



MARCH 2016

ACG: Forging A New Path And Strengthening Local

The African Coordination Group (ACG) hosted a 4-day retreat/

training session of representatives of lofC Boards from twelve (12) African countries from 11 - 14 February, 2016. The occasion was inspired by the strategic framework arrived at during a consultation in Ethiopia in 2014 to encourage skills development in order to enhance the effectiveness of teams. It was also in response to needs expressed by teams in Africa, through a questionnaire sent out by the ACG in 2015.

Countries represented included Burundi, Cameroun, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Programmes such as East African Youth Forum, Creators of Peace and the Communications team were also represented. For the first time, the Arab region was represented by two participants from Egypt.

Leveraging on human, spiritual and intellectual resources available within lofC in Africa and internationally, the purpose of the training was to strengthen the value base of various teams around good governance, ethical leadership and accountability. Other areas covered included project management, team building, fund raising and facilitation skills. A time of morning reflection set the tone for each day.

The training was strategically scheduled to allow some members of the International Council (IC) who had just concluded their IC meetings, to facilitate some sessions. It also provided opportunity for deeper understanding of the network at individual and institutional levels and the issues they are confronted with.

Funds for the programme were provided by the Irene Prestwich Trust, Friends Of Africa Fund, Friends of South Sudan in Australia and some national teams who provided airfare for some of their participants. Thanks too to the Nigeria Board for providing the financial surety for the programme pending the receipt of international grants. Thanks also go to the young volunteers of Moral Re-Armament (MRA) Nigeria who ensured that all logistics for a successful hosting of the training were in place.



ACG members (From left) Abiodun Owoseni, Adalbert Otou Nguini, Chief Felicia Odetoyinbo (PRESIDENT IOFC NIGERIA), Azeb Girmai, Roy Ncube, Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye, Steve Kismaru

EXCERPTS FROM OPENING REMARKS BY AHUNNA EZIAKONWA-ONOCHIE

UN resident representative to Ethiopia, Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie shed light on the situation in Africa and lofC's role in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She said, "The African continent has been through a lot of mutilations. This continent has a lot to offer to the world but the tragedy has been the narrative that this is a hopeless place. Africans started to believe it."

"There are a few things that are different in Africa now. One is the narrative, Africa coming to define itself not as a continent of challenge but a continent of opportunity. A destination for investment not charity".

"When I started at the United Nations (UN), African nations did not have national plans, only poverty reduction strategies, part of the 'Washington consensus'. We danced not to our own drums but to other people's music.

"Today at the African Union (AU) we have Agenda 2063 – African countries defining a vision for 50 years.

"Now every country in the world wants to be at the AU summit, because they think this continent could be a serious business partner in a world experiencing an incredible economic slump.

"We had the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They made remarkable achievements, but were not enough. Yes, there is economic growth but how shared is this prosperity?

"The idea of SDGs grew as something which does not put a band aid on the problem but deals with root causes. At the heart of the issue is that we are not going to be able to sustain the rise of Africa unless we achieve balance.

"What could be some of the links between the **SDGs and **Initiatives of Change (lofC)**?"**

"We need people who are prepared to invest time and energy in making better human beings. The most fundamental crisis is the lack of leadership. Leaders don't know what to do, walking into landmines all the time. No one is listening to themselves or their neighbours. The concept of listening has to be brought back on the table. lofC should focus on this. Nurturing leaders, counselling leaders.

lofC has a responsibility to get close to leaders.

"Second thing is how we manage our diversity. Another key building block of lofC. We are all different but our differences could be mined as an advantage. We need to create space to respect difference not just tolerate it."

Ahunna attributed her involvement with the UN to experiences as a volunteer with MRA/lofC in her youth which shaped her thinking and career path. "I am here today because someone took me seriously, picked me up, and gave me a sense of respect and responsibility. Since then, I've never lost my sense of purpose and belonging. Many young people don't have that opportunity."



**"WE ARE THE
GENERATION THAT
HAS THE CAPACITY
TO END POVERTY
ON THE CONTINENT,
BUT ALSO TO
WRECK THE
PLANET."**



Ahunna Interacting with participants

THE BEGINNINGS OF lofC



Edward Peters made a presentation on the beginnings of Initiatives of Change, a “refresher” on the foundational events and experiences which led to the creation of the movement initially called the Oxford Group, then Moral Re-Armament, and since 2001, Initiatives of Change. He recounted the three experiences which shaped Frank Buchman’s life and ideas, using video clips, slides and sketches to illustrate his presentation.

In 1908, Frank Buchman experienced a profound inner transformation in a chapel in Keswick, England, which provided the first core principle of lofC: that ‘change starts with me.’

The second event, or period, was in the years up to 1915 when Buchman was working as Young Mens Christian Association (YMCA) Secretary at Penn State College.

Here he learned the second core tenet of lofC: that we are called to help other people to change. He also discovered the power of a daily quiet time, as an indispensable aid to maintain his relationship with God, and as a time for receiving direction on how to care for other people.

The third moment was in 1921, in Cambridge, UK, where Buchman had a vision to “remake the world”, that is to seek to contribute to the changes needed in the wider world.

Edward invited the participants to reflect on the experiences of Frank Buchman and what it means for each, personally and corporately.

TEAM BUILDING

Camilla Nelson took us through a health check of our individual and team trees. This was a timely reality check for participants. As each team’s tree was posted on the wall it created a beautiful orchard of programmes in Africa.



LIVING DIFFERENTLY by EDWARD PETERS AND ABIODUN OWOSENI

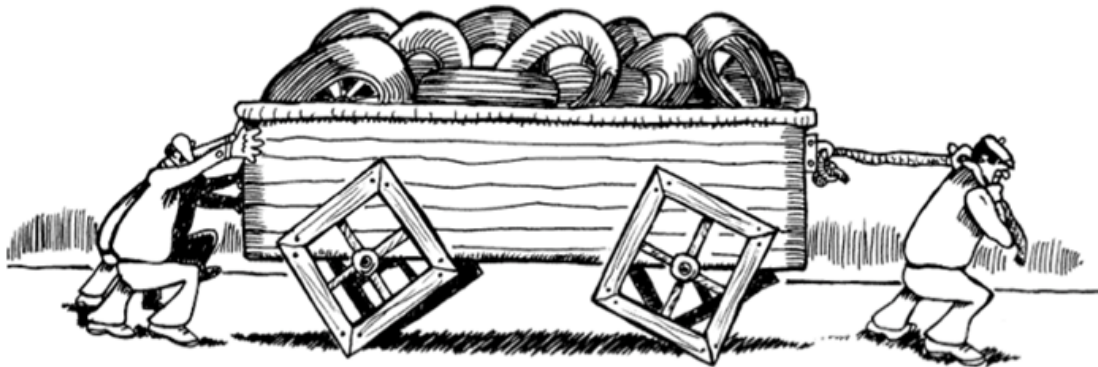
Living Differently (LD) is an initiative introduced in 2014 by the International Council in response to the demands for spiritual renewal, care and growth of individuals and teams. It is a monthly 2-hour sessions for small groups with self-guided facilitation materials, presently available in English and French.

Abiodun Owoseni, shared how LD has become instrumental in reviving the spirit of the lofC team in Nigeria. He facilitated a practical session on how a LD session should be run. Boards’ representatives were inspired and keen to adopt LD to deepen the faith and growth of teams.

GOVERNANCE AND SKILLS ACQUISITION

Sessions on good governance, organisational development, setting strategic priorities and financial management afforded the Boards' representatives the materials and practical tools for revamping the national lofC works. It is important to integrate lofC's core values in governance and accounting structures. Apply open and honest dialogue for the appraisal of the history of the team (how the team was formed; where they are and the desired future). This will give both the old and new members of the team the needed insight into the culture and what needs to be in place to become operational as a team. Thanks to Ron Lawler, Mohan Bagwandas, and Yehalu Fisseha for facilitating the sessions.

Further sessions on project management, fundraising, engagement and facilitation skills highlighted the need for Boards to take on the responsibility for the acquisition of appropriate skills for their teams. A better equipped team makes for better lofC programmes engaging with community and national issues. Projects will also attract outside funding. These sessions were facilitated by Imad Karam, Nelly Njoki, Potia Mosia and Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye.



DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIME - Reflection by Francis Acqua (Rev.) - lofC Ghana



- The life-transforming experiences of this workshop convinced me that God is doing a new thing in Africa, and we should not fail to discern this divine visitation. These events, coupled with the fact that, individually, we are alive to be part of what I describe as a great awakening of our calling and responsibility, attest to the signs of the time.

This gathering of both young and old passionate Africans from various cultures and situations at such a time is not for nothing; God is raising an army for a moral revolution in Africa and you are here at such a time because you are part of his recruitment. Our responsibility is to seize this moment and avail ourselves as instruments for this divine purpose in Africa and beyond. The signs are here with us, and we must not fail to recognize them and make the most of it while we have this time.

I was diagnosed with cancer in 2007 and underwent surgery without good insurance cover and any financial backing. I have survived this dreadful condition till now! God's divine intervention in this process and my survival, is something that I have not been able to process its full meaning for my life within God's plan. However, as I sat through this workshop during this week as a witness and participant of this happening, it then dawned on me why God has spared my life till now; there is mission to be accomplished, else the story will not be complete.

You may, also, have certain life experiences that can serve as a conviction that your life is not an accident; there is a divine purpose, and that the time is here and now! There is a change in Africa that has been initiated and you are an instrument for its full realization.

As instruments, let us rise up and build bridges across faith traditions, cultures, racial divides, and help dismantle all forms of structures that reinforce exclusions. lofC provides a platform for joining hands with all those who seek to affirm life through authentic religious experience and sound spirituality. At a time when religion is being exploited to unleash horrible conflicts and suffering in some African communities, let us present a better alternative through the life-transforming and unifying values of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

In doing so, let us watch and examine our hearts, which has the potential for both good and evil. The Islamic concept of Jihad, which has been exploited by some power seeking individuals, who serve their own interest, rather than Allah and humanity, offers useful points of connection and lessons. Jihad, understood as holy war against others is considered as minor Jihad in Islam. The greater Jihad, however, which every Muslim is called upon to wage, is the recognition of the evil potential that lies within the inner recesses of every human soul. A good Muslim is, therefore, the one who turns to Allah daily and resists this inner evil from causing harm, havoc and suffering.

We know the problem of Africa lies in the human heart; it is moral. Let us, therefore resist any form of self that can unleash this evil within, by turning to God for his grace, and go and care for others as we pursue the path of peace; let us go and live, differently, and Africa will awake to take her place in the world.



COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS AFTER THE TRAINING

"I have had a spiritual awakening and a clear conviction of my specific calling."

"I have received insights into skills of engagement."

"I realised how good governance can contribute in building a strong team," said a participant.

"Living Differently is a great initiative I would like to be part of."

"Team building strategies made sense to me because its how we strenghten our teams by creating space for honest conversations."

"I was really inspired by Ahunna. She spoke from the heart and reminded me that relationships are important and they need to be sustained by simple gestures."

"Refreshing leadership skills and a new way of mobilising the local team."

"I got a better knowledge of lofC and got to know more about the International Council."

A participant from Egypt wrote, "Now I have a strong relationship with the Nigerian team and many African countries and will share this experience at the Arab coordination group meeting in March."

"Daily reflection time was very touching, instructive and revealing."

"It was an opportunity to voice my country's challenges and needs."

"Opportunity to know more of my African brothers and sisters. It's a new chapter in my life."

LOOKING AHEAD



Representatives From Burundi, Cameroon & Rwanda



lofC Nigeria Volunteers

TRAINING FOR AFRICAN FRANCOPHONE TEAMS AND CONSULTATION in 2017

Adalbert Otou-Nguini, ACG member from Cameroon in charge of liaison with the Francophone teams, reported that there are plans for a training for Francophone Africa lofC teams under the aegis of the ACG in 2017. Following his ACG-sponsored visit to Burundi last year, he had earlier indicated that the training will be

held in Burundi; but in view of the prevailing political situation, it is now thought that the security of the participants to such an event in Burundi cannot be guaranteed. He therefore suggested that the training could be moved to Cameroon. That possibility has been considered by the Cameroon team and they are open to

it if it has the support of the ACG. He will consult with the other interested teams – Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda for confirmation of this option.

RESOLUTIONS GOING FORWARD

A. Spiritual Nourishment for teams.

- National teams to pursue the Living Differently initiative as a tool for spiritual growth of teams.
- End of April deadline for implementation of LD
- First week of May, approach Bhavesh Patel for Training of Trainers in Africa.



B. Governance and Accountability

- Review the governance structures of team in Africa (e.g. human resources, planning, finance, structure, commitment) and report to the ACG.
- By the end of June 2016 a report to be sent to ACG on inclusion of young people on national Boards to ensure continuity and succession leadership.
- Teams are at different stages of development. They go back to review their status and then timelines can be drawn up and communicated to ACG.

C. Finance and Sustainability

- End of June a report to be submitted on progress made in this regard and quarterly thereafter. Send reports to acg@iofc.org.

