

Topic 1: Developing an awareness of Ubuntu values within Burundian communities

Developing an awareness of Ubuntu values within Burundian communities.

'Ubuntu' is a fundamental value system embraced by both Burundi society and is at the core of the policy of the non-governmental organisation, Centre Ubuntu. This value system is also the basis of this factsheet. It is Centre Ubuntu's belief that a revival of the Ubuntu value system will help reconstruct local communities, institutions and the society, which have been traumatised. The discussion of values helps to create greater awareness of how we behave, and what we would like to achieve. The starting point of these discussions is that we should treat others, as we want to be treated. The Ubuntu values of: 'respect', 'care', 'compassion', 'love', 'solidarity', 'sharing', 'reconciliation', and 'reciprocity' form a guide, but the challenge is translating these values into ethical practice.

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1. Goals of Topic 1: Values

To raise the awareness of the population of the values of Ubuntu and encourage them to adopt behaviours and attitudes that will lead to strong individuals and strong communities. This is done through the use of Narrative Theatre, as well as all other community based activities.

Through Narrative Theatre, opportunities are created where people can meet and examine their problems together. They can discuss their experiences through an exchange of stories, can experiment with possible solutions and decide ways to move forward. The stories they discuss can change from hopelessness and helplessness, to stories of strength, dignity and working for a better future. Norms and values can become visible and renegotiated, and this can in turn contribute to collective problem solving.

Narrative Theatre aims to stimulate people not just to tell their stories, but to also act them out. By acting the stories out, people are encouraged to look at what is happening from different angles, and from a certain distance. As a result, the powerful effect that problems can have on people's lives can be put into a bigger picture. This can create new perspectives and restore hope. In using people's own life stories, we ensure that social norms and values that apply in that specific community are upheld, and nothing is imported from outside.

When problems have been around for a long time, people often forget that they also have abilities and talents that they have used in other situations, in the past. It is the role of the facilitator to remind them of these. Ultimately, we want people's strengths to stand out so that they can find new, creative ways of solving their problems. By discussing the problems occurring in daily life, while also reminding them of their strength, abilities and talents, opportunities are created for deeper thinking and understanding of both the problem, and the possible solutions. This is called reflection, meaning thinking through a matter while looking at it from different perspectives. This approach allows working with the problem based story to use people's strength to find a solution. Ultimately, the problem based story can then develop into, or be replaced by, a story based on the strengths people have identified in themselves and their community. In other words, it becomes a strength based story.

2. Concept of Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a classical African concept following a humanist philosophy, describing the kindness and connectedness felt between, or within, humanity. It is an expression of the African world philosophy from

Sub Saharan Africa that finds its origin in the Bantu languages of South Africa.

The word Ubuntu is not easy to translate, but it has spread beyond its original languages. It is used to express a relationship between the individual and the community. According to Desmond Tutu, *'someone showing Ubuntu is open and available to others, because he is aware of belonging to something greater'*.

We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another. In truth, we are all connected, and what you do affects the whole world/community.

General meaning

Ubuntu is an ancient African word meaning *'humanity to others'*. It also means *'I am what I am because of who we all are.'* Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. When you have this quality – *Ubuntu* – you are known for your generosity.

Ubuntu is also a constant awareness, *'the other'* represents a value to be respected in the same way as yourself; *'I am because we are,' 'You are, therefore I am,' 'Without the other I am nothing, together we are one'*, and finally, *'Ico udashakab bakugirira ntukigirire Abandi'* meaning *'What you don't want to done to you, don't do to others'*.

Examples

The following are examples that have come from participants' understanding of Ubuntu:

- *Ubuntu* is an individual, and at the same time, a collective conscience, an age-old wisdom.

Sharing food together



(Alphonse Twite)

- *Ubuntu* or a way of being;
- *Ubuntu* is a virtue, a good human conduct commonly called the nobility of the heart;
- *Ubuntu* is spirituality;
- *Ubuntu* is a vision life, the world, and of our destiny;
- *Ubuntu* is humanism, ‘I am because you are’;
- *Ubuntu* is a philosophy of living, and of living together;

These sorts of values become particularly important in countries where there has been conflict or war. Reconciliation and (re)building the social fabric of a community (in Burundi) is based on the understanding of *Ubuntu* as a foundation. The concept of *Ubuntu* has been debated in the South African court, resulting in the following understanding that *Ubuntu*:

- Dictates that a high value be placed on the life of a human being;
- Is inextricably linked to the values of, and which places a high premium on, dignity, compassion, humanity and respect for the humanity of another;
- Dictates a shift from confrontation to mediation and conciliation;
- Is to be contrasted with vengeance;
- Dictates good attitudes and shared concern;
- Favours the re-establishment of harmony in the relationship between parties, and that such harmony should restore the dignity of the plaintiff without ruining the defendant;
- Favours restorative rather than retributive justice;
- Operates in a direction favouring reconciliation rather than estrangement of disputants;
- Works towards sensitising a disputant or a defendant in litigation to the hurtful impact of his actions to the other party, and towards changing such conduct rather than merely punishing the disputant;
- Promotes mutual understanding rather than punishment;
- Favours face-to-face encounters of disputants with a view to facilitating differences being resolved, rather than conflict and victory for the most powerful;
- Favours civility and civilised dialogue based on mutual tolerance.

Virtues

Centre *Ubuntu* believes that the fundamental virtues give humans their “humanity” include the following:

- Respect and obedience to others;
- Respect for the law;

- Wisdom;
- Love of work;
- Kindness;
- Merciful and compassionate (*imbazi*);
- Generosity;
- Friendliness;
- Respectful of your own dignity and that of others;
- Thoughtfulness;
- Care;
- To be fair, honest and upright in conduct;
- Helpful and social;
- Self-control;
- Patience.

All of these qualities contribute to the collective fulfilment of individuals, and the world. They also make someone useful to herself/himself, and to others.

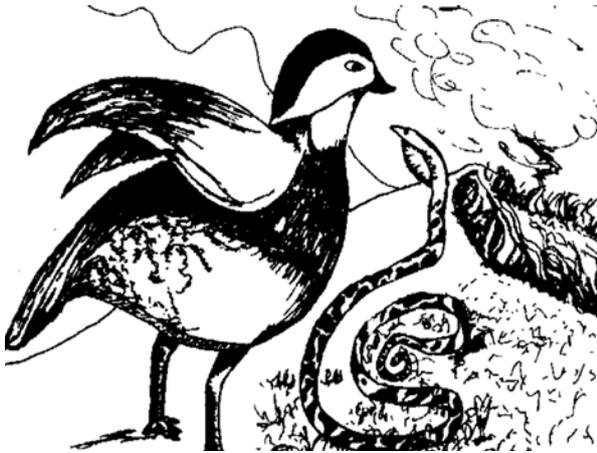
2.1 An example illustrating the *Ubuntu* value system

The following story is an example of how *Ubuntu* values are taught to youngsters in Burundi.

During the long dry season, animals will often go into the forest to find food. Like all other animals, the horned snake named Francis also decided to search for food and leave his shelter. That day he passed by a recently cleared field. It was hard to move because of the felled trees, tangled bushes and strong vines. When he was crawling in the middle of the field, a farmer came to set fire to the bush to make room for planting crops. The crackle of flames alerted the snake. “Fire! What can I do?” he asked. He tried to escape to the north, then to the south, but the fire kept approaching and surrounded him on all sides. Faced with this hopeless situation, the snake expected that he would die and started to cry in despair.

A partridge, who watched the insects fleeing the fire, heard the complaints of the reptile. Boldly, she flew into the circle of flames. “Friend snake,” said the partridge, “I heard your cries. I am going to get you out of here.” When they were far away from the flames, partridge asked the snake to free his neck and wished him good voyage. But the snake, would not listen. “Let go of my neck,” cried partridge. “Let go of my neck!” The snake let go, but quickly wound himself around the legs of the bird and said he was hungry and was going to swallow him. “How ungrateful my friend snake” said Partridge, “you reward me like this for the favour I did for you?” “I love partridge meat a lot, I escaped death and to celebrate this happy event, I want to feast.” Taking the tail in his mouth, he began to swallow the bird. Horrified, the bird suddenly flew off. When he came above the inferno, he shook his tail and the snake fell down and collapsed in the fire.

The Snake and the Partridge



(Alphonse Twite)

From this story came a proverb: “The ungrateful explodes in the backlash.”

Exercise 1: Sharing

After sharing the story above, hold a group discussion based on some of the following questions:

1. What was the attitude and behaviour of the snake and the partridge?
2. What do you think about that?
3. Discuss how human beings are different from animals.
4. Are there people like either of these characters in the communities?
5. Why do you think our ancestors thought it was important to tell this story to their children?

Based on these discussions, more detailed group exchanges can occur.

Exercise 2: Deeper understanding of the Ubuntu value system

The best way to do this is through an interactive dialogue with the committee members.

The facilitator introduces the following questions:

1. What is your understanding of Ubuntu as a value system?
2. List some of the values associated with the Ubuntu value system.
3. How are Ubuntu values expressed in the local community?
4. Discuss the foundation and meaning of the Ubuntu value system.

Some of the possible answers generated by participants during a training session are listed below. You

can generate a separate list within your own group.

- The love of self and others;
- A respectful way of living, speaking, walking, dressing, etc;
- To be generous and compassionate;
- A gift from God that determines the life of human beings:
- The identity of human beings;
- Something we give to ourselves.

3. Explanation of various values

3.1 Human values

Human values are a set of ethics that can be translated into different attitudes and behaviours. Human values are shared among social groups, communities and all people. Displaying behaviours and attitudes congruent to our shared human values is encouraged, as it leads to greater harmony and care for those who are vulnerable.

In principal, human values are considered universal, although there are socio-cultural nuances that are mostly expressed in cultural habits and behaviours. We can distinguish several types of human values, for example cultural values, personal values and religious values. Cultural values tend to be shared by most members of the group and are expressed through cultural practices. This may include the way people eat, dress or use symbols. Personal values provide an internal reference for what is good, beneficial, impor-

Sharing traditional stories with youngsters to depart Ubuntu values



(Alphonse Twite)

TRANSLATION OF TEXT BALLOONS: LEFT: I HAVE A RIDDLE. RIGHT: PLEASE EXPRESS IT.

tant, useful, beautiful, desirable, and constructive. Religious values are expressed in religious ceremonies, but also in following certain rules of behaviour. In daily life there can be considerable overlap between these different types of values.

Human values form a guideline for individual and group behaviour that is meant to lead to more peaceful lives, and a foundation for people to be strong together. If values are not adhered to it could give rise to behaviour that may be harmful to individuals and communities. It can include: frustration, rebellion, selfishness, dishonesty, insensitivity and violence.

Sometimes people have contradicting values. For example, a person is caught stealing from a neighbour. He later explains that he only did this in order to support his three children, and his wife who is ill. There is no food in the home and everyone is hungry. This person is experiencing a personal conflict of values; respecting the property of others (his neighbours) and caring for others (his wife and children). He is trying to care for his family, but with the consequence of disrespect and causing harm to others.

Stealing is a bad behaviour, so even though the person was trying to provide for his family, there were more appropriate ways to do this. Firstly, it is common for Burundians to turn to other family members, neighbours or friends for help. He could have asked for the support of others, whether in monetary form or food. The person may have also sought a small job to gain money, perhaps with the request of having to feed his family quickly. These more appropriate behaviours that display the values of respecting and caring better. Thus, there are multiple actions and behaviours that one can choose from that display Ubuntu values. It is the responsibility of the person to judge, which behaviours/actions are most appropriate, and provide a guide to others.

4. Other rights

In addition to the human values of Ubuntu, we also see other rights that must be respected, consistently by all. Human values are one of the necessary tools to enable better understanding, and ensure respect, for human rights.

In summary, these rights are as follows:

- *Fundamental rights:* All human beings are entitled to life, freedom, equality, security and the protection of the law.
- No human being should be submitted to slavery, servitude, torture, cruel treatment and arbitrary detention.

- *The right to work:* the worker is entitled to work, earn decent wages and to belong to, and be represented by, a trade union.
- *General rights:* Every being has the right to food, clothing, shelter and medical care.
- *The rights of citizens:* within a country every citizen is entitled to a private life, honour, freedom of movement and freedom of residence.
- *Political rights:* freedom of assembly, access to public jobs, the right to vote, appeal to the court, and freedom of association.
- *The rights of the family:* marriage, equality of sexes, and protection by the state, motherhood, and child protection.
- *The rights of the individual:* freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, property rights and the presumption of innocence.

In Burundi culture these rights are connected with the ideas below.

Humans have responsibilities and obligations towards themselves, other people, as well as animals and plants. A human being is a special, extraordinary creature, and at the Centre Ubuntu, we believe that God has created humans and therefore they must be respected and treated with dignity. 'One life is not superior to another'. Where there is solidarity, there is unity and coherence in diversity and tolerance. The right to life goes together with the duty to protect ones own life, and that of others. Rights are inseparable from duty. What you want and demand from others, you also have to do for others.

Exercise 3: On solidarity

The story below illustrates the concept of solidarity, which is very important within Burundi communities.

There was a rich man, who despised and denigrated others. He did not participate in community work or family celebrations, even funerals. The only thing that mattered to him was money. One day he lost a close family member and no one came to support him, or see what had happened. They did not come to the funeral, or to the mourning. One exception was that everyone did hurry to bring him beer, but would then leave again without waiting to attend the ceremonies. The neighbours hurled insults at him, saying that his money was all that mattered to him. Unlike others, they did not feel the need to provide any other support, since he seemed to only value material support.

Explanation of the story:

Humans are different to animals



(Alphonse Twite)

TRANSLATION OF TEXT BALLOONS: LEFT: DEAR RAT, I WISH YOU A HAPPY NEW YEAR 2011. RIGHT: AND YOU MY DEAR CAT, IT IS TIME TO SHARE GOOD TIME AND SORROWS.

Humans are born free and equal. They have an ability to reason and a conscience and should behave in a spirit of togetherness. In practice it means that people should behave like brothers and sisters towards each other. People are intrinsically joined together by mutually dependant relationships, and it helps if there is unity and harmony.

Attitudes and behaviour related to solidarity:

- Being communicative;
- Seeking advice;
- Spirit of sharing;
- Being available to others;
- Spirit of brotherhood;
- Being compassionate.

5. Pillars of Ubuntu values according to way it is implemented by Centre Ubuntu in Burundi

5.1 Ubuntu is a gift of God (1st pillar)

Ubuntu values are rooted within the local communities, and are connected to their basic beliefs. In order to increase awareness of these beliefs, these topics can be addressed in the exercise below.

Essence of humanity

All people belong to humankind. People did not create this belonging, or fight for it; they are born with it and die with it, and cannot get rid of it. Even if they become a criminal, they continue to be human, and deserving of their rights.

It is important to invoke the issue of human rights to

increase awareness of respect of the laws, rights and duties inherent in these rights. These topics contribute to the understanding of the 'essence of humanity'.

Exercise 4. On the essence of human beings.

To facilitate the discussion participants can be asked to differentiate between human and animal behaviour.

Brainstorming Activity: What is a human being?

In our group meetings, the following elements came up for discussion:

In Burundi, many people believe that God has created humans and animals. People have legs and arms, so has a dog, animals have a brain, so have humans. Humans have enemies, so do animals. Discuss with each other what the difference between being human and being an animal is.

5.2 Dignity (2nd pillar)

Exercise 5: On dignity

Brainstorming activity: What is it to have dignity? And what is it to show dignity for others?

The following story may serve as an illustration to start the group discussion.

In Bujumbura's central market, the mother of a child was humiliated by passers-by because her dress was short. Boys carrying goods had thrown rotten avocados her, screaming, 'it is undignified for a mother to dress like her daughters!'

Based on this, and other stories, the following elements arose that proved to be very relevant to understand dignity.

Respect for yourself and others

Dignity is having and showing respect for yourself and others. 'Burihabwa Ubuntu', meaning 'we give Ubuntu'. Respect for self and others demands respect for both our rights as exhibited in the following behaviours and attitudes.

Behaviours and attitudes

- Behave with common sense and moderation;
- Behave in a thoughtful manner;
- Have a good judgment of yourself and others;
- Self-criticism: to know your own strengths and weaknesses;

- Know how to weigh the pros and cons before making judgments;
- Be fair;
- Be impartial;
- Be polite;
- Act with prudence and integrity;
- Know how to choose good and avoid evil;
- Dress wisely;
- Be patient;
- Think before you speak;
- Make sense
- Use language that does justice to yourself and your culture;
- Be responsible;
- Have a good work ethic;
- Fulfil your duties very conscientiously.

5.3 Respect for creation (3rd pillar)

An important *Ubuntu* value is respect for people: man/woman not only lives, but also pursues values that bind them to the transcendental being in its supremacy.

Respect the environment. To not respect creation leads to the destruction of man himself and ipso facto, humanity. For example, there are many local topics, such as dried up streams, reduced ground water, and

the loss of some lakes in relation to the global warming, and flooding. The value of *Ubuntu* is to sustain development for life.

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