
Report from Kenya - August 23, 2011
AVP Soars with Youth in Turbo Division

Dear Friends,

Yesterday Getry Agizah, coordinator for Friends Church Peace Teams (FCPT), Gladys Kamonya, my wife, and I met with thirty-one youth apprentice AVP facilitators who are conducting workshops in Turbo Division. Here in Africa "youth" means anyone under thirty-five years of age.

Hot-spot Turbo Division is where AGLI and FCPT have been putting a lot of effort since the 2008 post election violence. Our goal now is to prevent renewed violence during the August 2012 election campaign. There are seven locations in Turbo Division and we started by doing two basic AVP workshops in each location. This was followed by one advanced workshop in each location. Lastly, there was a three day Training for Facilitators at the newly renovated Lugari Yearly Meeting Peace House for forty-five of the best participants who are now apprentice AVP Facilitators.

Then the apprentice AVP facilitators - with the help of a lead facilitator - conducted four basic apprentice workshops in each location. Altogether over 1400 youth in Turbo Division have now participated in an AVP workshop.

What did we learn about these apprentice workshops with the new youth facilitators during our visit?

In each location the first apprentice workshops were difficult. The apprentice facilitators had to recruit participants to attend the workshops with a goal of 25 participants. Since AVP does not pay the customary sitting allowance for attending a workshop, potential participants were reluctant to come. The first workshop usually then

had only sixteen to twenty participants. The inexperienced facilitators were naturally quite nervous.

Over time word got out so that by the third and fourth workshop, the facilitators were having too many participants. Those who were invited would bring along a friend or two and soon there were up to sixty youth wanting to participate. The new facilitators did not want to send people away, but doing an experiential workshop with so many participants destroys some of the essence of the workshop. In Rwanda, AVP facilitators once thought that they could put thirty participants in a workshop, but soon realized that AVP lost some of its effectiveness -- they returned to workshops with twenty participants.

So what did they do? In some cases, they were able to send some of the youth home with the understanding that they could come to the next workshop. In the case where there were sixty participants, they divided into two workshops -- but there was only the same food for the twenty-five that were planned. The food budget had to be stretched, but as with the loaves and fishes this seemed to work. In another case, when the fourth workshop had too many participants, those who were invited agreed to donate food for an extra workshop for those who were unable to attend. When Getry visited this extra workshop on the last day, she found that at 5:00 PM they were still going strong (and wanting more) even though they had not eaten for the whole day! Getry provided a soda and some bread for the participants.

They have called these additional workshops "voluntary workshops" in that the participants bring the food, obtain the meeting space, and home stays for the facilitators (who meet each night to debrief and plan for the next day's activities). AGLI/FCPT only provides the lead facilitator and the materials for a cost of about \$50 per workshop. Already by the time of our meeting, the apprentice facilitators had conducted two voluntary workshops and had eleven more planned. I expect that they will arrange for even more after this.

I asked them if they were getting only youth who had not participated in the violence. Their answer was a resounding "no." A good number of the participants had confessed that they had participated in the violence and at least one admitted to killing someone. One basic AVP workshop turns these violent youth around and they have committed themselves to being peaceful during the upcoming election cycle.

A number of older people thought that there should be workshops for older people. They felt that they also needed AVP. At least one older person thought that he should be trained as an AVP facilitator.

Roughly half the facilitators and half of the participants were women -- a difficult goal to reach in the African context.

September 21 is World Peace Day as proclaimed by the United Nations. In Turbo Division there is going to be a celebration with a walk from each direction. The AVP youth leaders have been asked to participate and organize those youth who have taken AVP. We will see how they respond and what activities they will plan.

In summary, AGLI/FCPT took a most difficult area to work on violence prevention. When we began, many people were negative about the response we would receive in Turbo Division. On the contrary, the response has exceeded even my usually optimistic forecast. My conclusion is: **"People are often violent because peacemakers have not made the necessary effort to reach and teach them."**

If you would like to sponsor a voluntary AVP workshop, send \$50 to Friends Peace Team/AGLI, 1001 Park Avenue, St Louis, MO 63104 with a notation of "AVP in Turbo, Kenya."

Thanks,
Dave

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