

The Art of Practicing Peace in Cote d'Ivoire

The first training for facilitators of gatherings for the Art of Practising Peace in CI took place in Abidjan 24 – 27 January 2013, with 30 participants.

The **objective**: help participants be ready to host conversations (gatherings) on the Art of Practising Peace in CI.

Trainers: Toke Moeller and Marc Levitte

Content: participants have been trained in using methods to be used in the future gatherings / conversations, mainly the **circle** (1) and **trios**.

In addition a lot of insights have been shared about how to work with people and allow individual and collective intelligence and courage to emerge, so that each trainee has a clear background on how to host groups and feel comfortable with facilitating such a process.

Day 3 conversation: a 3,5 hour conversation with guests was hosted by trainees and served as a model for future meetings. This group for the open meeting consisted of 47 humans (including 17 guests) in the circle of all ages, political and religious convictions, and professions and all that did not matter. We met in our hunger for more peace and the simple practices that allow us to share and harmonize as humans.

The **invitation** said *“How can we, individually and together, contribute to living in peace in Cote d'Ivoire for ourselves, our children and our grand children?”*

The conversation started with a listening circle, the talking / listening piece being a microphone. After a short break a video was shown: 15 minutes excerpts from Prem Rawat speaking at the Brand Laureate awards conference.

Then all participants were invited to sit in trios with people they did not know to share a personal story where *“you experienced practicing peace with someone”*.

They were asked to identify / harvest *“the conditions that made it possible”*.

Two conditions per trio were expressed and gathered collectively. See below (2).

The last question for the trios: *“What do we dream possible for Cote d'Ivoire if we practice more peace?”* This was harvested back into the circle and it was amazing to see the deep and hopeful dreams expressed. See below (3).

This conversation about the Art of Practicing Peace ended with an invitation to share what they will take away with them from this meeting. Few people expressed verbally their thanks and appreciation. More wrote in *The Golden Book*. All of them left their details in order to receive the bulletin and the video shown and be informed about future work and gatherings

Water, tea and coffee was served as participants shared their joy and left.

It worked very well and proved that when invited with care and clear purpose and with well-hosted participatory methods, participants engage in a fruitful constructive dialogue.

Day 4 was aimed at looking ahead and **organizing the future conversations**. 4 projects were identified and for each a team of 3 –including the “caller”- was formed with support of all other trainees.

The next steps:

The practicing design process with four callers preparing with their teams, 4 more practicing peace meetings of 1/2 days is just concluding:

- A mayor of a city 200 km from Abidjan who will invite former enemies - politicians - citizens together to practice peace
- A singer/artist in his suburban village with young, middle aged and elders
- An officer in the navy calling for help to host such practicing peace gatherings for inhabitants of 270 flats (approx 1.500 people altogether) in his city neighborhood. He will start working with traditional chiefs to include them.
- The caller of this whole project, an elder wisdom holder of 75 years, calling for another gathering like this with citizens and decision makers.

All these gatherings to happen within the next 3 months.

(1) **Circles** are fashioned in such a way that interconnectedness, interdependence, and equality within the community are highlighted. Participants are encouraged to share a sense of mutual respect and responsibility for the well being of the community and the individuals within it, and an understanding that what happens to one person affects all.

In the circle, all participants, regardless of role or status, age or experience, are considered of equal importance, with equal voice. Everyone in the circle is invited to speak and listen from the heart, or to initiate silence. No one sits above or below others, or outside of the circle. The circle is inclusive.

Even the circle keeper participates in the circle, in addition to facilitating the process. A circular seating arrangement and the use of a talking / listening piece help make the process work.

The circle seeks to cultivate a climate of mutual respect and caring that is value-oriented and heart-based, that engages the heart, the emotions as well as the mind. Circles are inclusive also in content, designed to allow space and time for all dimensions of human life.

When you receive the talking / listening piece, you may speak without interruption, hold the talking piece in silence, or simply pass it in silence to the next person. The use of a talking piece, in essence, slows the pace of dialogue, encourages quieter people to have an equal voice, assists participants in modulating and shaping the expression of strong emotions, and allows for deeper heartfelt conversation, more careful listening and thoughtful expression to take place.

(2) **Conditions** that allowed peace to be experienced with someone:

Desire for concord, patience, humility, asking for help, need to understand the other, conviction that reconciliation is possible, will to forgive, tolerance, harmony with myself, putting myself in the other person's shoes to offer help, refusing violence, mutual understanding through listening, awareness, going beyond, accepting the other as he is and not as I want him to be, loving the other, communication, discipline, accepting to dialogue and communicate.

(3) **Dreams** "What do we dream possible for Cote d'Ivoire if we practice more peace?":

A prosperous country with shared happiness and progress for all. Real brotherhood. To aim towards a united and indivisible nation, not tribalism. A model of peace for other countries. A country united and prosperous. A country of hope, hospitality, liberty and dignity and to be able to dream and practice peace for each one. The well being of a reconciled population. Cote d'Ivoire being united and developed. Cote d'Ivoire open and prosperous. The joy to live in brotherhood and harmony. Living really together. A country united, peaceful and prosperous. A country full of love and respect for the other with a hope for the future.