

CPS actors strengthen social cohesion in various countries

Members of the Civil Peace Service (CPS) continue to strengthen social cohesion in their various countries of operation. Participants in this year's annual gathering that held in Buea, Cameroon, from 27th -30th July 2021, agreed that the ecumenical approach to enhancing social cohesion and peace building, through religious leaders in advocacy serves as foremost best practice. The event took place under the distinguished patronage of the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), and President of Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon (CEPCA), who was represented by the Rev. Miki Hans Abia, Synod Clerk of PCC; and Princess Marilyn Douala Manga Bell, President of Doual'art and representative of CPS partners in Cameroon.



Speaking at the event, the Rev. Enow James Obi, Chaplain and Parish Pastor of the Synod Office's PCC Congregation, entreated participants to shun pride as it promotes strifes. He added that civil society actors should seek veritable knowledge which would promote shared understanding and ease communication between them thus enhancing a peaceful working environment and a peaceful society.

After the programme coordinators, Madam Florentine Nekdem Fandio and Mr. Ntui Oben Obi Agbor had provided clarity on CPS's vision to the 17 participants on the need to strengthen social cohesion and fight against fragmentation which has increased during the last ten years; partner coordinators took turn to present reports on their different engagements:

Cameroon' CPS Coordinators Madam Florentine Nekdem Fandio & Mr. Ntui Oben Obi Agbor



According to the *PCC Peace Office coordinator*, Rev Nta William, they have been carrying out capacity building, training- of- trainers, through a reach out program with over 250 organizations. He added that, the peace office is carrying out distribution of stickers and badges, to spread the peace message of non-violent actions in society and schools in particular. Through its slogan “Peace also needs good health”, the peace office has equally been raising awareness on the Coronavirus.

Through radio programs and radio dramas, psychosocial support is also provided for victims in crisis zones and the internally displaced. Through such, and peace clubs in schools, the peace office hopes to reinforce the peace dialogue.



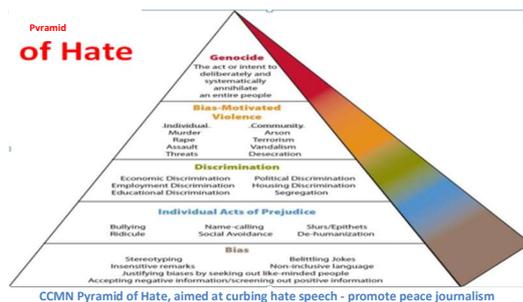
On his part, the coordinator for the Community Initiative for Sustainable Development (COMINSUD) Mr. Fon Nsoh in his presentation on challenges to social cohesion in Cameroon, enjoined participants to engage a community focused intervention in promoting social cohesion. Such as organizing open space discussions on contentious issues with mixed groups on topics like: “Stop violence on civilians! Stop torture! Stop harassment! Stop kidnapping! Stop rape! Stop abduction! Stop killings of civilians”.



In their presentation, Mr. Duplex Kuenzob and Mrs. Rosaline Obah Akah (coordinators, DMJ & CCMN) indicated that the DMJ program focuses on implementing skills in young people to be leaders of today and not of tomorrow and to encourage young people who are willing to assume leadership roles. It was observed by DMJ, that the population has been reduced to articles that can easily be bought by the conflict dynamic perceptions in instilling hate speech which evades peace. Most leaders have failed to practice what they preach, as a consequence, young people are seen as the problem or victims, as such they lose confidence and value in the eyes of those in power. Amongst the solutions proposed, the need to equip young people in the use of communication tools to influence positive behaviour, stood central. This could be through short term causes on peace monitoring and evaluation.

Since the creation of CCMN, over 400 media organs and civil society organizations have been mobilized to strengthen social cohesion and to check hate speech, through Peace Journalism for transformation. Its watch word has as phrase “90% community and 10% media”, with motto “We Stand for Peace”. As a strategy, the CCMN has been creating a generalized wave of awareness and strengthening the competencies among Journalist, CSOs and other relevant stake holders to effectively play a positive social and democratic change in Cameroon.

CCMN represented the image of hate speech as an impediment to social cohesion, due to the fact that hate speech is also considered as fake news which intends to hurt or injure persons. Hate speech is dehumanizing and plays down the dignity of a person, or groups of persons.



To curb hate speech in the media, CCMN proposed amongst other things that:

- Everyone must get involved in denouncing hate speech through enhancing citizenship and professional participation on their media space - online and offline (through programs, documentaries, editorials, peer reviews, etc).

The Central African Human Rights Defenders Network (REDHAC) a partner has been supporting CPS to enhance social cohesion through sustainable peace and justice through:

- Short term: freedom of speech, self-confidence and experience sharing.
- Medium term: Commitment of all to achieve the objective. Advocacy for conflict prevention and resolution.

- Establishment of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission.



REDHAC's Strategy in involving women and youths in peace building and social cohesion.



CPS Cameroon, Doual'art stands unique in implementing a participatory approach to cultural practice, negotiating with local communities. This non-for-profit cultural organization and art center which was founded in 1991 in Douala focuses on new urban practices of African cities.

It is a contemporary art center and an experimental space for new urban practices. Its artistic policy is centered on providing services and support for artist who are interested in urban concept through their work and research. Since inception, the art lab has offered over twenty pieces of public art that inform people on the history of Douala.

The Douala art has enhanced social cohesion by creating a bridge between the city and contemporary art productions, to trigger a change in the paradigm of development, and most crucially an effective means to fight poverty.



Doual'art production aimed at communicating social cohesion and the preservation of historical heritage

Major take home from the presentations of coordinators from Sierra Leone, Liberia and DRC were:

Sierra Leone faces a high level of marginalization and political manipulation which has led to the exclusion of young persons, women and the disabled from much of public life. Thus there's a need for a social cohesive society, to break this fragmentation. As such, CPS's strategy has been to: place youths at the center of empowering youth with training skills; active advocacy groups (e.g. Gender Association) made up of men, fighting against gender stereotypes and stigmatization to promote inclusive peace building; ecumenical council of churches in Sierra Leone is doing a lot of meditation to suppress violence; wide use of the media, to enhance social cohesion, through radio programs such as radio dramas and outreach through partner



Sierra Leone’ CPS Coordinators, Adenike Cole & Dr Sheku

organizations; the cluster and bundle approach has also enable partner organizations to work in synergy in other to achieve better results, especially with the “Do No Harm Approach”.

For Liberia, the overreaching exclusion of community people from participating in granting concessions to multinational corporations and the inadequate attention women and youth’s role in decision making for social cohesion encouraged CPS’s strategies in: Organizing and conducting multi-stakeholders dialogue to mitigate conflict on land and other national resources in the Southeast of Liberia; conduct leadership and advocacy training for 200 girls clubs in Bong and Margibi county’s; establish a quarterly platform for inter-school girls advocacy dialogue and action planning; establishment of a joint technical working group comprising of partners of CPS, Agiamondo and Bread for the World, working on gender issues, environmental education, Covid-19 awareness and other immersing issues in Liberia; and over 250 civil society organizations that oversee electoral processes.

Joseph Howard Dorbah & Monseo Bertsche Rebekah, Liberia’ CPS Coordinators



It was observed that, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with a population of over seventy (70) million persons suffers from high insecurity, high levels of violation of human

rights resulting to kidnappings, torture, displacement of displaced persons. These challenges are compounded by the presence of more than four hundred (400) tribal groups and languages (increase diversity and fragmentation).

Odile Bulabula & Bibiche Kangolongo, DRC' CPS Coordinators



CPS in this country uses education for peace, with focus on young persons in and out of school, clubs and the need for living together to promote its agenda, giving a voice to the voiceless. In all, participants were called upon to seek best practices in the promotion of peace: ecumenical approach and inter-religious dialogue; the bundle and cluster approaches; implication of women / youth /vulnerable in Peace building process; encouraging trans-generational dialogue; and collaboration between government and civil society.



Ways forwards for partners



Participants at a radio programme (CBC radio station, Buea)

