

The global pandemic has impacted the way we work, but our core focus is the same. We empower people divided by conflict to stop the spread of violence, and to forge more inclusive, sustainably peaceful societies. As the pandemic's many effects continue to unfold, we are seeing that these efforts to bridge divides and prevent violence are needed more than ever.

## Steps to prevent violent conflict, as the pandemic spreads in Nigeria

In **Protecting Our Communities: Building on Women's and Youth's Knowledge to Increase Civilian Security**, Karuna Center and the Nigerian nonprofit *Neem Foundation* work toward reducing deadly farmer-herder conflict. Environmental degradation, climate change, and population shifts have impacted the usable land. Sometimes, this explodes into community violence when people back either the farmers or the semi-nomadic herders out of ethnic or religious solidarity. Our focus is on mentoring women and youth from impacted communities to cooperate across differences in faith, culture, and livelihood, and to advocate solutions to local leaders and government officials.



In this 2019 project meeting, the speaker noted that women are often the first to detect extremism in youth.

The pandemic has further restricted Nigerians' access to income, growing supplies, grazing lands, and food. This scarcity

could exacerbate existing conflicts. Violent extremist organizations and bandits are also increasing attacks on communities during the current crisis—further increasing tensions and threatening the national food supply.

*Protecting Our Communities* uses several strategies to reduce violence. Our team is teaching communities how to flag warning signs of conflict using an **Early Warning/Early Response** system developed by *Neem Foundation*. We are providing in-depth practice and

mentorship so that **community dialogue facilitators** can safely bring farmers and herders together. The project's **call-in radio programs & social media campaigns** engage people in problem-solving about conflicts while also sharing information about COVID-19. We continually adapt all initiatives to current health guidelines for travel, physical distance, and group size.

## Talking about environmental justice

If **all** Americans were dying of COVID-19 at the same rate as **white** Americans, then at least **13,000** Black Americans would still be alive with their families today.\* Indigenous people, Latinos, and Asian Americans are also dying at disproportionate rates. Environmental injustice is one of the social inequalities behind this outcome—heavy air polluters are more often located close to communities of color, and initial studies show this makes the body more vulnerable to COVID-19. Environmental justice activists have been sounding the alarm for decades that pollution contributes to cancer, cardiovascular disease, and other causes of death that are now accelerated by the pandemic.

Last year, we began co-facilitating a series of dialogues—**Transforming the Conversation on Carbon Pricing**—in partnership with the *Deep South Center for Environmental Justice*, *Pricing Carbon Initiative*, and *Citizens Climate Lobby*. The purpose is to create a constructive space for leading advocates of carbon pricing policies and of environmental justice to talk together about how to better include the concerns of vulnerable communities in proposed policies—so that efforts to address *overall* emissions do not inadvertently continue the existing, deadly disparities.

\*APM Research Lab, [www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race](http://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race), 5/27/2020.



Workshops (above, Feb. 2020) are replaced by webinars during the pandemic.

## Sharing skills among Ethiopian city leaders

As Ethiopia transitions to democracy after decades of authoritarian rule, we are working with diverse leaders from three eastern cities: Harar, Dire Dawa, and Jijiga. These areas have faced rising ethnic and religious violence, while political tensions and high unemployment make youth susceptible to recruitment by violent extremists. Our workshops on conflict transformation and coalition-building are supporting municipal and civil society leaders, from different religions, clans, and political parties, to form and operate local peace committees. During the pandemic, those committees are meeting virtually and in small groups to lead a range of projects, including social media campaigns for inclusion and televised dialogues about the importance of building communities resilient to violence.

This project is a collaboration with *Ethiopian Interfaith Forum for Development, Dialogue and Action* and *African Immigrant Communities, Inc.*

## Improving West African states' coordination to respond quickly to emerging threats

Over the past four years, Karuna Center has been working with **ECOWAS** (the **Economic Community of West African States**) to strengthen its ability to coordinate across 15 member states to respond quickly to early warning of violent conflict. Our contributions are part of the USAID REWARD program led by Creative Associates.

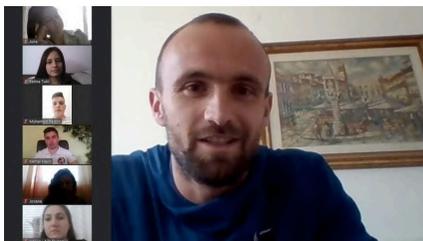
We have developed tools that can be used with the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, which emphasizes “human security” in all its dimensions rather than just preventing violent conflict alone. This is important when a threat like COVID-19 emerges that may increase vulnerability to conflict. Last year, we led a 3-day planning exercise in which participants from different sectors of ECOWAS (with focuses ranging from humanitarian to electoral issues) used our conflict analysis and response tools to address a hypothetical emerging crisis.



Then, in January 2020, we supported ECOWAS staff to practice designing a response to a real situation—the complex humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad basin, impacted by climate change, irrigation practices, and violent extremism. We first led an in-depth facilitation workshop (photo above), then coached them as they co-facilitated the exercise. Now, we are focused on a series of webinars to continue supporting ECOWAS' work as they face the challenge of coordinating responses to the pandemic amid many other human security threats.

## A generation of Bosnians rises to meet new challenges

Youth and young adults in our **Societal Transformation and Reconciliation (STaR)** project have spent the past year working across generations to build more inclusive communities—through peace camps and caravans, human rights workshops, art and media activism, talks with war veterans and survivors, and collaborations they have led across ethnic divides in their own communities. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a nation still politically divided along the lines of its 1990s war, and a pandemic brings the risk of new divides and scapegoating. In these difficult times, youth have been inventing creative ways to keep their peace work going even though the spread of COVID-19 keeps them apart.



*In one “Let’s Talk” event, Olympic runner Amel Tuka talked with dozens of diverse Bosnian youth about using sports for peace.*

An interethnic group of STaR peace camp graduates recently launched a nationwide series of conversations online—#hajmopričat (*Let’s Talk*)—about how art, sports, and other

“When the COVID-19 virus came, I, as an activist, felt a moral responsibility to get involved and contribute so that everyone who was isolated and left alone in these difficult days would receive help.”

—STaR youth peace camp participant

aspects of daily life can help build social cohesion and peace. STaR youth centers have moved their workshops to Zoom; film screenings and discussions have continued online; and youth monitoring and reporting of hate speech have expanded to capture COVID-19 misinformation. STaR youth are

also collaborating to produce a variety of social media initiatives—including an inspiring video about staying true to our common humanity during the crisis. As we head into summer, STaR is carefully resuming some activities in person while maintaining this vibrant online presence.

*STaR is a collaboration among Karuna Center, Center for Peacebuilding, PRONI Center for Youth Development, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, and Mali Koraci/Small Steps, funded by USAID.*

## Erasure and Restoration: An Exploration of Past and Present in the Kwinitekw River Valley

This year is the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower landing in Plymouth, a symbolic beginning to European colonization of the region. Guided by a local Advisory Committee, with Indigenous participation, we are convening a discussion and dialogue series about Erasure and Restoration. Together, we will explore historical and current narratives about Indigenous people in Western Massachusetts, the attempts at erasing and altering these narratives, and how more space can be made in



our communities for Indigenous voices. Our aim is to consider who the narrators of Indigenous history and experiences are, make possible a strengths-based retelling of history, and explore new possibilities to build relationships, repair harms, and support inclusive ways to engage the general public in

learning about local history and the ongoing impacts of colonization. We are beginning this spring with virtual meetings and talks and by sharing resources online.