

# Supporting Intergenerational Partnerships for Peace



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## Short Overview of YMCA and the Project

Young Male Christian Association – Ethiopia (YMCA) is a pioneer among other Civil Society Organizations established centering the youth and society in Ethiopia. The association is a member of the regional and international YMCA and adheres to their basic principles that doesn't discriminate people against their skin color, gender, beliefs, or viewpoints.

For over 70 years, YMCA - Ethiopia has been operating and focusing on the mental, physical, and spiritual growth of young people by developing various projects that are being implemented via its ten branch offices located in four national regional states and one city administration. These branches are located in Addis Ababa city administration (Uriel, Arat Kilo and Addis Ketema), Oromia (Adama and Teji), Southern Nations, Nationalities and People (Welayita Sodo), Sidama (Hawasa), Amhara (Bahir Dar and Debre Markos) and Tigray (Mekele and Adwa).

Aspiring to be productive in its activities, YMCA Ethiopia has been working with its target groups i.e., the youth and the women in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations. As a result, the organization is actively playing its role to the holistic empowerment and development of young people. .

YMCA Ethiopia has four program pillars:

1. Youth, Civic and leadership development: increasing youth participation for peace and social justice,

2. Job readiness (economic empowerment): TVET trainings, entrepreneurship support to promote descent income,
3. Health and Fitness: sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention activities & physical fitness activities,
4. Community resilience and response: child care and education, safe and inclusive cities and community resilience.

Based on this, our association has been collaborating with Dexis Consulting Group in implementing a project entitled "Dialogue for Supporting Inter-generational Partnerships for Peace" with the financial support secured from the USAID.

### As a result of this project:

- A total of 150 youth and adult Peace Ambassadors (75 from Bahir Dar and 75 from Adama) have graduated after receiving trainings on topics such as peace, peace building and strengthening partnership.
- Out of those graduated peace ambassadors, a total of 3000 community members (1500 people from Adama and 1500 from Bahir Dar) have been reached out. More specifically, youths, elder, community leaders, religious fathers, experts working with peace and order have been trained on matters such as peace and peace building, strengthening indigenous peace building values and enhancing cooperation and dialogue.
- 500 brochures/fliers that strengthen peace and partnership were written in both Amharic and Afan Oromo and disseminated to create public awareness.
- Two regional workshops were held in Adama and Bahir Dar under a motto "Strengthening Inter-generational Partnership for Peace. Furthermore, national peace building workshop was held in Addis Ababa. In this workshop all the stakeholders and target groups, i.e. youths, women, adults, community elders & religious fathers from Adama and Addis Ababa in federal level have participated and discussed under two major themes "How To Build Peace and How To Create Intergenerational partnership For Peace".

**Helen Tefera**  
**YMCA Ethiopia**  
**Program and D/ Director**

## Inter-generational Alliance for Ethiopian Peace Building

Ethiopia is an African country that has long retained independence. Along with this truth, it has also paradoxical past — one characterized by a history of war and conflict. It is not a new phenomenon for Ethiopia to bear the destruction of war and lack of peace. Although Ethiopians have been exposed to ramifications of internal instability and external aggression, they are also endowed with the culture of peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Peace is not limited to “absence of war or conflict” but it is much more than an opposite idea to war and even more broader than that.

The repercussions incurred due to lack of peace have made both Ethiopia and Ethiopians to pay a huge price. Among other things, social cohesions have been obscured; citizens have lost their lives and properties, the country's positive image has been damaged and its development has been slowed down. Though Ethiopia has been suffering from the vicious cycle of paying huge cost of war or reconstruction in the aftermath for long time, it is endowed with indispensable social values necessary for building the culture of peace. Therefore, it is high time to pass those indigenous Ethiopian norms, cultural values and knowledge necessary for building sustainable peace in Ethiopia from this generation to the next generation. Evidently, this can only be realized when all Ethiopians citizens, institutions and arrangements at all level carryout their duties of crafting a bridge that links the elders to the successor youth generation, by developing the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, and fostering the culture of peaceful coexistence.

For many decades, the Young Male Christian Association (YMCA) has been working on the youth social participation, skills development endeavors and job creation opportunities. Currently, this association is making use of its years of experience and institutional capacity towards working on the area of sustainable peace building in Ethiopia.



Among the association's numerous peace building endeavors, the project “Dialogue for Supporting Inter-Generational Partnership for Peace” is financed by the USAID.

More importantly, the implementation of this project in Oromia (Adama) and Amahra (Bahirdar) regional states has matchless role in the national peace building process. For one thing, the population and territorial size of the two regions ranked first and second respectively. As a result, they share internal boundary with many parts of the country. A case in point is Oromia region which shared internal boundary with almost all regions of Ethiopia except Tigray region. On the other hand, both regions are known for the existence of civil conflict and lack of peace. Cognizant of the role of various community members who can play a significant role in the two regions' peace building process, the project has trained youths, elders, women, religious and community leaders and graduated several of them as peace ambassadors.

The volunteer youths selected from the two regions have received training that focused on peace building. To this end, these peace ambassadors are currently playing a significant role in strengthening the inter-generational alliance between the young and the old generation members.

Though the project has been piloted for the last eight months, it has strengthened dialogue among inter-generations and conducted awareness creation activities on peaceful coexistence.



## Implemented Activities

The majority of the project has been implemented through offering trainings and organizing conferences. The training commenced with offering training for 12 master trainers (6 of them were from Adama and the remaining were from Bahir Dar). Among the 12 trainees, 6 of them were females, 8 of the them were youths while the remaining 4 were adults.

In return, those 12 master trainers have created 75 Peace Ambassadors in their respective regions. Accordingly, a total of 150 Peace Ambassadors were created in the two regions among which 50% of them were females. With respect to their age levels, 50% of the ambassadors were adults while the remaining 100 belong to the youth age group. At the end, each of the 75 Peace Ambassadors have reached out to their communities and facilitated grass root dialogues.

Having organized a conference under a slogan "Enhanced Intergenerational Partnership for Peace", we have been able to create an interactive platform that actively engaged the youths, adults, community representatives and stakeholder. From a total of 43 participants who took part in the conference held in Bahird Dar, 15 of them were females, 24 of the participants were adults; while the remaining 19 were youths. In Adama, 43 participants took part in the conference.

Among them, 18 of them were females, 24 of them were elder participants and the youths were 19. In Addis Ababa, 40 participants took part in the conference where 25 of them were females, 11 of the participants belong to elder social group, while the remaining 29 were youths.

So as to maintain diversity, participants from different age groups, genders and representatives from different social segments have been incorporated to participate in the conferences and trainings. Among them were:

- Religious leaders,
- Aba Gedas and community elders,
- Leaders and members of Community Based Organizations like "Idir",
- Youth volunteers from Family Planning and YMCA,
- Students from different school clubs and mini-media,
- Government employees (From the Ministry Peace, Bureau of Women, Youth and Children Affairs, Peace and Order Office...),
- From law enforcement (Police officers, lawyers, etc )
- University instructors,,
- House wives, fathers, retired persons, and others.





## Before and After

A discussion was held with the participants after attending the training and conference, they reflected their point of view as in the following section regarding changes they have observed before and after taking part in the trainings and conferences:

My understanding of peace was limited to “if there is no war, there is peace.” I used to think that maintaining peace was the role left for the government. But now I came to understand that there might not be peace even when there is no active war. Peace is not limited to a free movement of people without encountering any problem. I have understood that peace is connected to a number of factors such as poverty, social problem, and hostile human interaction.

“Starting from the early ‘Good Morning’ greetings, every one spends the whole day talking and thinking about peace. This indicates that we know about peace, though we don’t have it. are indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms.

I first questioned the importance of getting a training about peace, however, after taking part the conference, I was really delighted for getting an in depth understanding about peace. In the training, we have raised the factors that disrupt peace and the role of our responsibility as a citizen. We could have seen better changes in our current situation if we had had a deep understanding about peace. Since we, the participants have acquired better awareness from the training I believe we will bring something better as an ambassador of peace.

In the past, if you said “In the name of Law!” to any offender, he would stand down. The youth of this era is not like that. I used to blame the youth for instability and lack of peace. I have never asked myself what my responsibility is.

But now we have begun asking ourselves, “What have we taught the youth?” The discussion that we have had in the training with the youth helped us question ourselves what contribution we’ve made for peace. I have come to realize that peace begins from oneself.





◆ If you don't know the cause of your illness, you can't get the cure. Equally, I understood that bringing peace would be challenging unless we sit for a dialogue and widen our awareness.

◆ A lot is going on in different parts of our country. There was time I almost gave up on peace after observing its absence in our close neighborhood.

◆ But whatsoever happened, it's already passed. The discussion has motivated us to be cautious so that such problems will not happen again in the future. We must learn how to walk before trying to run. As a peace ambassador, I understood that if I start preaching peace in my locality, the whole nation will be peaceful gradually.

◆ I was convinced that we, Ethiopians, are unable to resolve our issues and create peace. I gave upon us. But now, I am aware that we can study our indigenous knowledge of conflict resolution mechanisms and make use of it to end conflict. I have come to understand that there are Ethiopian mechanisms of building peace.

◆ From the discussion, I have understood the significance of peace for everyone. Equally, I have understood that many will benefit from our instability. Thus, we should build our peace by depriving the unfriendly ones of such a benefit.

◆ It has always been an intriguing scenario why we lost peace in a land where parents name their children "Selam" which literally mean peace. But now, I have understood that our problems are emanated from absence of intensive dialogue and our limited knowledge of peace.



It has enhanced my confidence



**Sinde Mitiku is a grade 12 student**  
**from Fitawrari Secondary and Preparatory School. She is one of the 75 trainees-**  
**Bahir Dar**

The training has enhanced my conflict resolution potential. Now I can easily resolve conflicts that arise between my families and misunderstanding between my friends at school. Although I used to be such a mediator in the past, the training has made me more confident and knowledgeable. I have also shared the knowledge I got from the training to my friends. It was not as such easy to reach this stage. There were some people who tried to discourage me by saying, "You are very young. Who made you to be a mediator?!"



The first thing I did after attending the training was to tell myself about peace repeatedly. Whenever there is a fight, we used to say, "It is their problem!" But now, when I encounter such incidence, I ask myself "What is my role?"

In our culture, parents resolve their disagreements all by themselves. Kids are not allowed to intervene. But this has been changed after the training. I told my parents, "Peace starts from oneself and family. Any problem between you two affects me. I should have my share of responsibility." They agreed to this and allowed me to take part any resolution endeavor whenever a misunderstanding arises in our family. This doesn't mean I am acting as a judge between them. I am helping them by suggesting alternative solutions so that they will easily solve their misunderstanding. I am acting just like a harbinger.



**Tigist Dejene**

**A grade 11 student from Fitawrari Secondary and Preparatory School. She is among the 75 trainees - Bahir Dar**



## We have started weekly family discussion



**Selamawit Debele**

**A second round trainee from Adama Town  
Peace Sector Office**

Although I had various understandings about peace due to my job, this training enabled me to see peace in a wider perspective. This kind of understanding is useful for my job which keeps me in touch with different community members including youth, adults, Aba Gadas, elders and religious fathers.

The training has helped me understand the interplay between peace and factors associated with it such as diversity, law, and indigenous knowledge. It has enabled me to perform my job easily.

The training has also brought a remarkable change in my family. One of my family members has difficult behavior. I convinced her to take the training in the next round. Next, I have launched a weekly family meeting by which every member of the family, including the house maid, takes part. We have resolved a number of family issues through the weekly dialogue. It has strengthened the love and affection among our family members.



## Saved the Failing Marriage

My customers usually tell me the problems they are passing through in their life. When I came to realize that many of the problems were caused by hearsay, I really felt sad.

One of my customers told me that her husband hated her. She convinced herself that divorce would be the solution. I asked her how she knew he hated her. And all her answers were hearsays.

I suggested her to discuss with her husband before ending the marriage. She did that. Now she lives with her husband in peace. This happened with in a family. But the same thing is disrupting our country's peace.

This is the result of the training I received. In short, I am playing my role as a peace ambassador.



**Emebet Getachew,**  
**First trainee from community members-Adama**



## It gave me a home work

I used to think that I had a conventional understanding about peace. The discussion on the conference has shown me the fact that I was unable to understand peace from different perspectives. It gave me homework to discuss with myself about what I should do to maintain peace.

**Atlaw TekleTsadik,**  
From Addis Ababa Bureau of  
Women and Children Affairs



We know the destruction we faced in our region. We lost lives and property. We have also faced similar destruction as a nation. All that happened because of misunderstanding and our inability to sit for dialogues such as this one.

You have started a great undertaking. Keep it up. We will reach to our community at the Kebele level and work for peace.

**Yigerem - Bahir Dar**

We had a relative peace in the past. Now we do not have peace and that is because we are no more afraid of God. In the past, any offender will return and leave if one asked his/her to do so "in the name of the law." Elders were respected back then. Any serious fight between husband and wife was easily resolved by elders.

None of that works today. I remember the women elders that were sent to Tigray to mediate the government and the regional authorities. They were not heard. That was very unfortunate. And it has sent dangerous message to the youth. And look where it got us. Our problem is not yet solved.

We have raised this very issue during our discussion with the youth. The youth do not have conflict resolution norms such as the old time phrase – "In the name of the law!" As a result, they resort to either attacking first, or defending themselves, or running for their lives. Experience sharing such as this one will help us end instability we face these days.



**Demoz**  
**Community Elder - Bahir Dar**

I was on a mission in Afar regions for the recent military campaign by which the government tried to maintain peace and order in the country. I have seen a lot of suffering and brutality.

I have become a mediator elder after I come back home from the front. I was very delighted to get the chance to attend training on peace. I have suffered due to the problem.

**Kefyalew**  
**The Soldier- Bahir Dar**



As we can see, the peace and stability of our regions is deteriorating day by day. And it has become critically concerning. We have to reach our community to the lower level structure and inform them about peace.

**Fitsum Kassahun,**  
**from Circus YMCA - Bahir Dar**

## Achieved Best Practices

- ◆ The project was piloted in areas where lack of peace is more prevalent than the rest of the country. The participants of all rounds of the training have understood the problem better. As a result, they were active participants during the discussions.
- ◆ A number of government employees, volunteers that have direct contact with the youth, religious fathers, Aba Gedas, and elders have participated in the training. This has helped the project to meet its objective. Even more, the participants are in a better position to implement the knowledge more quickly.
- ◆ Youths, adults and elders from different age levels have participated in the trainings and dialogues. As a result, knowledge transfer was made possible.
- ◆ The discussions in the training helped the participants avoid accusing or blaming this or the other generation for all the faults that have been committed in the past. Rather it helped them to have a discussion on the other important issues.

Since the participants in all the trainings and discussions were the youths, adults & elders from different age groups, a kind of indigenous knowledge transfer was made.

- ◆ Participants understood that failure to conduct dialogue is one of the main causes of instability. As a result, they began to sit down for dialogue.
- ◆ Participants from the two regions have been informed about the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia such as elder mediation in Amhara and northern parts of the country, Aba Geda and Hada Sinqe in Oromia, as well as other mechanisms in Gammo.

They indicated that the lessons would help find solutions for various problems.

- ◆ There was a common understanding during the discussion that the issue of peace is not some groups' duty but rather a concern for all. In addition, it was indicated that participants from all regions have similar understanding of the issue.
- ◆ The following institutions were among those that took part the training: for instance peace and security office, women and children affair, ministry of peace and security, enactment religious fathers, "Aba Gedas" elders, Community Based Organizations (Idir) leaders, volunteer youths, different school mini medias requesting to get together so as to strengthen their partnership among themselves. And also observing a growing demand for an effective discussion and dialogue can be taken as one of the best practice we have achieved
- ◆ Enhanced understanding was observed on the significance of maintaining diversity of religion, ethnic, and culture and mutual respect in creating peace.
- ◆ All participants have understood how critical, timely and sensitive the agenda of peace is.
- ◆ Peace is not an issue to be raised over night. It is a process that requires longer time. Considering this fact, participants requested the sustainability of the project. Participants were motivated to facilitate dialogues starting from family and then neighborhood. In doing so, the participants have promised to put the knowledge they acquired from us into practice. And some of them have already begun implementing it.





**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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