

Dignifying Citizens with Physical Handicaps in DR Congo

Saturday, 03 August 2014
Kinshasa — Democratic Republic of Congo



BACKGROUND



Elesse & Virginia Bafandjo

In January 2012, the grassroots citizen-facilitators Elesse and Virginia Bafandjo discovered a documentary film, [DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA: Muslims & Christians Creating Their Future](#), with its useful examples of face-to-face citizen communication.



Beginning March 2012, the DVD gave them the inspiration, communication tools, and purpose to initiate many face-to-face engagement experiences for diverse women, men, and youth of their community, illustrated at <http://traubman.igc.org/vidnigeriadrcngo.htm>

Their brave, healing circles included (1) Albinos ~ Non-Albino Reconciliation, (2) "Enemy" Rival Football Fans Humanizing Each Other, (3) Married Couples Improving Communication Skills, and (4) Muslims & Christians Building Relationships in Face-to-Face Dialogue.



Mr. Aime Makengo, a **physically handicapped person (PHP)** confined to a wheelchair, then consented to meet with Elesse and Virginia, **non-physically-handicapped persons (NPHP)**. They heard Aime's heartbreaking stories of discrimination, neglect, humiliation, and rejection. Said Aime: "I remember in a church they refused me go up to the altar, considering that my presence there meant that all the activities off this church would become handicapped." Elesse, Virginia, and Aime decided together to invest themselves in a strong program to **build a bridge between the NPHP and PHP communities**.



FACE-TO-FACE CONFERENCE GATHERING OF PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED PERSONS AND NON-HANDICAPPED PERSONS

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[I. INTRODUCTION](#)

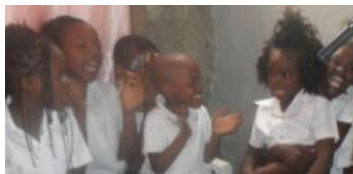


OBJECTIVES of the day were defined by organizer Elesse Henoc Bafandjo as (1) giving PHP and NPHP principles and skills of community-building Dialogue, (2) dignifying the PHP, (3) creating compassion for PHP by NPHP, (4) helping NPHP discover the equal humanity of PHP, (5) beginning PHP-NPHP joyful, sustained relationships, (6) and **establishing a strong citizen-driven model for lowering walls and diminishing all kinds of discrimination**, to be followed locally and worldwide by NGOs, religious and educational institutions, and grassroots women, men, and youth.

[II. GRATITUDE](#)

The facilitator express thanks to God, the participants who responded, the creative event organizers, and Libby and Len Traubman for providing the Dialogue principles, the *Dialogue in Nigeria* film DVD, and personal mentoring for several years.

[III. YOUTH DANCERS](#)



To break the ice, youth including 20-month-old Elvi Greis performed a variety of dance styles. The audience came to life and joyful, shared spirit filled the room.



[IV. PERFORMANCE OF PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED PERSONS](#)



An indescribable moment of joy and tears filled the room when PHP participants danced and sang beautifully and powerfully. Others from outside the building entered, asking "What is happening here? Who is singing? PHP?" PHP and NPHP -- everybody -- stood up with drums, noises, shouts while singing and dancing together. Elesse wrote: "It was not easy to stop this moment!!!!"

V. STORIES OF PERSONAL REJECTION AND DISCRIMINATION

1. Mr. Abel Kanda: What disturbs me is that all my life NPHP don't recognize that we are suffering. They never like us in their taxis and buses, even if we have money. They don't help was with transportation we need. When I was studying it was hard for my family to pay my school fees. They thought I would contribute something good in life. But I now feel useless and unable to have meaning in our society. The injury is even more painful when NPHP do not respect and honor us.



2. Frederick Sekele: My pain is that the NPHP refuse us jobs even if we can transport ourselves to look for them. We are neglected in churches and are put in the back even if we arrive first. We need to pray like everybody! And from worry that we might ask for money, pastors and priests never like us to visit them in their offices to share our personal problems. In my family we are nine people. I am the third child. My own family loves me much. But other PHP persons are victims of many kinds of maltreatment and family rejection. Sometimes that is why they become street beggars. I must say that in public transportation we not respected or helped. There is no love between PHP and NPHP.



3. Josue Ibonn: I am a victim of so much abuse from my mum's family. They don't love me. They always say that I must die. I am not a useful person and cannot bring anything good to the family. They tell me I am a witch who killed my aunt. They promise to kill me, too, even if I don't know anything about all that. They constantly take me to false prophets, pastors, and priests without my agreement, in order to deliver me from witchcraft and get forced confessions that I'm a witch. They give orders that no one can take care of me because I killed their sister. According to them, I must tell the truth that I really killed their sister to benefit care for myself. The force me to drink water of kamba for me to vomit up the witchcraft or cause my death. They also hope that that the fear of drinking would cause me to confess that I'm a witch. My aunt spreads everywhere the word that I'm a witch. I'm living only by God's grace and am so thankful for allowing me to express my story.

4. Ms. Huguetta Ikolonga: A disease caused my physical handicap. As a PHP, now no one is interested in me or helps me. I was neglected, rejected, and abandoned by my family, the church, and my own parents. I needed to continue my studies, but there was no one to pay my school fees.



5. Ms. Elysee Kalambote: We PHP are rejected, neglected, and unloved in the world. Some couples divorce after a baby CHP is born. My friend PHP died from negligence of her family. She became ill with no one to help or take her to the hospital. She died alone behind a sofa. It was so, so sad!!!



6. Ms. Gisele Mbombo: I became a PHP when I was 13 years old. I thank my parents who took good care of me and moreover helped me study despite my handicap. I much instruction in dressmaking. And I help other PHP like me to be useful in the community in restaurant and sewing jobs. Yet we are victims of violent attacks and considered witches.



VI. ADMISSIONS OF PREJUDICE & REPROACH BY NON-PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED PERSONS

1. Papy Mbosim: What I share with my brothers and sisters is great mercifulness for the PHPs conditions, challenges, and suffering. My reproach and personal experience is that they always refuse to let people close to them. I do not understand their psychology.



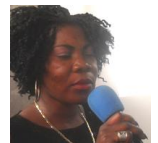
2. Mr. Baby Bomenga: The wrong thing I see in PHP lives is that instead of learning a skill or trade, they prefer to become beggars in the markets and trouble the peace everywhere.

3. Mr. Serge Bafandjo: I reproach my brother and sister PHPs for using brutality. They don't hear. They never accept their errors when in conflict with us NPHPs. I know a story in which a PHP borrowed money from a NPHP. But when the NPHP came to look for his money, the PHP pretended not to understand or hear.



4. Agnes Muamba: I agree with all that has been said here caused by a lack of love and knowledge needed to help each other create a successful community.

5. Bibiche Lubanzadio: To me what is wrong is that many PHP participate in much prostitution.

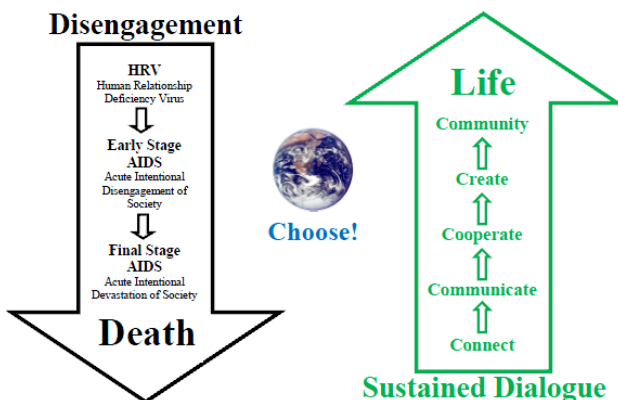


A noisy debate erupted. It was difficult to control because everybody -- especially PHP -- needed to respond. Despite the noise, a great atmosphere of exchange developed.



6. Mr. Gaby Mayombo: I reproach PHP because of their deceptive, unnecessary dependence in their families and everywhere else. They easily believe they suffer more than others, especially NPHP. They need to move out of this perception that puts themselves in prisons and limits their vision and horizons.

VII. HRV—HUMAN RELATIONSHIP-DEFICIENCY VIRUS



Worse than HIV/AIDS, this worst-killer of all was the salvation of the day's relationships, according to some participants. It was one of the best moments allowing people to discover a mystery of how life fails or works. Each participant was given a paper with the graphic describing humankind's weakening poverty of relationships and famine of communication skills. In the room was much personal engagement, sharing of ideas, and awakening of day-to-day purpose of engaging with others. See the graphic in French at

<http://traubman.igc.org/nigeriahrvfrench.pdf> and in English at <http://traubman.igc.org/nigeriahrv.pdf>

VIII. A SPARK CAN LIGHT A CANDLE OR CAUSE AN EXPLOSION



Light is a powerful symbol. Sparks and friction from misunderstandings and conflicts can ignite an explosion or light a candle. There are two choices: increase danger, or discover an opportunities to live better together. We can Resist -- resent, separate, humiliate, and harm each other. Or we can Respond -- hear, include, dignify, and cooperate.



Each of us can choose to be a Candle -- a flame that lights up others' lives to spread Dialogue engagement that heals our relationships, ourselves, and our community. We must not withdraw, waste our energy, or lose our spark. (See <http://traubman.igc.org/respond.htm>)

IX. FILM: *DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA: MUSLIMS & CHRISTIANS CREATING THEIR FUTURE*
WITH AUDIENCE ASSIMILATION



The instructional documentary film was translated into French and Lingala. The film was like a mirror for participants to see themselves, improve attitudes, and decide courageously to choose life and not death. The Nigerian story was a teacher, educator, lecturer, mentor, second facilitator, physician, psychologist, parent. (See <http://traubman.igc.org/vidnigeria.htm>)



Participants considered two questions:

- **What in the film touched you, had meaning for you?**
- **What new possibility or initiative was awakened in you?**

1. Mr. Tampo: The film edified the importance of rejecting violence, because we are so easily deceived and lured in the way of violence. I decided to leave the violent way

2. Mr. Abel Kanda Kanda: It instructed us in peaceful development in different aspects of life. I have decided to work for unity.



3. Mr. Frederic Sekele: The mighty lesson was to refuse to be an enemy. I decided to abandon all the forms of anger, because generally I'm full of anger within me.

4. Mr. Jose: There are many beginning disasters and crises in the community. I decided to stop my hate.

5. Mr. Elysee: The film helped me realize the importance of dialogue. I decided to live in good relationship with everybody.



6. Madame Gisele Andjo Mbombo: I saw the danger of being enemies and the necessity of building a global community. I decided to improve my friendships.

7. Mr. Huguette Lusungu: To sum it up, we need to desire dialogue instead of hate and wars.



8. Madame Bibiche Lubanzadio: To respond to life's problems we have to elevate the dialogue which is the best way for peace and development.

9. Mr. Papy Mbosim: I'm very excited about the film. Being enemies with each other is very bad. I intend to consider the humanity of others, beginning with the PHP.



10. Madame Bebe Messa: We need to live in understanding, accord, and harmony.

11. Ms. Gloria Lupeso: The film is very interesting to me! I have never participated in this sort of meeting and am amazed. In the film, the choice is between life and death. Being enemies, violent, hateful is choosing death of community. But peace, unity, understanding lead to life of community. I decide to stop neglecting others.



12. Madame Chantal: Neither violence nor indifference can help the nation progress. I decide to avoid maltreating others and to love those who do not have my faith, race, or culture. We are all God's creatures.



13. Madame Sidonie Milonga: I understand that respecting and dignifying others and our differences is a solid foundation for a strong community.

14. Madame Agnes Mwamba: I am deeply blessed in this meeting, thanks to the initiators! I appreciate the courage and decisions of the film's Nigerians to sit down together. This is simply fantastic! I will never forget that not only dialogue, but sustainable dialogue, can help solve the problem. I decide to be courageous and go towards others for a solution. I suggest that the initiators do their best to go throughout our country and even all the world with these good ideas.

15. Ms. Jose: The love and unity are compulsory if we want to construct a country, a nation.

16. Mr. Fils Masunda: I'm touched to see people together doing their best to create unity.

17. Mr. Papy Mbosim: I love when everybody is together without discrimination.

18. Ms. Sylvie Dimena: The film strengthens my decision to create a culture of reconciliation.



19. Mr. Matthieu: I miss words to express my feelings since this program began. I'm really happy and hope you go everywhere with these techniques and messages. It's all so good!!

X. FACE-TO-FACE, KNEES-TO-KNEES, HEART-TO-HEART DIALOGUE



In a new experience for everyone, in pairs PHP and NPHP exchanged their personal stories to experience their shared humanity and the principles of dialogue. The snaps best describe these emotional atmosphere that created new friendships, compassion, and love. Participants exchanged phone numbers and addresses with the promises of meeting in Kinshasa.

XI. RESPONSES AFTER THE FACE TO-FACE EXPERIENCE



1. Mr. Papy Mbosim: I finally understand the needs of the PHP. Our exchange was full of kindness that touched my heart. I never imagined such an opportunity and the pleasure of being friends with a PHP. I will never forget it. Thanks a lot to who thought all this. Let them reach all the families, communities, cultures, religions.

2. Mr. Tampo: I, a PHP, was with my brother, Papy, a NPHP. All was wonderful and alive. But please let me as a question to the audience: Who gave to Elesse this noble, fantastic, intelligent idea? (REPEATING FIVE TIMES, WITH TEARS) God bless you, and do not stop with this mission.

3. Madame Sidonie Milonga: I'm so happy for the dialog with my sister, Huguette. She becomes my friend and has already added so much to my life.



4. Madame Gisele Andjo Mbombo: I thank the initiators for giving me this excellent opportunity to be with my new friend, Madame Bibiche. We have succeeded to exchange deeply with our NPHP friends who generally never like to be close to us.

5. Madame Bibiche Lubanzadio: I thank God for everything that happened in this meeting. I had a fantastic face-to-face dialogue. It opened my memory and enlarged my wisdom with new intelligence. It is so important to educate for the integration of the PHP who really are maltreated. They need love, security, assistance, and understanding.

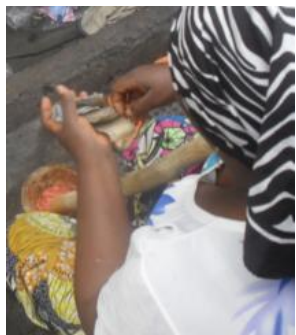
6. Mr. Abel Kanda-Kanda: Many, many thanks to Mr. Elesse, and extraordinary man like I have never seen since I was born a PHP. I was very weak toward NPHP due to their attitudes toward me. Today I experienced in dialogue with Mr. Fils Masunda that it is possible to live closer with them. I can now listen to a NPHP. May God forgive me for all my dangerous activities and harmful thoughts.

XII. SYMBOLIC GIFT TO THE PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED PERSONS

Giftng was not our first objective, because we gathered in order to bring PHP and NPHP together to become familiar and equip them with communication tools to end create trust and compassion for one another. Another intention was to dignify the maltreated PHP. So as a sign of compassion and love, a symbolic new cloth was presented to a PHP.



XIII. REJOICING WITH FOOD AND DRINK



After more than six hours of work the participants ate, drank, and rejoiced in their shared historic success. Additional NPHP saw the wheelchairs and came into the space to share the celebration and add even more meaning to the day of healing and humanizing. The room was buzzing with new conversations and relationships.

XIV. CONCLUSION

This day was proof that the principles and practices of Dialogue work well in DR Congo. These experiences seem new invention—a new system of human reunion seriously needed in all communities.

Many phone calls followed to (1) thank God and the organizers for this idea, (2) suggest repeating these activities even weekly, and (3) recommend taking this experience to distant communities. The PHP say that this is a solution for their problem, and they wish to involve more from their PHP community.

The facilitator, Ellesse Bafandjo, thanked (1) Virginia Bafandjo for her great cooking, (2) Gabriel Mayombo for the snaps and general support, (3) Winny Laby, for her full investment as secretary, (4) Ariane Laby, who arranged for the place and distributed food and drinks, (5) Charlene Bakambana for welcoming people, and Libby and Len Traubman for their mentoring and vision that is medicine for the people. Their local and global activities bringing people together are described in [Wikipedia](#) and at <http://traubman.igc.org/dg-prog.htm>



For more information:

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This document is on the Web at
<http://traubman.igc.org/vidnigeriadrcongohandicapped.htm>

The larger story of
Relationship-Building Steps in Kinshasa, DR Congo
<http://traubman.igc.org/vidnigeriadrcongo.htm>