of the wounded, the children, the animals. Even if they don’t die, they have to shoulder so many of the burdens—the horror.”

As she spoke, Boru’s young grandson wandered into the tukul and leaned against her. She wrapped her arms around him and planted a series of kisses on his neck—a grandmother’s instinctive way of coping with the uncertainties of the future. She listed her own losses. Her father, her brother, and four uncles are all dead, she said, her eyes fiery. So, too, are her father-in-law and brother-in-law.

The toll is profound.

“When there is no peace, you cannot look after your cattle. You can’t plow your farms. You can’t care for children,” said Boru. “We cannot live without peace.”

Mako Dalecha, another member of the peace council, knows this, too, and talks with her five children about how to live peacefully with others.

“We believe that children learn from their parents at home,” she said the next day, seated on the porch of RCCHE’s office on a busy, dusty street in Moyale.

And what of the older generation? How do these ideas from RCCHE about making

connections with other groups, openly confronting suspicions, and feeling empathy for each other—all the hard work of peace building—sit with her parents?

“My father has died, and my mother is elderly,” said Dalecha, hinting at the bedrock of tradition that can be hard to change. “She is not the kind of woman to teach on peace.”

Still, there is acknowledgment among men in this patriarchal culture that women bring something unique to peace work.

“They are better than men,” said Boru Roba, a man and the leader of a peace committee for elders.

“Women can play both a fueling role and a cooling role in conflict,” added another man, Galma Roba, a representative for traditional leaders. “If men prepare for conflict and women interject, the men might change their minds.”

Highlighting the awful consequences of conflict—the death, the destruction—against the broad benefits of peace is at the core of the women’s strategy. It’s an argument few can refute.

“When we try to sensitize them on the importance of peace, there is no man who opposes us,” said Dalecha. “Peace—and rain—are the basis for life in our area.”



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The AK-47: “The world’s favourite killing machine”

- > There are between 50 million and 70 million AK-47s in the world.
- > The AK-47 can be fired at a rate of 600 bullets per minute.
- > An AK-47 can be bought for as little as \$30 in parts of Africa.
- > The first Kalashnikov rifle was invented by Mikhail Kalashnikov, and its first incarnation was the AK-47, named to coincide with the year of its entry into active service, 1947.
- > Variants of the Kalashnikov rifle have been produced in at least 14 countries.
- > AK-47s, or their derivatives, are found in the state arsenals of at least 82 countries.



SOURCE: 2006. “The AK-47: The world’s favourite killing machine”. Control Arms briefing note. Full text at www.oxfamamerica.org/AK-47

Dawit Guteta

Role > “Peace practitioner”

Partner organization >
Research Center for Civic and
Human Rights Education (RCCHE)

Home country > Ethiopia

Writer: Coco McCabe

His head tilted back, the hint of a smile about his lips, Dawit Guteta is listening—intently. It’s a characteristic pose, the stance of someone who often shoulders bad news and searches for the nugget of good that can come out of it. A project officer for RCCHE, an Oxfam partner in Ethiopia, Guteta prefers to call himself a peace practitioner. That is, after all, what he does as he travels the bumpy, dusty distances between villages in the heart of “the conflict triangle”—a remote, drought-prone area where Ethiopia meets Kenya and Somalia, and where violence triggered by political pressures and the punishing climate has all too often resulted in death. That has changed significantly since RCCHE set up shop in southern Ethiopia in 2000.

Guteta isn’t interested only in what appears on the surface, but what stirs beneath. It’s the state of the human heart that seems to matter to him most in this delicate work that he does.

From the simplest of offices—two sparsely furnished rooms in a low building on a central street in Moyale where the electricity doesn’t come on until noon—Guteta works with men, women, and young adults to foster understanding among different ethnic groups. Sometimes that means visits to troubled areas, notebook in hand, to gather facts. Other times, it means facilitating workshops with local leaders. And always it means patient listening.

A former rural schoolteacher, Guteta isn’t interested only in what appears on the surface, but what stirs beneath. It’s the state of the human heart that seems to matter to him most in this delicate work that he does.

“This is not a bad man,” he says of a beefy town administrator—perhaps to counter a listener’s suspicion that the official’s suit seems too fine for his modest post.

“A peace-minded man. A respectful kind of man,” he says of another, a herder whose lean frame hints at a life of hardship.

Traveling with only a small black bag containing a few possessions—one of them a cell phone, his link to the high-tech world he also frequents—Guteta, 30, misses little on his treks between

villages. He notes the places where drought has not yet ruined patches of good pasture. He calculates the kilometers women must walk to fetch their water. He confronts the sickness and hunger among people displaced by violence and admits, simply, that it leaves him with a broken heart. But you would never know. On this mission to mend communities frayed by guns and the madness they feed, Guteta has no time for despondency.

One gray day in July, on a scrubby hillside in the Arero district north of Moyale, Guteta found what he had come looking for: a settlement of tiny huts made of branches and dead leaves. For the past month, that parched place, strewn with dung and sharp stones, had been home for a handful of families—some of the 700 who had fled a conflict among different ethnic groups.

Guteta gathered some of these villagers into a small circle—a peace circle, he called it. The group included one man with a gun slung over his shoulder, which served as a blunt reminder of the horrors they were all trying to escape.

Patiently, Guteta recorded their stories, the first step in sowing peace. Gathering facts would help to open a dialogue between the groups that were fighting—the Boren, the Gebre, the Guji. Later, Guteta would use those facts to facilitate a consensus-building workshop among the groups’ leaders.

When all had been told, Guteta stood. Speaking in Oromifa, the local language, he reminded them of the most important thing they had said as they tried to make sense of what had gone wrong among groups of people who had lived and worked together in the past: “The Guji and the Boren are brothers.” Common ties had helped them weather other struggles, and could serve as the foundation for peace once again.

As he left the hillside, tramping through the dust to the rutted road that had brought him to that place, Guteta, his face serene, may have been thinking about the irony of a gun-toting militia man joining a circle of peace. But in that incongruity lies the heart of the lesson: Everyone has a role in building peace.

Editor’s note: As this magazine was going to press, we received word that Dawit Guteta had suddenly died. A passenger in a car traveling from Moyale—where his office was based—to Addis Ababa, Dawit Guteta was killed in a crash. We mourn his death deeply.



Zimbabwe: When Enough Is Enough

In a country that has suffered long-term political strife, Oxfam's **Chris Hufstader** tells how one organization brought opponents together to stop political violence.

Tina Malowa was 14 when she fought in the war to liberate Zimbabwe from white rule in the late 1970s. Now middle-aged, she still has the fierce eyes of a girl who came of age as a guerilla fighter, and has unwavering faith in the ruling political party. "I did not see why there should be an opposition political party," she recalls. "I saw the opposition as people who wanted to grab the country away from us, and return [it] to the white people.... As long as someone belonged to the opposition party—it did not matter if they were my neighbor or even a sibling—I would not tolerate them."

Such lingering hard-line attitudes led to widespread political violence during the 2000 and 2002 elections in Zimbabwe.

founded in 2000, helped eliminate much of the violence in just a couple of years. With funds from Oxfam America, ZIMCET established a network of local "peace committees" that have brought political opponents together to learn about non-violent conflict resolution.

These peace committees are led both by members of the ruling political party and their opponents. ZIMCET overcame the climate of distrust by keeping the focus on peace—something neither side could oppose. ZIMCET also cultivated strong relationships with local leaders, who encouraged the new peace committees.

One peace committee created a sports league for youth, many of whom were out of school and lacked employment, which

all the violence, and at times I find myself sobbing because I know I did some evil things. Things that...I really regret to this day." Her transformation has been both personal and political: "I realized that my thinking was all wrong.... In democratic societies, there is bound to be an opposition party."

Beside her, at a meeting in ZIMCET's Harare office, sits Simon Mapuvire, MDC district secretary for Manicaland. Once an opponent of Malowa's ZANU-PF Party, Mapuvire has also come a long way. "I was beating ZANU-PF people, and I was directing people to beat others. Then ZIMCET taught me that I was just beating my brothers and sisters. Now Tina is my friend and we work together, and I have thrown away that evil element in my head."

“Our peace committees help people change their attitude toward each other,” Chimhini says. “They now say, ‘Never again...! We will never beat or kill just for an election.’”

A 2000 human rights report described a typical incident: A truck transporting people to a party meeting was run off the road and attacked by members of another political group armed with AK-47s and iron bars. While most of the victims of the attack fled, two were trapped in the truck when it was firebombed, and they died on the road moments later.

Thankfully, today there is considerably less political violence, and one of the groups that have made change possible is the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET). According to Executive Director David Chimhini, the organization,

made it easy to get caught up in violence. Another committee concentrated on cultural events. But ZIMCET's main accomplishment has been to help people acknowledge their mistakes and learn to forgive one another. "Our peace committees help people change their attitude toward each other," Chimhini says. "They now say, 'Never again...! We will never beat or kill just for an election.'"

The process has not been easy. Malowa was a much-feared political operative, but after attending training sessions with ZIMCET, her perspective changed. "Sometimes I sit down and think about





When people are blocked from opportunity, they often need to change laws, customs, and policies. Without these changes, the battle against poverty cannot be won. Oxfam's economic and political analyses help transform the thinking of powerful decision makers.

Control Arms Campaign

Brief overview > In October 2003, Oxfam and its allies launched the global Control Arms campaign. The campaign focuses on promoting an international treaty that would regulate government-to-government arms transfers. The Arms Trade Treaty would stop arms from being sold to those likely to misuse them.

In October 2006, the UN voted to start work on an Arms Trade Treaty, with more than 116 countries agreeing to co-sponsor a resolution and 139 voting in favor of it. Although a number of countries abstained from voting, the US was the only country to vote against the resolution in the first committee.

The resolution commits the UN to establish a group of governmental experts to develop the foundations for a legal agreement that will ensure "common standards for the import, export, and transfer of conventional arms." This treaty will have a real impact on the arms trade, and will ultimately prevent weapons from ending up in the hands of human rights abusers and fueling conflict and poverty. Many countries are unable to tackle the problem of poverty when weapons violence dominates everyday life.

"The international community has thrown a lifeline to millions of people, particularly those from poor, developing countries who have suffered from uncontrolled import, export, and transfer of conventional arms," said Ambassador Ochieng Adala, senior program officer for the Africa Peace Forum.

Allies > Oxfam is working on the Control Arms campaign with Amnesty International and the International Action Network on Small Arms.

control arms

Recent in-country success > In June 2006, Oxfam America's organizers and partner organizations in West Africa celebrated their own arms control victory. The Economic Community of West African States announced that it had approved a new law designed to stop the illegal trafficking of weapons in the region. The law makes permanent a 1998 temporary moratorium on the weapons trade in West Africa and ensures that there are consequences for those countries that fail to uphold the legally binding agreement. In West Africa alone, the illegal arms trade has contributed to more than two million deaths during the past decade.

Campaigner's profile > As part of the Control Arms campaign, Oxfam activists around the world gathered more than one million signatures in 170 countries calling for a global Arms Trade Treaty. Eva Kouka, an Oxfam campaigner in Senegal, organized "anti-arms brigades" of students, community members, and local celebrities who gathered one-third of the total signatures for the petition—the most signatures from any single country.

"Since I am from Casamance, [Senegal], I could see the need for this work to ban illegal arms. The region where I grew up was in conflict for more than 20 years, and I wanted to contribute to solving the problem," she said.

"The popular support around the world demonstrates the need to control the arms trade and violence that has ravaged so many poor communities. I'm proud to be part of the team that brought the right people together to create this change."

Writer: Andrea Perera

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For more information about the Control Arms campaign or to sign the Million Faces petition calling for a global arms trade treaty, go to www.controlarms.org.





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