

ASSOCIATION MODESTE ET INNOCENT (AMI)



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BEST PRACTICE FILE

PROMOTING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION THROUGH "AMATABA" APPROACH



"What binds us is more important than what divides us"

PROMOTING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION THROUGH « AMATABA » APPROACH

VALIDITY OF BEST PRACTICE	TESTIMONIES
<p>These practices help social groups experiencing division and violent antagonism, tensions, fear, hatred, and distrust to progressively improve their relations and recreate a harmonious cohabitation.</p> <p>Experience has shown that bringing people back together in such circumstances requires a judicious combination of sensitization activities as well as trainings accompanied by follow up and mentoring, which triggers a deep individual and social transformation. As far as AMATABA approach is concerned, sessions of sensitization and training in The Right Inner Power and UBUNTU (inner state characterized by goodness), and in the theory and practice of a person in the right position « IMPAGARIKE » are indispensable factors of a successful AMATABA approach.</p>	<p><i>«During the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, I took part in the murder of this woman’s son. Thanks to AMATABA group, of which we are both members, I asked her for forgiveness for my vile deeds. She forgave me. Since then, our relationships keep improving. We support each other in all aspects of our everyday lives. If she needs drinking water, I fetch it for her and she uses it any suspicion. There is no suspicion between us anymore. Before I asked for forgiveness, I used to have nightmares. I could not sleep peacefully. But I sleep well now. When we are together, we behave like a brother and sister because we are free from fear and the burden of the tragic past that was weighing us down. (Comment made by an ex-prisoner who was convicted of the genocide crime)</i></p> <p><i>"He killed my son; He admitted his crime and came to me to ask for forgiveness after we both joined AMATABA GROUP. It was not easy for me to forgive him. But I saw the way he was crying and trembling with fear, and I took pity on him. I realized that he was truly repentant. I felt in me the strength to forgive him, and I did. I was touched by the way he admitted his crime. Before I forgave him, he could not get close to me. I treated him as my worst enemy. But now, I treat him like my own child." (Testimony of a woman who survived the genocide).</i></p>

STEPS OF THE APPROACH

STEP 1: Collecting and analyzing preliminary information on the situation of antagonism

Getting an idea of social groups that are experiencing antagonism in a given area (identifying the causes, effects and various the forms of divides). Questions such as « who, where, how, why and with what effects » help clarify this exploratory phase.

Step 2: Contacting stakeholders

- Contacting stakeholders to inform them of the initiative to reunite social groups in conflict.
- Explaining the AMATABA approach, its effectiveness and its social utility in order to gain acceptance and support from key actors within the community.

Step 3: Sensitization to the Right Inner Power

- Inviting members of social groups in conflict situations in collaboration with local authorities.
- Sensitizing guests in separate groups to the Right Inner power (In AMI'S experience, sensitization sessions for genocide survivors have always been conducted separately from those for ex-convicts for crimes of genocide)

The Right Inner Power refers to the ability to regain confidence and resilience in life, despite the tragic events that people experienced. It is also the unconditional acceptance of the other person, or non-exclusion, the ability to love unconditionally (even your enemy), to restore harmonious relations with others and to rediscover peaceful cohabitation for a better life.

- Volunteers who wish to deepen their personal and collective transformation process in order to restore social harmony register and set up an appointment with the facilitator for future sessions.

Step 4: Creating groups of volunteers

We organize a second separate sensitization session to the Right Inner Power with volunteers who registered for it. At this point, they reinforce one of the important keys to the Right Inner Power: the key of harmony. The teachings emphasize the importance of harmonious relationships within the integral well-being of a human being. The notions of reconciliation, forgiveness and healing are addressed at this level. At the end of the training, participants form groups of up to 20 people. Factors of proximity and gender parity are considered for the good dynamics of the group.

Step 5: Expressing one's negative perceptions about the other in writing

At this stage, the members of each group are invited to write down their perceptions (prejudices, negative opinions, stereotypes, etc.) as well as their feelings (fear, frustration, hate, grudge, etc.) about the antagonistic group. The goal of this practice is to identify factors that bridge the relationship gap that separates members from these antagonistic groups. The reconciliation process largely consists of bridging this gap by gradually dismantling these factors.

- There is freedom of speech, where everyone has the right to freely express their negative perceptions and feelings about the opposite social group in a protected framework. In this way, each group member expresses freely how he/ she perceives the other social group.

- Through brainstorming techniques, everything said is put in writing without debate, judgment, or censorship. All the "bad things" mentioned against the other group is recorded. The report preserves members' anonymity.

Step 6: Exchanging lists of perceptions and writing down reactions against them.

With the permission of each group of volunteers, the groups exchange their reports through the facilitator. Each group reads the list of perceptions from the opposed group and expresses its reaction on the content in writing. Experience has revealed that people generally tend to reject all or part of the negative perceptions of the opposite social group and label them as baseless or exaggerated. At this level, tensions and traumatic resurgence may increase because of what the other group said. The facilitator should be able to facilitate the management of emotions by using appropriate techniques, such as "Mpingagasaki" (relaxation and breathing exercises aiming at managing emotional overload). The facilitator then hands the report of each group's reactions to the opposed group.

Step 7: Face - to - face dialogue.

Based on the disagreements between members or serious problems that were raised, the facilitator proposes to both parties to meet face - to - face in order to discuss perceptions from both sides. In most cases, the facilitator will encounter a few cases of resistance that he will have to skillfully address. Those

meetings go through the following steps:

- Receiving volunteers from the antagonistic groups who took part in previous stages (The layout of the room and the seating arrangements are taken into account).
- A chat about empathetic listening, non-violent communication and guidelines of the protected space.
- In a plenary session, everyone expresses their feelings and opinions in relation to prejudices, accusations, negative opinions and feelings, and feedback that were stated in previous stages by the antagonistic side.
- Finally, in mixed small groups, the contextual problems and needs related to the prejudices and feelings expressed are jointly identified, shared in the plenary session, and then written down in a formal report.
- The results of the work in mixed subgroups make it possible to reach a consensus on the real problems that are at the root of the antagonism, how they can work together to solve those problems and which prejudices and negative opinions they need to overcome in order to live together peacefully.
- Face-to-face encounters can lead to traumatic crises. Therefore, the facilitator must take appropriate precautions in advance.
- Empathetic listening is part of the norms of the exchange space.

Step 8: Creation and operationalization of the reconciliation groups (AMATABA) in order to continue exchanges and initiate reconciliation activities.

- In order to keep up exchanges and work together to normalize social relations, members of antagonistic social groups form mixed groups of rapprochement and reconciliation composed of at least 40 people. They are key Vanguards of Unity and Reconciliation (Noyaux Générateurs d'Unité et Réconciliation /NGUR, in French) called "Amataba" in Kinyarwanda (plural of "Itaba" which means "flat space"). It is a metaphor referring to "flat spaces where people climbing down the mountains of violence and those climbing up from the valleys of hatred and misery meet and join efforts to achieve normalized social relations through dialogue and solidarity.

The AMATABA members elect a mixed and balanced committee of 6 people: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and two advisers. The Amataba group develops an action plan based on the social relations problems and needs that were identified in its area of influence. Later on, during subsequent sessions, the facilitator will assist the group in drafting internal regulations that will ensure harmonious functioning.

- To be fully operational, the AMATABA attend an extensive training in the Right Inner Power that focuses on 6 keys to the Right Inner Power: energy, synergy, harmony, maturity, creativity and fertility.

Step 9: Action and outreach of the AMATABA Group

With the facilitator's guidance, the AMATABA actions are subdivided into three main categories: Ad intra actions (*Directed towards the members of the AMATABA Group: activities aimed at reinforcing internal cohesion, socio-economic solidarity in order to improve the living conditions of the members. These*

initiatives are all the more important as they enable the reconciled group members to build new relationships based on both the memory of a divisive and tragic past and on a community of people with common interests in the present), ad extra actions (directed towards vulnerable members of the community who are not part of AMATABA groups, in the context of community outreach) and the multiplier actions that inspire other people to replicate their actions and bring the rest of the community to the path of reconciliation and harmonious cohabitation.

GENERAL CONTEXT FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE PROCESS

Based on experiences and lessons learned from more than 10 years of field work, AMI suggest that the AMATABA approach should be applied in a specific situation marked by three major features :

- Two social groups in a situation of open or latent antagonism during or after a period of conflict.
- Both groups have more or less strained relationships with each other as a result of a badly managed conflict that gave rise to various forms of violence.
- This relationship of rupture is characterized by a psychosocial climate of mistrust, harmful prejudices, fear and mutual rejection between the two social groups. This can lead to various forms of conflicts: agro-pastoral, interethnic, interfaith, etc. In some cases, one of the groups may be both a victim and perpetrator. Both groups may also be victims and perpetrators at the same time.

SUCCESS FACTORS/ CONDITIONS FOR REPLICATION

- *The good will of the authorities or, in some cases, community leaders and their commitment to peace.*
- *Strong commitment of some members of relevant social groups who serve as relay groups.*
- *Availability of competent facilitators who are able to facilitate the mediation and management of social tensions, to provide trainings in the Right Inner Power and in the management of group dynamics, and to regularly assist the AMATABA groups.*
- *Long-term vision and action*
- *Availability of material and financial means.*
- *An approach that can adapt to culture.*