

## REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT

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### Case Study

#### The Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA)

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This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

**These documents do not represent a final product of the project.** While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.

The Coalition for Peace in Africa (hereafter COPA) was established in 1995/96 as a network whose aims are variously described<sup>1</sup>, but include the following:

- ◇ Build a resource in conflict management within and for Africa
- ◇ Provide mutual support and overcome the isolation of people working for peace in situations of serious social and political conflict
- ◇ Assist people to see patterns and develop new ideas in their work on conflict
- ◇ Enable people in Africa who do this work to be directly recognised for it, and directly in contact with each other and with potential partners and funders in other parts of the world
- ◇ Assist people to address conflicts which extend beyond their situation but have an impact on it (regional, international)

Because it was set up as a continent-wide organisation, intending to have an impact on people and conflicts across Africa, there is no specific conflict whose history can be detailed or geography mapped. It is clear, nonetheless, that the vast majority of COPA's membership and its activities were caught up in some of the most violent and prolonged conflicts in the world, including: Burundi, Rwanda, Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Somaliland, Sudan, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique. The people who joined COPA were from these situations and engaged (often at great personal risk) in trying to change them. The organisations which asked COPA to assist them were focussing on violent conflict, in the present, in its aftermath, or in the foreseeable future.

Another significant aspect is that COPA arose at a relatively early stage in the development of the field of conflict transformation. Both the members and the partner organisations were, for the most part, officially engaged in some other task – development, human rights, health work, refugee relief, education. People attracted to COPA were those who glimpsed the need to address conflict directly, to work **on** conflict, while others still saw themselves as working **in** conflict, continuing their usual work despite the temporary obstacle of conflict.

*“In the course of networking for peace in Africa, we have come across many organisations that have been founded to do peacebuilding. Many started out well initially, but soon ran into problems that threatened the continued existence of the organisation and success of its operations and programmes. {...} An organisation's performance and sustainability are weakened by its inability to stay focused on its vision, mission, and to build appropriate structures for programming and organisational development. We have also seen that many African peace activists live and work in local communities affected by conflict and violence. It is in those areas and situations of conflict that structures ought to be put in place and resources provided to assist organisations to actively address the conflict.”*

- - - COPA newsletter no. 1. 1998

## SECTION ONE: ACTIVITIES AND STRUCTURE

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<sup>1</sup> The first funding proposal (RTC to Comic Relief) lists 4 major objectives: (1) To facilitate exchange and mutual support among members of the network; (2) To support and extend the capacity of the members and the network to address conflict in Africa, and to assist others in addressing conflict; (3) To enable the network to develop and become autonomous; (4) To support and encourage Africa-based coordination, maintenance and further development of the network.

## ACTIVITIES

As befits its diverse aims, COPA has engaged in a variety of activities, including:

- ◆ SHARING of information and experiences through network meetings and news letters
- ◆ TRAINING
  - § of its own members, as capacity-building, typically through its commitment to have a skills workshop as part of each Annual General Meeting
  - § of other individuals, in its own Conflict Transformation Course
  - § of others in organisations which sought COPA consultants to provide training (e.g., for election monitors or organisational strategy)
- ◆ MEDIATION
  - § Direct involvement (of COPA's Director) as mediator, notably in intra-organisational conflicts
  - § Supportive visits and informal mediation (by the Director) in members' political/social conflict situations
- ◆ RECONCILIATION
  - § Workshops between groups in dispute
- ◆ PEACE-BUILDING
  - § Workshops, seminars, training events on themes such as human rights, reintegration of ex-combatants, trauma healing
- ◆ AWARENESS-RAISING about conflict transformation and capacities within Africa
  - § Among potential members and partner organisations, particularly in Director's visits to regions and documentation efforts
  - § As advocacy with international agencies and funders, particularly in the North
  - § In media contacts and interviews, as occasions permitted
- ◆ FOSTERING REGIONAL COOPERATION between members to address shared conflicts or similar needs

## THE DIFFICULT PROBLEM AT THE CORE OF THIS CASE STUDY

As will be seen, COPA was confronting a difficult enough task, trying to assist its members to address some of the most violent and protracted conflicts in the world. In the event, however, its greatest problem to date has been a much more mundane problem: financial mismanagement. At the time of writing, it looked likely that there would be criminal charges and a court case, though this is still under discussion. Certainly, however, large amounts of money entrusted to COPA for its programme activities were taken from the accounts without proper authorisation or receipts later being available to auditors. This problem is understood by those involved to be attributable in various proportions to one individual's dishonesty, too-trusting membership, lack of rigorous financial structures and accountability, insufficient management exercised by international partners, and distance and communication difficulties preventing the Board from exercising sufficient control. Without wishing to impugn any individual, the author feels it necessary to say explicitly that, while all these factors had a part to play, and represent lessons for others to learn, the pattern in this case was of an individual initially

“borrowing” funds ostensibly for legitimate but not-yet-funded activities, sliding into large sums of money disappearing in ways which were increasingly obvious and illegal.

Let it be said clearly that there is nothing inherently dishonest about the members of this network, nor about the many brave souls who confront the conflicts in their own societies. They were victims of this problem, not causes, as indeed were the international agencies and donors who tried to support the network. Whatever lessons there are to be drawn from this case study, they do not include a blanket dismissal of African initiatives for peace.

## STRUCTURE

COPA began in 1995 as a loose network with a volunteer coordinator. It was formally launched in 1996 with a Management Board made up of representatives from Eastern, West, Southern, and Central Africa. The post of Programme Development Consultant was advertised, and the volunteer coordinator was interviewed and hired for this post, to get the network started and guide its early development. The Secretariat was initially to be located at the work-site of the PDC, in Johannesburg. It was anticipated that, in ensuing years, the PDC post would become more part-time, and much of the work would be taken on by regional coordinators paid for part-time work for COPA.

Regional coordinators actually began work in three regions in June, 1997, with part-time support and no programme funds<sup>2</sup>. By this time, the decision-making body was to be the Convention (of those present at the annual meeting,) and the Board became, in effect, an Advisory Board.

Six months later, this structure was abandoned in favour of unpaid national representatives. The Management Board was to be called the COPA Board, and a Management Committee was set up of members and associates located near the Secretariat, to meet frequently and more closely advise the director. There were to be no regional co-ordinators, and contracts with the three in post were cancelled.

There was a New Strategic Plan in January 1998. By September, 1998, when none of this had taken place, another new programme was ratified, and the director relieved of financial responsibility. No annual meeting occurred in 1998, and the one scheduled for early 1999 was at short notice to be replaced with four regional meetings.

## MEMBERSHIP

The members initially were “alumni” of Responding to Conflict’s course, Working with Conflict (an 11-week course offered once or twice per year.) They came from various parts of Africa, with clumps in Anglophone areas of eastern, western, and southern Africa. About half worked for development organisations, with the rest fairly evenly

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<sup>2</sup> By this time, the Programme Development Consultant was called the Director, presumably because the programme had been developed and was now being implemented.

divided between education, churches, human rights, and other kinds of voluntary agencies.

Over time, as COPA became more active, it drew a wider membership. With the development of its 5-week Conflict Transformation courses, it attracted many individuals, particularly within southern Africa. Regional activities and visits, seminars, and workshops in situations of conflict drew organisational affiliations and interest, particularly in East and West Africa.

Always, however, its members were fully engaged in difficult work, often travelling to remote areas, and not really in a position to offer COPA much time or undivided attention. At the same time, even a loose network was appreciated by members, since the solidarity lessened their sense of isolation. As had been true since the beginning, the members were concerned particularly to find ways to be a resource to each other.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

As a network, COPA had some in-built challenges in relating to other organisations.

In relating to other African conflict and development organisations, it wished to be seen as a resource, a source of capacity-building, and a partner in activities. This did happen to some extent. The Conflict Transformation Course and the Director's visits to sites of conflict were seen as particularly useful and particularly supportive. At the same time, COPA was also sometimes seen as diverting staff energies, both in terms of encouraging work on conflict, and in drawing on the time of supportive active members and Board members (and the goodwill of the organisations which employed them.)

In its relationships with international (often Northern) agencies, COPA was seen initially as a very promising, locally-rooted endeavour. There was interest, and some funding support, though some of this was required to be channeled through UK agencies, which implied rather a limited level of trust. In the event, funders concluded that the lack of trust was justified, at least on the financial level. At the same time, COPA enjoyed a generally good relationship with RTC, which was (and is) perceived to have collaborated seriously with COPA, differing occasionally, but generally sharing its aims, values, and approaches, and genuinely wishing to see it develop autonomously. RTC did not, however, have the capacity to offer as much assistance, advice, and support as COPA or the donors would have preferred. This was an area of considerable ambivalence, since all concerned hoped and believed that COPA would develop well according to its own pattern, so all were reluctant to impose guidance or structure on it.

In its relations with other international agencies, COPA occasionally experienced real differences of approach, and found itself strengthened by the realisation that its membership was largely united in its objectives and methodologies. For many international agencies, of course, their impression of COPA really depended on the one or two individuals they knew, since networks even more than organisations consist of

individuals who may differ considerably. In part for this reason, impressions of COPA and its capabilities vary greatly from one partner to another.

## **SECTION TWO: IMPACT**

### **THE IMPACT OF COPA ON CONFLICT**

It is as well to repeat the caveat: Work to address conflicts is, by its nature, long-term and difficult to measure. In the case of COPA, this is particularly so, as its target was diffuse and its time-frame short. Nonetheless, those interviewed pointed to activities which had positive impact, small but real, in three areas.

1. Two geographical areas were mentioned by interviewees: the Great Lakes, particularly Burundi, and northern Uganda and its region. In Burundi, COPA had small involvements at both elite and grassroots levels. This situation is by no means resolved, yet the indicator cited of the impact was the continued request for involvement by key political actors.

Because COPA was involved in Northern Uganda in a number of ways and levels, this example will be presented in more detail.

*There were several Ugandan members concerned with the ongoing conflict in the north, both between rebels and government and between Uganda and Sudan. One very active member in Gulu, Rosalba Oywa, drew the attention of the director and fellow members, and engaged their support. COPA's director was substantively involved with her and others in seminars in Acholiland to sensitise the community, government, and rebels to the need for and possibilities of peace. The eventual amnesty is attributed in part to the long-term impact of the forum for dialogue, which stemmed from the efforts of COPA as well as other organisations. Another member from eastern Uganda, Pius Okiria, came to assist with community seminars on mediation and peace-building. He continued into nearby Sudan, offering seminars to rebels as well as local communities there. In all these areas, a key result was the complexification of the conflict, that is, the end of oversimplification and polarisation, and instead the acknowledgement that many conflicts were intertwined at many levels. Another indicator cited was the new interest in traditional methods of conflict resolution (i.e. what had worked in the past) and modern methods used with some success in other parts of Uganda (i.e., what had worked elsewhere.) COPA was the catalyst of these activities, giving members access to each other and offering support and links as needed.*

2. The Conflict Transformation Course had a positive impact on a number of individuals, who in turn influenced both their organisations and their situations. This kind of impact is particularly difficult to evaluate, since it may remain at the level of individual feelings and inspiration (no small thing, but quite indirect as a way of dealing with social and political conflict). An interesting indicator mentioned here was that organisations and communities reported that individuals trained at CTC had a clearer

sense of what to do next, and more skills and confidence to do it. Ideas developed through COPA took form in organisational structures and policies, not only within the organisations intervening in conflict, but also in cross-cutting community initiatives set up as mechanisms to resolve conflict. Both of these results were cited as having important strategic impact.

3. Through COPA's direct work with organisations, and indirectly through its members and trainees, NGOs in areas of conflict became more likely to include conflict in their thinking and planning. Those interviewed mentioned particular agencies and particular policies, including some which went beyond conflict-awareness to a willingness to engage directly in the conflict itself. This impact has further effects, in that it supports those within the organisation who are conflict-sensitive, and values their work, which further enhances the capacity to engage with conflict.

## IMPACT OF COPA ON INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS

The results here are mixed.

Positive impact came in a number of forms, cited by many of those involved:

- § There was a lot of learning. People learned both from the positive and the negative impacts.
- § Those involved were inspired by individuals, by creativity, by possibilities, by kindred spirits, and particularly by finding all this within Africa.
- § COPA, both as a network and in terms of its staff and programmes, was able to support those engaged directly with conflict in very difficult situations. There was a level of solidarity developing that was important to those involved, in relieving their isolation, strengthening them within their organisations, and giving them some possibility of a foothold from which to address conflicts that often transcended their local situation.

Overall, and particularly in terms of the second, third, and fourth of the original objectives, much of the impact on individuals was positive and is likely to be sustained.

There was also negative impact:

- § Particularly at organisational level, much of the impact was negative. Part of this is simply because COPA did not succeed. Funders and partners feel that much was wasted, to little benefit. Even organisations whose staff and policies changed (see #2 and 3, above) may remain with a negative assessment of COPA overall.
- § Funders are more reluctant than ever to channel money directly.
- § RTC sees itself overall as probably less likely to take risks of this kind.

For many, their greatest resentment and their sense of the worst impact is that the experience of COPA may serve to reinforce prejudices, and be used to justify racist beliefs that Africans are corrupt, or similar nonsense.

## IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON COPA

Even as COPA set out to have an impact on conflict situations in Africa, it is probably inevitable that the reverse would occur, and that those conflicts would have an impact on COPA. In addition to dilemmas and issues that commonly face networks (see below), COPA also faced particular problems because it targeted precisely the most difficult places and often the most acute stages of conflict.

Most of the membership was already fully- or indeed over-committed to tackling their own situations. They called on the network and the Secretariat for assistance, and their conflicts merited attention, but there was little spare capacity within the network to respond anywhere. Only the director and the regional representatives had any time released for addressing situations, and only the director had a programme budget, so he was the one most often called on. He, simultaneously, became more over-stretched, felt more responsible as he himself was exposed to more situations of desperation, and became more isolated than ever at the same time that he was very likely being traumatised by his experiences of traveling on behalf of the network.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, COPA found itself addressing urgent problems, yet in a format where funding required careful proposals, long time-lags, and detailed financial and programme documentation. The organisation was busy almost before it existed, and always found it easier to put time and energy into urgent conflicts than into structures, processes, reporting, and long-term capacity-building for itself. Another effect of the conflict was to make detailed financial record-keeping both more difficult to achieve, and seemingly less important in the face of the human consequences.

It will be seen that these impacts of the conflict on COPA exacerbated problems it would have faced anyway.

## **SECTION THREE: ANALYSIS: DILEMMAS AND PROBLEMS**

### **DILEMMAS PRESENTED BY THIS CASE STUDY**

Many of the problems that COPA experienced were exacerbated, though not caused, by two factors built into its very origins:

1. COPA was established as a network. Members were mostly individuals, often those who felt isolated in their work because they saw the importance of engaging with social and political conflict. Apart, then, from a very few paid staff, most of them part-time, COPA could command only the free time and surplus energies of its members. Often, individuals who wished to be more involved in or committed to COPA found resistance in their organisations (often their employers), who saw the energy diverted to COPA as a loss to their own work.

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<sup>3</sup> In his interview, he referred specifically to the massacre sites in Rwanda, mass graves in Burundi, and amputee children in Sierra Leone.

2. It originated with people brought together in the North, and needing Northern funding (and, in the event, a UK financial channel-cum-guarantor). At the same time, both RTC and COPA were determined that COPA itself must develop independently<sup>4</sup>, in order both to find its own, distinctive voice, and to take its rightful place as a recognised resource. These events were happening at a moment in history when both organisations were sensitive to issues of empowerment, paternalism, and colonialism. Relations between RTC and COPA were affected by the colonial past and sensitivity to any possibility of paternalism. While individual relations were able to cope with this honestly and transcend it, organisational relations were more vulnerable, particularly when they involved funding and accounting, where power was less balanced.

There was a third, background factor which was also a major constraint, not only for COPA, but for everyone:

3. The reality of life in most African countries was of desperate poverty, lack of infrastructure, and intense conflict. Few members had access to email or even working telephones. Travel was rare and difficult: neither individuals nor their organisations could afford vehicles or airplane tickets, and they rarely traveled even within their own regions. Members' own lives were sometimes at risk, or suddenly disrupted. Of the three regional coordinators, for example, one was displaced by severe flooding in an arid area, and another became a refugee from the war in Sierra Leone, fleeing with his family to a neighbouring country.

## THE DYNAMIC

The dynamic that developed from the combined effects of these factors was a difficult one. Members felt great need for COPA, and commitment to it, but they were scattered by distance and by lack of money, transport and communication. They had a wealth of experience of conflict, and had devised creative responses to it, but they lacked the resources and time to document this and develop it further. They also lacked confidence in their own ideas and abilities.

As COPA developed, the Director became more and more active. He was skilled, articulate and becoming well known. He was also accessible by phone and email, and near a major international airport, with a budget that permitted at least some travelling. With the best will in the world, it was difficult to envisage COPA as a kind of brokerage of consultants all over the continent, since most members were inaccessible and unavailable. There were also occasions when members were asked to undertake activities, but turned out not to do them very well, and there was no agreed mechanism for assessing members' competence at particular tasks. Activities fell increasingly, then, to the Director.

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<sup>4</sup> From the first funding proposal: "Decisions about development of the network would be made by the African network itself, and RTC would not wish to pre-empt this dynamic form of development."

Structurally, networks always seem to need a strong core of people to support and administer them, and COPA was no exception. Members were not sure what kind of structure would best support what they wanted to do. Since annual meetings were empowered to make decisions, the group who happened to show up might decide on quite a different structure than last year's meeting. There was a board, but the members were scattered, often inaccessible while doing their own work in remote areas, and already too busy with urgent situations of their own. It would, in any case, have been difficult for them to exercise close oversight over operations without meeting often, and everyone was anxious to spend resources on work in conflict situations, rather than on the network itself. When problems arose, reports were lacking, or finances unclear, this was often attributed to miscommunication or lack of services, rather than being seen as a warning that more rigorous inspection was needed.

As concerns about financial accountability increased, the Director introduced more restructuring of the organisation and more elaborate plans, even as the actual programme work diminished. This could have been an attempt to correct problems, and was seen as such by some, while others perceived it to be the diverting of energy and the deflection of criticism. A review of the documents reveals a pattern of increasingly abrupt changes in plans, meetings shifted or dropped, lack of reporting, and defensiveness alternating with attempts at reconciliation. This is a familiar pattern in conflict, often accompanied by polarisation, escalation, and the breaking off of relations, all of which do seem to have occurred.

Eventually, the COPA Secretariat was closed down, the bank accounts closed, the police were called in, and the financial affairs now rest with the courts. Everyone involved perceived this as a sad and painful ending to an optimistic and much-needed initiative.

However, a consultation called by RTC in Nairobi in March 2000 enabled many of the COPA Board and members to meet again. They discussed the situation and decided that COPA should continue. Re-considering the original aims and the significant events, all felt that such a network was still needed and valuable. A noteworthy conclusion was that COPA is more than its Director, and its activities are more than its finances. The members agreed to confront what has happened, communicate honestly with donors, and clean up the problem rather than walk away from it.<sup>5</sup>

## ANTICIPATING AND PREVENTING PROBLEMS

COPA's founders anticipated a number of problems, and did their best to prevent them.

They were worried that members would be fixed in insularity, looking only at their immediate problems, and seeing neither connections nor more comprehensive needs. For this reason, COPA began with a continental focus, more or less from the top down, rather than from the ground up. The result may have been to circumvent this problem, but it caused others, particularly the centralisation and difficulties in accountability.

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<sup>5</sup> A slightly abridged set of minutes from this consultation is found in the Appendix.

There were also worries that COPA would be seen by its members as a funding agency. Indeed, early on, this did happen, and the first meetings received many requests for funds to enable members' organisations to carry on with their existing work. When COPA declared itself not to be a funding agency, and refused such requests, the organisations became even less enthusiastic about the involvement of anyone on their staff, since there seemed to be no benefit accruing to them. This also meant that COPA's activities were restricted (more training) and centralised (the Director did more and more of the work.)

In order to remain a network, not an operational agency competing with its members, COPA declared explicitly that "its external function does not include initiation of projects, but to assist already existing and initiated projects."<sup>6</sup> This reinforced the consultancy aspect and the process of centralisation, as well as the reactive nature of the network.

Both RTC and the COPA founders were concerned at the channeling of funding through RTC, and tried hard both to find direct funding sources and to compensate by insisting on the trustworthiness and independence of COPA. Since RTC was not funded to exercise real oversight over COPA, and since it was in any case sensitive about possible paternalism, it walked a tightrope. COPA, similarly, and particularly its Secretariat, was sensitive about dependence on RTC, defensive when criticised according to someone else's accounting standards, and anxious to demonstrate its independence. Both COPA and RTC felt that their best efforts to anticipate and overcome this problem were thwarted by the reluctance of international donors to assist COPA directly in establishing itself organisationally.

COPA attracted as active members people who were already engaged in work to address conflict in their own situations. Rather than contribute to the brain-drain of good people away from needy areas, COPA wanted to strengthen them and their organisations. For this reason, it hoped to develop through part-time employment of staff who would remain in their own organisations, which would be reimbursed and assisted to provide office needs. In this way, the base organisation would lose part of the individual's time, but gain from their new experiences, and be able to some extent to replace them. On one level, this may have worked, since the regional representatives did stay in their places, apart from the Sierra Leonean who had to flee for his life and become a refugee. However, there were some tensions with the base organisations, since the individuals were always being drawn in different directions. And, in the event, this regional structure was abandoned by the Board on the advice of the Director after only 6 months of an 18-month term, and little was able to be accomplished during this short time. The decision was made abruptly, and not communicated well, which left some bad feelings as well.

One of the patterns visible in COPA, then, is of fairly experienced people seriously trying to foresee and circumvent problems of the sorts they had encountered before. They were not naïve or innocent, but they did not, of course, anticipate all possible problems. Their story is a reminder that, while conflict was the problem their work addressed, it was not the only problem they would face. Just as Do No Harm case studies show the unintended

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<sup>6</sup> Annual report, 1997

consequences of “other” work in conflict, COPA shows some of the unintended “other” consequences of work in conflict. And the fact of working specifically in situations of conflict is likely to have exacerbated other problems encountered: of isolation, communication, transport, and trauma.

## INDICATORS OF ACTUAL PROBLEMS

With hindsight, those involved can identify a number of signs that could have been interpreted at the time as indicators of problems, and followed up upon.

Initial funding was offered before it was sought. Just at the time of the first consultation and its identification of the need for a network, a funder approached RTC with the suggestion of funding for a broad, African initiative on conflict. With some misgivings on all sides, RTC informed network members, and together they developed and submitted a proposal. This seemed timely, yet is now seen to be a possible source of future problems, since it made top-down development more likely. The metaphors used to describe the effect on the organisation include “floating in the air, without legs on the ground” and “a baby given a car to drive when it should have been learning to walk.” This is not intended to blame the funder, but to emphasise the importance of appropriate growth and ownership.

There were abrupt changes in structure. These sometimes happened without apparent changes in strategy or programming, but it is apparent that any change in structure implies some changes in direction and aim, and ought to be carefully assessed in that light. At the moment of introducing a grand strategy plan that emphasised regional efforts, the director also proposed abolishing the posts of regional coordinator. He claimed that this was necessary because the regional coordinators were misappropriating funds, but the Board and members now feel they ought to have questioned this more closely as a glaring contradiction. Such a change in structure had logical and real consequences in further centralization, which contradicted the stated programme aims.

There were lapses from acceptable standards, both in finance and in carrying through on commitments. With hindsight, those involved believe that these should have been anticipated and protected against in advance, or, failing that, been seen as serious signs. Closer investigation, firmer action, and more rigorous oversight were difficult to implement at this time, but should have been seen as necessary, given these signals.

## SECTION FOUR: REFLECTION BY COPA CONSULTATION

In mid-1999, RTC sent to COPA members a letter describing the situation, and seeking guidance on what should be done next. RTC then called a consultation of those involved in and interested in COPA, in Nairobi in February 2000. This event included extended reflection, in both large and small groups, on what had happened and what could be learned from the COPA experience. At this consultation, the researcher was asked to present some of the overall findings of the case study, and also to use the results of the

consultation to further inform the case study and RPP. As a result, this study was in the fortunate position of both contributing to and benefiting from the reflection process of active practitioners in the case. The consultation reinforced and complemented findings from interviews and documents, drew explicit lessons, and considered possible ways forward.

## LESSONS DRAWN

- § Resources should be generated from within. And resources should follow, not lead, identification and articulation of needs, objectives, and activities.
- § Set up structures and safeguards before you need them, to guide energy and enthusiasm rather than dissipate them.
- § An organisation can start on the basis of good faith, but must move quickly to professionalism.
- § Monitoring systems as well as evaluation are needed from the beginning.
- § Networks require close, frequent consultation (both horizontally and vertically) and a strong managerial board. Structures should be polycentric, and planning decentralised. Staff should organise and administer, but primary planning and administration should rest with an executive board.
- § Networks are more likely to succeed when members have a sense of ownership, of shared visions and tasks, and when they take responsibility rather than expecting someone else to do so.
- § Roles, responsibilities, and terms of reference should be clearly defined.
- § Individuals as well as structures are important, and they need support, challenge, rules, and limits.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The consultation group considered what should next be done, about both the past and the future (if any) of COPA. There were strong emotions, yet a sense that hopes disappointed remained hopes. The following decisions were taken:

- 1) To offer the former Director a last chance to acknowledge and accept his responsibility and to commit himself to trying to repay funds diverted. Failing this, to try to find funding to proceed with the forensic audit, get donors involved, and proceed with the legal case
- 2) That they still value, want and need a network of African practitioners
- 3) And that, in future, such a network should have:
  - Strong regional structures as well as national and continental levels
  - Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
  - The organisation registered as an NGO in the country(ies) of principal operation
  - Both individual and organisational membership
- 4) The appointment of a task team, charged with immediate planning and investigation of possibilities for moving forward.

The result at this moment can be seen as a decision by the membership to reclaim the network, to make clear that COPA is more than its director, and to acknowledge

problems and carry on. In this sense, the process of centralisation is being reversed, and ownership reclaimed by the collective.

## **SECTION FIVE: EPILOGUE**

November, 2002

Since the case study was written, COPA has implemented conscious decisions to retain its name, acknowledge its failures and problems, and build on its experiences and advantages in order to become the peace network it always intended to be. Members of COPA have rededicated themselves to this task. They saw that closing the organisation was an option, but decided not to do this. They regarded the problem as having to do primarily with one employee, but the members had done nothing wrong, and the programmes, the thinking, and the strategy were all valid. There was still a need for such a network, so it would not be appropriate to close it down.

### **Learning from Failure**

COPA now goes to funders and potential members and partners with a frank description of past problems as well as changes, including lessons learned and safeguards to ensure that problems are not repeated. The members see that, apart from the loss of money, the crisis also represented necessary learning.

COPA had accepted too much money too quickly from too many donors, without increasing staff capacity at the base. Too much responsibility had been shifted on to the director. Now, the organisation is moving more slowly. In early 2001, it developed a strategic plan which it is now implementing, and which will be reviewed in 2003. More people are involved in all aspects of planning and decision-making. They assess what skills are needed and available, and seek allies or help for areas of weakness.

### **Managing Failure**

In reconstructing the organisation, there were changes and safeguards intended to manage the problems and their consequences. Changes included:

1. The first resource now is the members, not the staff or external donors.
2. The former director was a visionary. The current one is an implementer, both by temperament and qualifications. For visions and ideas, the members get together.
3. Earlier, management was continent-wide, which meant that it was scattered, and many people were remote from the base and the staff (both physically and in terms of transport and communication). Now, the Management Board has representatives from all over the continent, but it has selected people who are physically present in or near the staff base in Nairobi. Also, there are two levels of management, the Board of Management, which gives a legal framework and directions, and a Core Group of founder-members, who meet to articulate the vision and work out programme ideas.

There were also a number of safeguards to prevent recurrence of problems, including:

1. Physically, COPA is now housed in PeaceNet (a Nairobi-based network of peace organisations in Kenya.) For the first two years, COPA did not have legal recognition, so it handled its finances through PeaceNet. Now, COPA is legally registered and handles its own finances.
2. There is close accounting for finances reporting every 3 months to both Board of Management and Core Group. Expenditures are controlled by vouchers. There is annual auditing.
3. There is managerial and systems assistance from time to time from Responding to Conflict. COPA is also entering a strategic alliance with SkillShare to send a development worker to help COPA with accounting systems, procedures, policies, and so on.

COPA is still discussing and trying to clarify the balance of priorities between networking, training, coordination, documentation (e.g., newsletter), and practitioner involvement in crisis regions. This is not yet clearly worked out, but the need to clarify it is acknowledged. Key questions remain: What are our areas of expertise? What are the key needs of our members? What are the future trends of this field, and of the continent?

**APPENDIX 1**  
**LIST OF THOSE INTERVIEWED<sup>7</sup>**

**Responding to Conflict (RTC)**

Simon Fisher, Director  
Pat Priestley, Administrator  
John Mansfield, Finance Officer

**Other Organisations**

Alex Nyago, PeaceNet, Kenya  
Rosalba Oywa, ACORD-Uganda (also COPA)  
Steve Collet, Norwegian Quakers  
Paul van Tongeren, European Centre for Conflict Prevention  
Richard Graham, Comic Relief

**Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA)**

Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, Kenya (and RTC 1999-2000), former regional coordinator  
Genni Blunden-Johnson, South Africa, Board Member  
Brian Williams, South Africa, former Director  
Frank Rwakabwohe, Uganda, Chairman of the Board

In addition, the following expressed views as part of the 3/00 consultation in Nairobi:

Omer Ishag, Sudan  
Pius Okiria, Uganda  
Peter Oyopo Amodoi, Uganda  
Florence Nighty Otto Luttay, Sudan  
Michael Muragu, Kenya  
Tecla Wanjala, Kenya  
Cecile Mukarubuga, Rwanda  
Mussanzi wa Musangu, D.R. Congo  
Haroon Yusuf, Somaliland  
Mxolisi Len Khalane, South Africa  
Oray Aden, Kenya  
Richard Smith (RTC & COPA)  
Moses Bigirimana, Burundi

Also consulted were a written statement of the finances by Ursula van Nierop, formerly bookkeeper for COPA, and some 35 written replies to the questionnaire posted to members by RTC in mid-1999.

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<sup>7</sup> Interviews were conducted in person, by telephone, by e-mail, or by a combination of these, according to the preference of the interviewee.

**MINUTES<sup>8</sup> OF COALITION FOR PEACE IN AFRICA [COPA]  
CONSULTATION HELD ON SATURDAY 4 MARCH 2000  
AT THE METHODIST GUEST HOUSE, NAIROBI, KENYA**

The Coalition for Peace in Africa [COPA] Consultation met in Nairobi on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2000, to deliberate on recent events which led to the virtual collapse of COPA. Members analysed the weaknesses and problems which plagued COPA, particularly the role of the Board, the Secretariat, and the Director. They then made recommendations as to the way forward, including possibilities for reviving it.

The Consultation received reports on how COPA came about, its vision and mission, and what actually went wrong. There was a general sense of disbelief, anger and dismay at the misappropriation of such a large sum of donor funds [approximated at between 80,000 and 100,000 US dollars,] and also the fact that the Board did not act sooner. However, there was general agreement that COPA had made some progress, particularly in terms of capacity-building through continental and regional courses.

The Consultation engaged in animated discussions around the following main areas:

- ž Structure of COPA
- ž Programme vision
- ž Communication
- ž Accountability
- ž Outside relationships

**1. Weaknesses of COPA**

The following were identified as the major weaknesses of COPA:

- ž Lack of a functioning constitution
- ž Lack of commitment of some Board members
- ž Lack of strength and guidance at regional level
- ž Lack of checks and balances and follow-up, particularly with regard to programme and finance
- ž Rapid expansion
- ž Top-down approaches
- ž Frequent changes in programme and programming
- ž Strategic plan not followed
- ž Misappropriation of power in all spheres
- ž Lack of effective flow of information
- ž Lack of accountability and transparency [staff, board members]

**2. Insights and Learnings**

- ž The importance of moving quickly from goodwill to professionalism
- ž Need for strong monitoring systems
- ž Structured participation [committees]
- ž Build in evaluations

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<sup>8</sup> These minutes have been slightly abridged for purposes of inclusion in this case study.

- ž The power of individuals to affect things
- ž Clearly defined roles and responsibilities and functions of people and groups
- ž Structures from the start to guide enthusiasm
- ž Resources generated from within
- ž Commitment as important [core group / broad membership]
- ž Money should follow proposals, not vice-versa
- ž Plan structures to decentralize organization at regional and national/local levels
- ž Communication and documentation is vital
- ž Flow of information – regular and in all directions

### 3. Consultation arrived at following general agreements regarding COPA

- ž We want and would value a network of peace practitioners in Africa.
- ž This network should have continental, regional, and national elements.
- ž It should be more clearly defined as an organization that is registered in the country where the principal structure is based.
- ž Membership can be both individual and organizational.
- ž RTC will continue to assist and advise but **will not** take a lead role.

On the Director:

- ž Offer a final opportunity to acknowledge and accept responsibility for his actions, and agree to make efforts to pay the money back. If he fails, then COPA should proceed with forensic audit, get the donors involved, and pursue the legal suit.

A Task Team (initially for the week of the meeting) was selected to:

- ž Pull together the proceedings of the consultation.
- ž Make solid proposals on the way forward: Who? What? How? When?
- ž Feed back to COPA membership.
- ž The task team had members from Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, and Bangladesh.

## 4. Report of Task Team

### 4.1 Future of COPA

- a We should go ahead with COPA's vision, mission, and name.
- b There is need to engage in a clean-up exercise which entails:
  - ž Writing an executive summary of COPA to include: where COPA came from, what happened, current position, the future.
  - ž Letter to the Director requesting him to give us his perspective on the matter
  - ž Open dialogue with funders
  - ž Letter to Management Board seeking their input into the clean-up exercise
  - ž Letter to management committee in South Africa
  - ž Up-date COPA membership
- c Management and finance: It was noted that COPA's accounts are dry and therefore there is need to decide how to revive COPA and get it going again in the

- short term, or until it can get back on its feet again. Task Team made two proposals:
- ž Identify and approach NGOs to house COPA temporarily.
  - ž Establish a Transitional Committee to carry forward the proposals.
- d Proposed Guiding Principles as follows:
- ž COPA structure should have national, regional, and continental levels
  - ž Membership at national [local] level where there is a COPA chapter
  - ž COPA should have a formal structure.
  - ž COPA should have a legal status.
  - ž Clear communication system
  - ž Transparency and accountability
  - ž Shared ownership/inclusiveness
  - ž Rotating COPA Secretariat at regional level
- e Action: COPA should decide: Who? When? How? of implementation plan

## **5. Final Action by COPA Consultation**

- ž The Consultation adopted the proposals of the Task Team and took further action, delegating particular members for particular tasks.

Michael Muragu, Interim Coordinator  
COPA Transitional Committee  
22 March 2000

## COPA CHRONOLOGY

- 5/95 First consultation  
Meeting in Nairobi, group of 25 from 10 countries agrees to form itself as Coalition for Peace in Africa with coordinator
- 9/95 First funding proposal:  
RTC applies to Comic Relief for 3 years' funding, 1/2/96 –31/1/99  
Stated aim: "To strengthen this network as an African-based conflict-handling resource independent of RTC, while continuing in cooperation with us" through the "employment of a Programme Development Worker [later Programme Development Consultant] whose aim would be to enable the network to develop and become autonomous, and by assisting the network to agree and implement its own plan for co-ordination and further development."
- 2/96 Second annual meeting  
Official launch of COPA as an organisation  
Skills focus: Multi-level conflict and multi-level solutions  
Structures: Management Board established to "give practical expression to the mandate received from the COPA corpus in assembly."  
Decision to hire part-time regional coordinators
- 7/96 Electoral Violence Workshop, Kenya
- 9/96 Second meeting of Management Board, including focus on regions and "where COPA members could find entry points into the various conflicts there, what kind of support they need to make a significant difference to their situation, and how to move from analysis and reflection to positive action."
- 11/96 Conflict Pacification Seminar, Gulu, Uganda
- 3/97 Reconciliation workshops for hostel dwellers, Durban, South Africa  
Peace and reconciliation seminar for displaced, Burundi  
Healing and reconciliation workshops for young adults, Johannesburg
- 4/97 Third annual meeting, Johannesburg  
Skills focus: Trauma counselling  
Membership of 40 from 23 countries  
Structures: Establishment of Convention as the "supreme body" and forum for overall policy-making  
Coordinators hired for 3 regions: Southern, Eastern, and Western Africa
- 5/97 First Conflict Transformation Course, Johannesburg
- 7/97 Peace Building Workshops, Liberia  
Conflict Resolution workshops, Sierra Leone
- 12/97 Meeting in Birmingham at which Programme Development Consultant (later Director) agrees he has been guilty of "abuse of COPA funds" (attributing this to diverting them for refugee assistance) and agrees to repay them by a deadline.
- 1/98 Management Board Meeting, Nairobi  
Structures: Decision taken to "do away with Regional Coordinators and establish links with National Representatives."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Minutes of Management Board Meeting, 24-26 / 98

- Management Board to be called COPA Board; Advisory Committee (those located near Secretariat) to be called Management Committee; Programme Development Consultant to be Director  
New Strategic Plan
- 4/98 Peace Education Workshop, displaced people's camp, Sudan
- 9/98 Extraordinary Board Meeting, Johannesburg  
None of new work programme in action (Director reports feeling undermined).  
New programme ratified, to be implemented: course, services to members, marketing of COPA as consultancy  
Director to have no further financial responsibility, and to receive half-salary until funds repaid.
- 10/98 Second Conflict Transformation Course, Johannesburg
- 2/99 Fourth Annual Meeting scheduled for Kampala, replaced by 4 planned regional meetings & workshops, the first to be in Kampala  
-- participants arrive to find no arrangements, no workshop (Board had agreed meeting should be cancelled for lack of funds, participants not informed)
- 7-9/2/99 Board Meeting moved to Johannesburg  
Director does not attend
- 22/2/99 Director relieved of COPA employment  
Charges laid against Director by COPA Board (fraud and theft)  
Secretariat closed by Board
- 3/00 RTC calls consultation on COPA's situation and future  
Transitional Committee formed to "clean up" the past, including communicating with funders, members  
Interim Coordinator selected