

Side by Side meeting in Bujumbura, Burundi 29 September 2017



Background

On 20th December 2016, the Side by Side chapter was launched in Burundi. Religious organisations like CNEB (National Council of Churches), faith-based organisations, media organizations, Muslims and other stakeholders attended the launch and committed to the Side by Side movement in Burundi. A committee was set up led by the CNEB. The launch was supported by Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) with a priority advocacy role to drive the Regional Advocacy Strategy around [UN Resolution 1325](#) on Women, Peace and Security.

However, the Chapter has not made much progress due to lack of leadership and clarity on a number of issues and perceptions that needed to be discussed and clarified in order to have a vibrant movement. NCA requested Christian Aid Burundi to support the Chapter in this formative stage while their commitment for partnership and support to the movement remains. Christian Aid Burundi has prioritized Side by Side in their Gender Strategy as a forum to mobilize faith responses for gender justice and support Impact Area on Gender and Inequalities.

September 2017 Side by Side Forum

On 29 September 2017, a follow up meeting for the Chapter was organised by Christian Aid Burundi with the technical support of the regional Gender and Inclusion Advisor, Ms Jane Machira.

Objectives

- Review Burundi SBS Chapter with a view to identify opportunities and challenges impeding the growth of the movement.
- Clarify Side by Side global goals and address negative perceptions.
- Develop a strategy and action plan for Burundi SBS chapter and sustainability plan.
- Map out stakeholders and CSOs to be enjoined in the movement.
- Agree on hosting of the movement to ensure it has a “home” among the participating organizations. (The preferred host would be Burundi National Council of Churches or any other ecumenical body that is a partner of CA in Burundi).

Devotion

The meeting started with meditation and prayer led by the Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Matana, the Rt Revd Seth Ndayirukiye, who shared the verses from 2 Kings chapter 4:1-7. He indicated that there are many people in our neighbourhood who are helpless and need men and women of God to help them get out the misery they are in due to injustices they are facing now. He indicated that the women are facing gender-based violence and their children taken for slavery out of debts incurred by their late husbands before they died. He requested church leaders that were present to work together to support those who need justice. In his opening speech, the Legal Representative of the Conseil national des Eglises du Burundi (General Secretary) highlighted the verses from the devotional session, emphasizing that we should all leave this earth better than when we found it.

Participants’ Introductions and Expectations

After participants’ introductions, the report from the Side by Side launch meeting was read. After discussions and comments, it was adopted. With regards to expectations, most participants were expecting clarity on what the Side by Side movement entails as there have been perceptions that it has the intention to make homosexuality tolerated.

Kenyan experience

Participants took advantage of Ms Jane Machira’s presence to hear more about the Kenyan experience since Kenya Chapter was created before the Burundi chapter. Side by Side Kenya Chapter was launched after the Eastern Africa Conference held in Nairobi in November 2015 and the key milestone of the Chapter has been the impact on the Two-Thirds Gender Rule constitutional threshold that states that not more than two-thirds of any gender should hold appointive or elective public positions in Kenya. Jane explained the journey of Kenya Side by Side chapter and how the entry of faith leaders on the gender justice scene has made a difference in the implementation of the Gender Law.

After the Kenyan presentation, participants raised questions of how Kenya Side by Side obtained funds to sustain the chapter and it was clarified by Jane that, so far, there have been no funds for the chapter. What they do is to share costs among members. The example of rotating meetings among members was shared. Jane also clarified that the chapter is for Burundians and they must shape it the way that is suitable to Burundians.

Key Priority Areas and Action Points

Participants then discussed key priorities they would like to focus on as Burundi chapter. Various issues came up including Inheritance Law, discriminatory social norms, women leadership in churches, marginalization of Batwa community and people with disabilities, sexual education and

reproduction, human trafficking and child neglect, theology and gender, among others. After lengthy deliberations the forum prioritized three issues:

1. **Women inheritance Law.** This law has been presented as a Bill in parliament on many occasions but never discussed. Women in Burundi have no rights to inherit land from their husbands or girls to inherit from their fathers. It's a very discriminatory situation perpetuating poverty and inequalities, and the government is never willing to have the Bill addressed. It was perceived to be major a breakthrough for faith leaders to adopt Inheritance Law as their priority, and a brave move given the delicate political environment. A committee was put in place to spearhead the advocacy plan.
2. **Promoting Women Leadership:** Side by Side Burundi will focus on women leadership in the church, to lead by example.
3. Address **Social Cultural norms** focusing on the discriminatory aspects of culture.

A committee was set in place to work on the Chapter's action plan based on the priority areas identified, and some actions points were discussed as follows:

1. Develop the Plan of Action by November 25th to be ready during the 16 days of activism to be validated.
2. Hold another meeting during the 16 days of activism to come up with signed commitments for members of the Burundi chapter.
3. CNEB to draft the format for members to sign on.

Emerging Issues

- CNEB General Secretary mentioned that UNICEF was impressed by the Side by Side faith movement's approach in addressing issues in Burundi rather than acting in silos. This will go a long way in promoting common voice and fundraising.
- Regarding the legal status of Burundi chapter this was seen to be potentially problematic if not registered. One of the members was tasked to find out implications. However, the forum agreed there is no need to register Side by Side, and instead it will be hosted by the Council of Churches (CNEB).
- From the discussions it was clear that Burundi Side by Side will be a forum beyond gender justice advocacy. Faith leaders are likely to use the forum to address broader issues impacting on the lives of Burundi people.
- Side by Side is emerging as an advocacy forum and faith leaders will need training and capacity building in policy advocacy and engagement with government and stakeholders.

ANNEX :

List of participants

Names	Church or organisation
Mgr NZOYISABA Justin	President of CNEB
Mgr Paisible NDACAYISABA	EAB/ MUYINGA Diocese
Mgr Seth NDAYIRUKIYE	EAB/ Matana
Rév. Nicodème AHISHAKIYE	Legal Representative of Lutheran Evangelical Church in Burundi
KASSIM Jaffar	Spokesperson Islamic community
Rév. BIZIMANA Sylvestre	General Secretary – CNEB
KANKINDI Perpétue	CNEB
NZEYIMANA Louise	Seventh Day Adventist Church
KIGEME Claudette	Mothers' Union
KANYANGE Chantal	Christian Aid
Rvde KAMIRAMEYA Christine	Free Methodist Church in Burundi
Mr BIZOZA André	Executive Secretary of Network of Churches – RCRSS
Mr NSABIMANA Jean-Claude	Legal Representative Saint Egidio/Burundi
Philip Mato Galgallo	CA - Country Manager
Micheline NTAKARUTIMANA	NCA
Jane MACHIRA	Christian Aid G&I ADVISOR