

Canossa Foundation

The Canossa Foundation is well known and integrated in Timor-Leste and has its various communities in 9 Districts. They focus on service for the poor, education, health, pastoral, training of laity and retreats.

The team of JPIC of the Canossian Foundation has experience in accompanying people in difficult times and had received training also outside the country. The trainer from an international NGO, AGEH, is experienced, having done work in Europe and Africa in the field of personality education, capacity building and training. The assisting staff has some teaching experience and is receiving training on the job.

Background

Private and personal relationships to conflicts are seldom reflected by people in Timor Leste. There seems to be not yet the awareness that the individual can make a change in the transformation process of this society. Based upon the belief that each person has a unique personality, the social competence is assessed as an important contribution to stability of peace and development in the families, groups, communities and in the society as such. Inspired by this insight the team is conducting training in various districts: Ainaro, Baucau, Ermera, Illiomar, Lospalos, Manatuto, Ossu and Suai.

Activities

The focus of the peace education of the team is to train youth and other groups in social competence and non-violent strategies in conflict transformation. In order to contribute to a more peaceful society of Timor-Leste they enhance the ability of youth, parents and teachers to reflect about themselves better, change attitudes, and develop self-esteem and self –confidence.

The trainings concept is a training circle and has different levels. It covers:

- Basic training on personality skills (self-reflection and stress management), communication (Schulz von Thun) and non-violent conflict strategies (understanding conflict and methods in conflict transformation) – Level 1

The advanced training is tailored to the specific target groups and is offered to youth, teachers or parents.

- Introduction to the mediation process – Level 2
- Non-violent communication (Marshall Rosenberg) – Level 3
- Advanced training on various conflict strategies including case studies and practise – Level 4

Approach

The training follows a psychosocial approach. The psychosocial approach addresses the well-being of individuals in relation to their environments.

With theory and practice, group work, discussions, role plays the participants are involved with their whole personalities in the training procedures. The trainings are highly interactive and are focusing on the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of conflicts and conflict management. The trainings incorporate the unique method of a psychological approach: Providing a safe space.

In addition to the psychosocial approach the focus is upon empowerment. The different aspects of the empowerment that are focused upon are:

- Personal empowerment: self-confidence, self-assurance, self-respect, opportunities and greater freedom
- Social empowerment: visibility and social presence, participation in public life, respect by other members of the community, networking
- Cultural empowerment: power to shape cultural definitions, influence the symbolic order maintaining and expanding youths' culture and position in the religious system
- Economic empowerment: economic literacy, property and means of production, income and decision-making power in reference to money, reduction of dependence, risks and stress, social security, influence on economic policies

The design of the trainings is to form peer groups in order to deliver the training to other persons in the community or schools. Therefore the curriculum – from the Level 2 upwards - is designed specifically for each group and provides training units that can be transferred directly to other beneficiaries. The participants undergo a process of participating, experiencing, evaluating personal results and effects of the units directly. Consequently, they can measure the use of the content openly in the training and discuss about it.

Target group

The target group is reached easily by this project: During the time of funding 974 participants have taken part in the training circles already. The established infrastructure of the Canossa Foundation makes it easy to provide venues for trainings, even in remote areas and the Sisters are supporting the team seeking for the right persons to take part in the trainings.

Obstacles

The students from university have unpredictable schedules regarding exams. The dates are delivered to them only a few days before the exam takes place. This hinders occasionally their attendance in the training.

Approaches that proved to be successful

At the individual level, power can be understood as «power within». People are able to recognise their own situation as shaped by adaptation, dependence and/or oppression, and they develop a wish to change. They understand that they have the possibility to influence and shape their own lives – that they have the power to act, to make decisions and to solve problems.

Empowerment includes «power with», i.e. the realisation that individuals are not alone but are part of a group and that change can take place when people work together. This power involves thinking, acting and networking with others in a social context.

The third level is concerned with the changing of social power relations. It is a question of marginalisation and of reducing the power of dominant groups (power over). The goal should be participation in power in societal processes.

Empowerment is not limited to developing more positive feelings about oneself and gaining insight into one's situation. It also means doing something about it. It means actual participation in the social process with a realistic prospect of changing existing power structures.

The concept of providing “safe space” where participants can reflect and experience their constructive power makes this approach recommendable for replication. The individual is taken seriously.