

Ugandan students embrace ICT4Peace

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By acquiring the ICT skills, students are in a position to share information pertaining to peace with colleagues.

'There are many ways to skin a cat', so goes the saying. After witnessing civil wars, including the horror that the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency has brought to their country, especially in the northern region, 150 students, from different parts of Uganda saw the need to talk peace in a different way. They have embraced a challenge to talk peace using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Clad in blue t-shirts with 'One Uganda for all' inscribed at the back, the youth were attended the 10-day ICT4Peace camp 2008 from 28 April - 7 May 2008. The camp was organised by three non-governmental organisations namely War Child Holland, Cry Uganda and I-Network, with activities starting from the war-ravaged Gulu district in northern Uganda, to the capital Kampala and concluded in Kalangala district.

"Information and Communication Technologies are broad themes which range from having and sharing information to how we share this information with others. In this context, the information is peace," said Opita James, ICT Manager, War Child Holland.

"We believe that the use of ICTs and media tools by the youth would make them more informed, more instrumental, productive, and useful to their societies. So the youth use knowledge gained to share their experiences, inform their friends and societies on peace issues, be good agents for peace, create peace awareness generally in places they live and elsewhere," he added.

Information vital to beat development challenges

He said information is needed to beat the current development challenges underscoring the need to share information about causes and management of conflict.

The ICT4Peace was conceived after a civil society workshop in 2006 which unearthed a finding that there existed a wide information and communication gap in the communities especially with regards to peace.

Empowering the youth through ICT

According to Opita, the peace camp was a great success as participants acquired skills to use ICT tools like email which they will use to keep in touch with others to spread peace messages.

Omongole John Emmanuel, a senior three student of Jeressar High School Soroti in Eastern Uganda said he was going to

start up a peace club and pass on the knowledge acquired at the peace camp: "I am going to mobilize teenagers in my community to engage in peace activities. I have opened up an email so I will use that to reach others who have access to the Internet."

"We already have a peace club at school and now. I have opened up an email to communicate with other people about peace building. Also, I have learnt peer to peer education, causes of conflict and how to manage it," said Auma Scovia from Trinity College in Gulu district.

Nurturing the culture of peace

The peace camp was a good strategy to encourage youth to be ambassadors of peace as the future lies in their hands. All participants opened up individual email accounts which will make it easy to communicate with their peers and also receive useful information about peace building. One of the advantages of the emails is that the youth will be able to receive an electronic copy of PeaceTalk, a newsletter engaging teenagers in issues of peace, justice and national reconciliation.

There is great need to nurture a culture of peace in teenagers in Uganda, as different regions of the country have experienced conflict at some point. In the last 20 years there have been more than 20 identifiable internal conflicts in Uganda, with the Lord's Resistance Army conflict in northern Uganda taking more than 21 years.

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