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**REPORT OF A SIX MONTHS PEACE PROJECT ON CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND PEACE BUILDING BY BIHNDUMLEM HUMANITARIAN ASSOCIATION OF PEACE (BIHAPH) IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SWISS EMBASSY YAOUNDE IN CAMEROON, IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE BAMENDA I, II AND III COUNCIL COMMUNITIES.**

Due to the persistent Anglophone crisis which started since 2016 and has resulted to loss of lives and properties, food insecurity, massive displacement and the inhumane and degrading treatment of women and children. BIHAPH in partnership with the Swiss Embassy in Cameroon organized and launched a peace project within the Bamenda I, II and III municipalities under the theme; **Providing Space for an Increased Citizen Participation and Civic Engagement as Major Tools for Conflict Transformation (CT) And Peace Building (PB) In Shattered Communities by The Crisis.** This was under the theme: **Effective Civic Engagement and Participation as Major Tools for Conflict Transformation and Peace Building, using a Community Based Approach.** The overall goal is to increase community participation in conflict transformation and peace building in BAMENDA 1, 11, 111.

BIHAPH has been actively involved in the fight against Gender based violence on women and children, providing livelihood assistance to vulnerable population, organizing workshops on skill acquisition to economically empower the local

population, peace building and conflict transformation projects. It is worth noting that the project began on July 16<sup>th</sup> with the launching and had three major trainings in Bamenda I, II and III, and the closing ceremony which took place on December 15, 2021 at Bamenda I Council Hall. The objectives of this peace project was to train community leaders and individuals on peace building strategies using COMMUNITY BASED approaches to initiate peace within communities starting from their families, neighborhood, community groups in order to achieve sustainable peace under the following strategies;

- Conflict transformation, mediation and negotiation
- Build local leadership capacity
- Imploring local traditional methods of peace building.
- Victim story centered approach towards trauma healing, reconciliation and peace building.
- Small community support projects to improve livelihood and relative Stable community.
- Non-violent communication training

### **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

- To support the development of skill knowledge and attitude change in peace building (PB) and conflict transformation (CT) through an in-depth capacity development and education.
- To support community's peace dialogues and reconciliation activities.
- To consolidate community peace and security by supporting peace activities of security and role of law institutions.
- To support activities aimed at empowering the youths and women and engaging them in peace building and conflict transformation.
- To support the revival of communities' livelihoods as peace dividends to the communities (income generation activities)
- To strengthen peace advocacy education and communication processes.

To improve coordination, collaboration and network in peace building activities in the communities

The trainings in the three communities was organized by the expertise and dedicated team of BIHAPH in line with the following program and agenda.

- Brief introduction of BIHAPH/team members
- Brief description of the project with emphasis on the results and positive
- Impacts in the communities especially on women and children.
- Impact of the crisis on the community especially on the children, women and girls
- Community leadership in resolving conflict and building peace at community level (identify the various leadership that exist in the family beginning with the family.)
- Building peace using local people's experiences (engaging the leaders to share their experiences.)

## **LAUNCHING OF THE PROJECT.**

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the project was launched at the Pastoral Centre, Up-Station, Bamenda. The launching had the following objectives; to sensitize the participants on the importance of living together and peace building, educating the participants on the project and the project launch was also an avenue to increase the visibility of the organization and for participants to understand the activities of the organization. During the launch, the project manager presented the project in its entity that is from the contextualization of the problem, to the objectives of the project and the anticipated results.

Also, a talk on “Effective Civic Engagement and Participation as a Major Tool of for Conflict Transformation and Peace Building: A Strategic Community-based Approach”, was presented by Dr Kelly. He presented on the context of the conflict escalation in the North West Region, giving serial right abuses in exchange for survival opportunities as one of the many points that have led to the escalation of the crisis. He elaborated so much on the theme, making the participants to understand that for peace to reign in the two regions, the bottom-top approach must be used.

The launching ceremony was colored by presentation of cultural dances by the Nso and the Aghem women, songs on peace by a song writer, presentation of arts and a poem on peace.

**Attendance:** The launching was attended by stakeholders from the UN, UNHCR, UNDP, NRC, UNFPA and representatives of the various national ministries, Regional delegates, cultural groups, media houses and other NGOs, church leaders, Fons, quarter heads and leaders of social groups.

The launching was greatly successful with huge impact which indicated the need and yearning of the population for peace. Feedback from the participants necessitate the trainings in the communities in the shortest time possible. The team was highly motivated to move in to the communities in spite the tensions, risk and insecurity because of the demands and needs of the population.

### **TRAININGS AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE COUNCIL COMMUNITIES.**

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021 the team had a workshop at the Bamenda III municipality Council with goal to enlighten the audience on “effective civil engagement and participation as major tools for conflict transformation and peace building, using a strategic community based approach. This interactive workshop was held with a cross section of participants: counselors, quarter heads, representatives of the moslem community and other religious denominations. These leaders shared their experiences on how the Anglophone crisis has affected them.

On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021 the team had the second training with the elites of Bamenda II, at the Bamenda II council Hall. The training had as objectives to; enlighten the audience on “effective civil engagement and participation as major tools for conflict transformation and peace building, using a strategic communication based approach”. In one voice, the community leaders and the first deputy mayor of Bamenda II made a fervent commitment to promote peace and conflict transformation in their respective groups. The mayor in his opening speech made the people to understand that when one person dies be it military or separatists’ fighters it affects the whole community. He charged his people to join BIHAPH and preach peace from their homes, to their neighborhoods and the community at large. To appreciate this initiative, the mayor declared that the second week of November next year will be called “**peace week**”.

Also on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the team had the third workshop at the Bamenda I municipality Council with goal to enlighten the audience on “effective civil engagement and participation as major tools for conflict transformation and peace

building, using a strategic communication based approach” this interactive workshop was held with a houseful of participants amongst who were counselors, quarter heads, representatives of the Mbororo and community men and women of all religious denominations. They shared their experiences on how this Anglophone crisis has affected them. During the training, the First Deputy Mayor of the Council charged his people to join BIHAPH and preach peace from their homes, to their neighborhoods and the community at large. The peace workshop was successfully carried out as participant admitted haven learnt a lot, as BIHAPH team drilled them on the activities of BIHAPH. The participants left satisfied and beckoned on BIHAPH to call on the powers that be to look into their plight in any ways possible and encourage them to carry out more workshops on peace.

### **CLOSING CEREMONY AND AWARD OF CERTIFICATE TO DESERVED COMMUNITY PEACE AMBASSADORS.**

Finally, on December 15<sup>th</sup> , 2021 the organization organized a closing ceremony, with the objectives to train community leaders and individuals of good will in local communities on peace building strategies using traditional approaches to initiate peace within communities starting from their families, neighborhood, community groups in order to achieve sustainable peace under the following areas; Conflict transformation, mediation and negotiation, build local leadership capacity, imploring local traditional methods of peace building, victim story centered approach towards trauma healing, reconciliation and peace building, small community support projects to improve livelihood and unity and active non-violence training. It was an opportunity for capacity building and empowering community leaders in lotion and soap making in line with BIHAPH model of incorporating economic activities in peace building. This closing ceremony had ten facilitators, eighty community leader, quarter heads, counselors, leaders of women groups, community leaders, civil society actors and some elites of Bamenda I, II and III communities. It was chaired by the representative of the Senior Divisional Officer of Mezam.

During the ceremony, certificates were presented to participants of the peace project and batches. A pledge on a commitment to be peace ambassadors in their communities was taken by the community leaders and a copy of the said pledge was handed to each person. The project could not have ended without ensuring that the

participants continue what they have learnt in their communities. To this effect six leaders were appointed, two from each community, with the role of coordinating peace activities and economic empowerment initiatives, learnt during the course of the project.

### **Activities carried out during the six months' peace project.**

These activities brought together participants like; quarter heads, community group leaders, youth leaders, religious group leaders, community elites, councilors, mayors and government representatives. Activities included:

- Interactive discussions on the impact of the crisis on the population,
- Lectures on the purpose and importance of the peace project
- The impact of the Anglophone crisis on the population especially women, girls and children.
- The role of community leaders in peace building and conflict transformation
- Old traditional approaches of local communities in peace building,
- Drillings on psychosocial therapists/exercise,
- Horrible experiences faced by some victims during the Rwandan Genocide
- Economic empowerment training on making of body lotion and detergents.
- Presentation of certificates to participants
- Election and installation of executive members to coordinate the community leaders in line with continuing to share the knowledge and skills gained throughout the project.

### **Feedback from participants.**

Participants expressed general satisfaction at the end of each working session and the different sessions were very interactive and facilitators shared knowledge that has empowered them both psychologically, politically and emotionally.

### **Needs and expectations of the community.**

The community members urgently need livelihood support as most of them have been rendered homeless and stranded due indiscriminate burning of houses and properties by state and non-state armed groups.

There is need to continue the project to cover other affected areas of the North West such as Santa and Tubah subdivisions of Mezam division, Momo, Nkokitungia, Bui and Menchum divisions which have been badly hit by the crisis. Given the huge and

impactful result the project has had in these three communities, there is high need to replicate the project in other communities to mitigate the escalating violence and deepening suffering of the population.

The participants have attest the impact of the project to them in taking up their responsibility to ensure a healthy and peaceful environment. This can be seen clearly from the relative calm that reigns in most dreaded communities and were the project was impacted that were considered no go zones with killings, kidnapping for ransom on a daily basis are now safe zones. Kidnapping has greatly reduced, school kids are able to go to school though still with fear and uncertainties. Life is returning to normal as families that have been displaced are returning given the difficulties living in cities. Most communities have taken up their responsibilities to rebuild their shattered communities by mobilizing community work every Monday and on holidays. This helps build community resilience and most needed social cohesion in the communities.

### **Challenges faced in the execution of the peace project**

- The project timing was very short considering the importance and the timely need for a peace project in the contest of the Anglophone crisis.
- Most of the quarters in the different communities visited where difficult to access due to insecurity and threats from separatist fighters, thus majority of the quarter community leaders were not trained.

### **Recommendations;**

- Community leadership trainings on peace building and conflict transformation should be multiplied and intensified.
- More effective mobilization strategies should be employed step up the number of participants
- Social activities such as traditional dances, intercommunity sports competitions, traditional festivals, religious gatherings which brings together community members should be encouraged and promoted for resocialization and reintegration of affected population.
- Identified victims who have suffered gross human rights violation should be given special support

**We express our sincere gratitude to the SWIZ EMBASSY Yaoundé for the Fund and support to carry out this timely and most needed initiative for the population affected by the devastating impact of the armed conflict.**