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Contents

Preface

This collection of research covers the students who took part in the Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) course between September 2006 and August 2008. The ACTS courses first began in 2005 and so these are only the second groups of students to complete their Masters studies with the programme.

The ACTS programme was developed with a number of specific aims in mind: to support the work of practitioners working for peaceful change in their communities, to enable practitioners to research and document their work so that others can learn from them, and so that they can systematically investigate their work and discover new ways to make it more effective and strategic. This publication is one of the ways in which ACTS aims to highlight the work of practitioners and bring it to the attention of a wider group of people.

The last year has been an exciting one for the ACTS programme as we have begun some initial work on impact assessment to see to what extent these aims are being met. The first article (by Dr Willemijn Verkoren and Alexandra Moore) looks into the reasons for the development of the programme, the theories behind the aims and assumptions of the ACTS programme, and draws on the impact assessment work to show some of the changes.

In section 3 the students' work and research takes centre stage. These articles are based on the action research which they undertook throughout their studies. Finally an overview of all the students has been included.

Course information

The section contains information about the ACTS course, including its aims, objectives and content

ONE

ACTS is a resource for learning and knowledge in the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. It aims to provide support to:

Individual practice

ACTS works directly with practitioners, many of whom work in situations of ongoing violent conflict or post-conflict situations. ACTS places an emphasis on strengthening personal skills and capacity for working in conflict situations and creating awareness of the (potential) of the practitioners' role and the impact that they have on their work.

Peacebuilding work

Individuals and organisations who are actively engaged in work for social change constantly face a wide range of challenges. There is a real need for people to find the time to pause; to examine the strengths, limitations and challenges of their work, and to introduce themselves to new ideas and fresh thinking. Only when this time is made can people learn from their work so that they can be more effective and strategic in the future.

Theory

The practice of peacebuilding work and the development of theory are closely intertwined. For theory to be useful to us it needs to be based on, and developed from experience. Yet those who have the most practical experience often do not contribute to theory. ACTS provides a space for practitioners to gain a deep understanding of the theoretical basis of the field, to critique it from their own experience, and to engage in their own research.

Each ACTS course is taken over a two-year period during which time there are six modules. Each module consists of:

Residential seminar (8-10 days)

Guided learning, group work.

Work/home-based study

Reading, action research, personalised study.

Coursework

Assessment tasks vary between centres and can range from essays, presentations, literature reviews, and learning journal reports.

Course learning objectives

Studying on the ACTS course will enable students to to:

- Employ conflict-handling skills in all spheres, from interpersonal to public and professional, with increased sensitivity and resourcefulness.
- Share their knowledge and skills appropriately with colleagues and partners.
- Articulate and communicate their work effectively.
- Examine and critique existing knowledge and theory in the field of conflict transformation.
- Analyse and understand complex conflict situations.
- Combine their theoretical understanding and practical experience of a situation to design appropriate interventions and programmes of work
- Assess the impact of interventions and programmes of work.
- Generate and test creative hypotheses and theories for action relating to issues confronting them in their work for peace and justice.
- Write about their research and work in a critical and analytical manner.

Course content

The ACTS course content has been designed to give students a broad understanding of the field of conflict

transformation and to look at different phases of conflict in greater detail. Each course will adapt to the needs of the group, drawing upon regionally relevant materials and focusing upon key issues and topics.

Module One – Theories of Conflict

This module focuses on articulating and deepening students knowledge about conflict and conflict theories within the global system. It introduces a number of tools, skills, frameworks and concepts to assist students to develop a common language for working throughout the course.

Module Two – Conflict, Power and Change

This module looks at how conflict can be used as a catalyst for bringing about sustainable peace. Students look at how latent conflicts and issues can be brought to the surface, but in such a way that they do not turn to violence.

Students are asked to think about how they can change themselves, and how individuals and communities can be mobilised to bring about positive change in their societies. Students are encouraged to explore the interconnections between the public, private and institutional spheres.

Module Three – Transforming Violent Conflict

This module focuses on how students can work on, and transform violent conflict in various situations. Students explore and critique a range of different types of interventions and the roles and functions of the different actors. Frameworks for conflict transformation are introduced, applied to local contexts and critiqued.

Module Four – Building Sustainable Peace

This module builds upon concepts introduced earlier in the course, such as systems change, and explores how they relate to the later stages of a conflict. It raises questions such as: How do violent conflicts end? How do we build sustainable peace in a post-settlement situation? The transition from violent conflict, to peace settlements and reconstruction of communities and societies forms the basis of module four.

Module Five – Building Theory from Practice

This module draws upon students' Action Research as a prime source of learning. Students bring their completed draft projects for presentation and critique during the interactive seminar. In particular students are challenged to look beyond their practice and their work and to identify the implications of their research for the wider field of conflict transformation. Mechanisms for generating theory through practice-based research are revisited and clarified.

Module Six – Agents of Transformation

This module focuses firstly on students' action research and secondly on the evaluation of the course. During the seminar students finalise and present their research at a public event and undergo a formal examination process.

Impact and lessons learned

This article looks at the learning which has been generated by the ACTS programme and the extent to which it has met its objectives.

TWO

Action learning for peace?

Applied Conflict Transformation Studies as a capacity development approach

by DR WILLEMIJN VERKOREN and ALEXANDRA MOORE

Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) is a Master's level programme for peacebuilding practitioners that is offered in parts of the world that are affected by conflict. In response to a number of challenges that peacebuilders face, particularly the lack of opportunities to engage in strategic reflection about their work, ACTS focuses on practice-based learning within an academic framework. Action research (AR), which focuses both on people's work and their own role within it, is central to the course. This article explores the lessons that can be learned from ACTS as it has been implemented between 2005 and today. In particular it asks whether ACTS provides a model for peacebuilding capacity development that may inspire other initiatives, and whether AR turned out to be an approach that can foster analytical and reflective practitioners, foster more effective and strategic peace practice, and enable practitioners to contribute to the generation of new academic theory. The article finds that AR indeed has enabled practitioners to be more reflexive and has helped them become more strategic in their work. However, there have been a number of challenges in developing the AR approach, such as building the capacity of teaching teams and developing a common understanding of the approach and its value with all the implementing partners. If this is achieved, another aim of ACTS may come closer to being realised, namely to strengthen the role of Southern practitioners in theory generation and academic and policy debates. This is an area which requires much more attention in the future. Finally, the article asks whether a capacity development programme such as ACTS can extend its influence beyond the participants to change the practice of organisations and other key players. It is still rather early to determine this, but scattered evidence suggests that the programme has achieved some limited changes in projects and organisations.

Introduction

Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) is a Master's programme for peacebuilding practitioners that is offered in parts of the world that are affected by conflict. It was initiated by Responding to Conflict (RTC), a UK-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), and developed and implemented with a consortium of partners: the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) and Paññāsāstra University in Cambodia, the Nansen Dialogue Network and Novi Sad University in the Balkans, and the Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA) in East Africa. Since 2005 the Master's programme has been offered in two regional centres: one in Cambodia for participants from all over Asia, and one in Serbia for participants from the Balkans (and later on also from the Middle East). As the programme was developed there were three main aims in mind. *The first was to develop the capacity of peacebuilding practitioners to engage in their work; the second was to support and promote effective and strategic peacebuilding work; and finally to develop theory and new knowledge about peacebuilding processes from the perspective of*

those who are engaged in the actual work. To do this ACTS focuses on practice-based learning within an academic framework to offer a programme suited to the needs of practitioners. Action research (AR), which focuses both on people's work and their own role within it, is central to the course. The underlying idea is that by using action research methodology in their own work environments, and comparing their findings with existing thinking in the field of peacebuilding, the participants not only become more effective in their practice but also contribute to global theory development from a Southern, practitioner perspective. In this way the programme aims to bridge some of the divides in the peacebuilding field between universities and the field, and between North and South.

This article explores the lessons that can be learned from ACTS as it has been implemented between 2005 and today. In particular it asks whether ACTS provides a model for peacebuilding capacity development that may inspire other initiatives. It will look at the specific theories of change which underpin the programme and ask to what extent have these theories proven correct? In particular, has action research turned out to be an approach that can foster analytical and reflective practitioners and more effective and strategic peace practice? Have changes been able to move from the individual practitioner to their organisations and colleagues? And has ACTS been able to strengthen the voice of practitioners in the generation of academic theory?

This article has been written by two people who have been involved in the ACTS programme in different roles and at different stages. Dr Willemijn Verkoren is assistant professor at Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands and has accompanied the development of ACTS as a learning consultant since 2005. Alexandra Moore is the Programme Coordinator for RTC and has been involved in the development of ACTS since its initial stages. The article also draws heavily on the thinking and reflections of many colleagues, in particular Dr Vesna Matovic, the RTC Programme Manager for this work. She has taught in both ACTS centres and previously worked for the partners in the Balkans to develop the course. Clearly then, we are not neutral observers and we have tried to be conscious of the possible bias that this may bring to this article.

The article begins by giving a short history of the ACTS course in section one: how did the programme come into being? In order to elaborate on the question *why* ACTS came into being, section two discusses the importance of learning for peace practitioners. Section three goes on to examine the theoretical background of ACTS: what theories and research findings have informed the approach taken? More specifically, section four outlines how these theories and ideas have translated into theories-of-change that have shaped the programme. In other words, what did we think ACTS would accomplish? Section five explains how these theories were translated into practice: what does the course look like and who are the participants? In section six, the theories of change are compared to the results we have seen so far. Have the theories proven correct, and has the programme met its aims? Finally, the concluding section discusses what all of this implies for capacity development initiatives more generally.

1. How did ACTS come into being?

Responding to Conflict (RTC) is a UK-based NGO that has been working on conflict transformation for over fifteen years. It has focused on the provision of training courses to peacebuilders from around the world as well as longer-term programmes of work with partners in various conflict-affected regions of the world. In Birmingham, UK, various courses have been offered, ranging from short week-long courses to the three-month *Working with Conflict* course. RTC's approach, whether in programmes or courses, is based on a participatory, experiential learning methodology that builds on the experiences and knowledge of those they work with.

By 2001 RTC had been working with peacebuilders for over eight years and the organisation felt it

was time to take stock of how it was doing. During research trips in 2001 and 2002 RTC staff and associates visited various peacebuilding practitioners from Kenya, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka and Serbia to find out how people had been able to use the training they had received from RTC in the past and to identify what challenges and needs remained for practitioners. One of the key needs that people voiced was for opportunities to access more in-depth skills and knowledge, and to think about the complex issues and challenges they were working with. Many were thinking about further study and some had already gone on to Bradford University in the UK or the Eastern Mennonite University in the US to do a Master's course. These courses had been valuable to them – but, they said, not to the communities they left behind, as their education had not explicitly been linked to the practical work they were returning to.

This led to the idea for a learning programme that *"..develops and articulates the experience of people working for peace, human rights, democracy and justice, builds new theory from practice and tests it in the fire of reality"* (RTC 2004). During the consultation phase of ACTS there was much debate about whether ACTS should be an academic programme. On the one hand this seemed like a natural option for an advanced learning programme, but at the same time it was recognised that the challenge would be to balance the needs of practitioners and their ways of working with the necessary demands of an academic course. It was finally decided that a Master's degree would provide the structure and rigour to allow people to undertake their research and refine their thinking. However, the difficulty of balancing practitioners' needs with academic requirements is an issue that has remained with the programme.

In 2005, the first courses began in Novi Sad, Serbia, for participants from different parts of the Balkans and in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, with participants from South and South-East Asia. In each ACTS Centre, ACTS is run by a consortium of three partners: the local NGO, which coordinates the programme, the local university, and RTC.

2. The importance of learning for peacebuilding NGOs

"Am I doing this thing right?" and, more fundamentally, "am I doing the right thing?" are questions most people ask themselves from time to time. And indeed they should as asking such questions leads to learning and improvement. In the complex and dynamic work of peacebuilding, they are particularly important, as the potential price of doing the wrong thing is high and renewed violence could ultimately be the result. However, finding answers to these questions is not easy. Doing so entails an open mind and a willingness to question previous decisions and ideas and learn from our mistakes – something which in a context affected by conflict is particularly difficult because of the implications this may have. It also requires a willingness to think about how we as individuals affect a given situation, and the assumptions we bring about the work. More practically, it is hard to obtain the knowledge needed to answer the questions in a satisfactory way. This requires research, reflection and exchange, all of which are particularly difficult in a conflict-affected and resource-deprived context.

The characteristics of violent conflicts have changed significantly since the end of the Cold War, as is reflected by the term 'New Wars' (Kaldor 2006). Increasingly wars take place within, not between countries. Often they are fought by groups that are confusingly difficult to define, hiding amongst civilians and exhibiting the characteristics of rebel forces, sectarian groups, terrorists, warlords, and criminals. Government forces, too, engage in plunder and smuggling, and integrate militias and private security providers into their ranks. Increasingly civilians have been targeted by the fighting groups on all sides. All this takes place in a context of globalisation and a weakening of national states' ability to provide for the security of their citizens. Deeper understanding about this new and changing context of conflict, and about the strategies that

do and do not work is needed, if conflicts are to be successfully transformed. Those working in the midst of conflict, such as peacebuilding NGOs, struggle to understand it, to adapt their analysis as the context changes, and to articulate why their actions do, or do not, contribute to changes in the situation.

A recent study found that "NGOs best equipped to deal with security threats were those which [...] had a strong analysis of the context" (Goodhand 2006: 107). Such NGOs are able to make sense of the conflict in which they work and to understand how changes in their context affect the work that they do. In other words, they are able to learn continuously, and this helps them to continue to be relevant and to see opportunities for engagement when they arise. Similarly, another study of nine successful South Asian NGOs showed that "the success of these NGOs was in part attributable to their willingness to embrace new learning and invest in developing their capacity as 'learning NGOs'" (Hailey and James 2002: 398).

However, learning is difficult in conflict settings for a number of reasons. NGO staff often work in a context of urgency, by necessity have action-oriented working styles, and as a result can find it difficult to create the time and opportunity for reflection and learning. In conflict-torn societies, the content of knowledge itself is usually contested as many narratives will exist within any given situation. In addition the mistrust and suspicion that often prevails between organisations working in these areas, as well as competition for resources, can hamper knowledge sharing. Structural inequalities also constrain the opportunities for learning and reflection that local Southern NGOs (SNGOs) have: the low research capacity of Southern knowledge institutions, a lack of recognition of indigenous knowledge, and the imposition of Northern policy priorities as part of the way the funding of NGOs is organised[1]. All these issues contribute to a lack of opportunities for Southern peacebuilders to reflect systematically on the role and place of their activities in the wider spectrum of peacebuilding, to analyse the effect of their interventions and ask whether they are doing the right thing, to study the needs and priorities of beneficiaries and collect existing ideas and methodologies of peacebuilding, and to document and share lessons learned.

The learning strategies of organisations are a relatively new field of analysis, which originated in the business sector in the early 1990s, reflecting an increasing emphasis on the 'knowledge economy'. Some years later, the development sector began to take up the issue as well. However, this body of thinking remains largely confined to internal learning mechanisms and knowledge flows inside organisations in the global North. From a study of British development organisations, Ramalingham (2005: 26) concludes that these organisations'

> *"focus on internal knowledge work belies the fact that [they rely] on activities in the South as a key source of their most valued knowledge, and that eventually, all knowledge that is 'value generating' must by necessity be tied back to a level of [knowledge sharing] with those in the South. [...] Learning between agencies and Southern partners, and between agencies and beneficiaries, is a clear gap in the knowledge and learning strategies [of international development organisations]".*

3. Theoretical background

A number of theoretical discussions and academic research findings have a bearing on the ACTS programme and its aims. In this section we will look at some of the discussions regarding the importance of learning for peacebuilding NGOs, different types of learning (in particular, tactical versus strategic learning), how peacebuilding NGOs in the field tend to learn, and whose knowledge is considered to be important. Together, these theoretical and empirical findings provide a background to the theories of change used by ACTS.

3.1 The road to improving effectiveness

One way to categorise the various activities of NGOs is according to the diagram below, often referred to as Key People, More People. The model

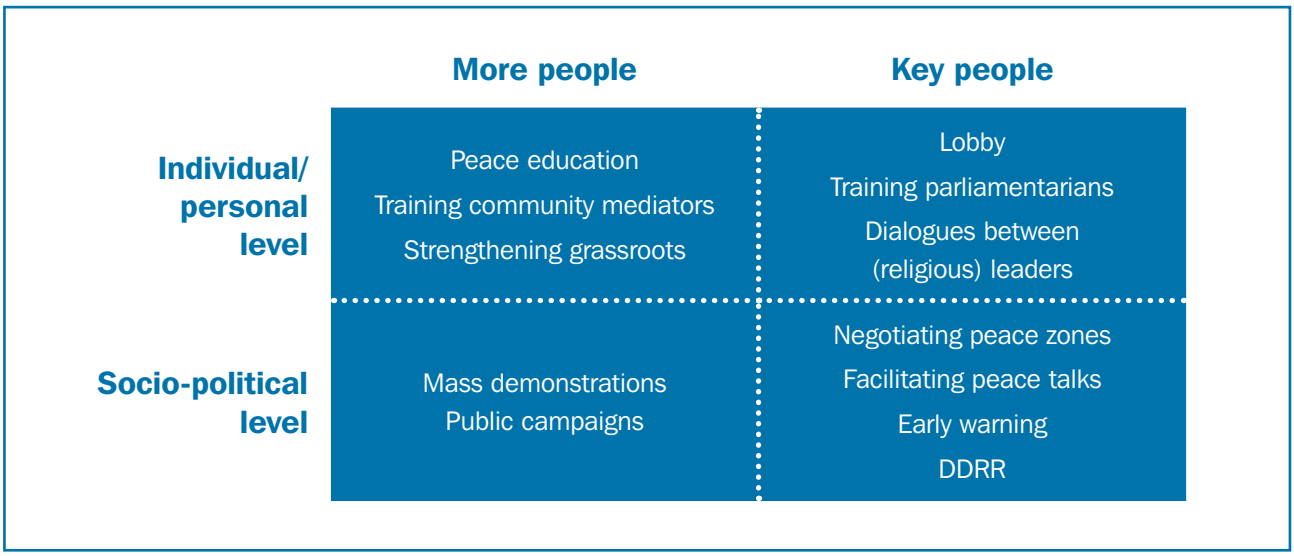
1 Below, these issues are discussed in some more detail.

was developed by Anderson and Olsen (2003) and based on the outcomes of a three-year project called *Reflecting on Peace Practice* that involved over two hundred peacebuilding NGOs.

Figure 1 looks at the ways in which most strategies for working towards "peace writ large[2]" can be understood. The horizontal axis represents a difference in strategies ranging from activities aimed at involving as many people as possible to activities aimed at a limited number of key people. "More people" strategies want peacebuilding activities to be as broad-based as possible and to have people from all interest and conflict groups take part in them. "More people" strategies are not simply about numbers of people. It can mean having more people who are aware of a particular issue perhaps through public campaigns or mass protests. It may also be more people who are skilled in a particular way of working (ie. skills training in mediation, peacebuilding). And in situations where it may be dangerous for people to participate in peace activities, it may mean a strategy which moves incrementally towards involving more and more individuals. "Key people" strategies by contrast aim at those people who are considered to be in positions in which they can make a difference, affecting the larger political or economic framework in which peacebuilding efforts take place. These may be people in government, powerful civic leaders, or representatives of international organisations. Lobbying is a "key people" strategy, as is negotiation to create peace zones or efforts to facilitate dialogue among leaders. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48-49)

The vertical axis shows two other dimensions of peacebuilding work. Activities aimed at the individual or personal level strive to start building peace by changing people's attitudes and perceptions. Peace education is a good example of this. Socio-political level strategies aim at systemic, institutional change, at the level of society as a whole. Strategies to strengthen democracy and activities to further socio-economic development both fit within this category (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48-49). If we start filling in the above-mentioned activities in the quadrants of the diagram, it might look as follows:

Figure 1: Categorising NGOs' activities in peacebuilding[3]



2 or the bigger peace beyond the immediate context of a project or programme(CDA 2004).
3 Adapted from Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48.

One of the report's main findings was that work which stays within one of the squares is not enough to generate any significant momentum for change. Fitting their activities into such a model may help NGOs to understand better how they are placed strategically. It can stimulate reflection on the relationship between activities and final aims and encourage the development of more effective strategies. For example, if an NGO works mostly at the individual, key people level, how does it expect this work to trickle down to the more people level – and who and what are needed to make that happen? Alternatively, when an organisation focuses its activities in several parts of the quadrant, do these different areas of work strengthen one another, and how? Further on in this section we will see that most local peacebuilding NGOs have not done such thinking explicitly, but voice a need for more reflection on their place, role, strategy, and results.

3.2 Types of learning

A large body of literature about learning (and organisational learning) has come into existence in recent decades, generating various ways to categorise learning processes. An often-made distinction in these publications is between first-, second- and third-order learning. First-order learning uses a pre-given set of knowledge, which is transferred from a book or teacher to a learner. By contrast, second-order learning is the creation of new knowledge by *learning in action*. It is a cyclical trial-and-error process of action and adaptation and involves asking questions, reflecting, and adjusting while acting. Third-order learning goes a step further in that it also includes questioning the validity of the tasks and problems posed. It does not take the structural framework in which the action takes place for granted but questions the ultimate aims and principles that underlie the action. Where second-order learning leads to adjustment at the tactical level in order to meet one's aims more effectively, third-order learning may lead to strategic changes, such as an adjustment of the aims themselves. Thus, second-order learning may also be referred to as *tactical learning*, while third-order learning is *strategic learning*.

Third-order learning adds another cycle to the learning cycle of action, reflection, adjustment, and renewed action; namely the cycle of self-reflection that involves the questioning of underlying values. It entails asking difficult questions at the individual level about my own role in the activity in which I am engaged. What implicit theories, assumptions and experiences do I bring to this action, and how do they shape my ideas and actions? Should my assumptions be modified?

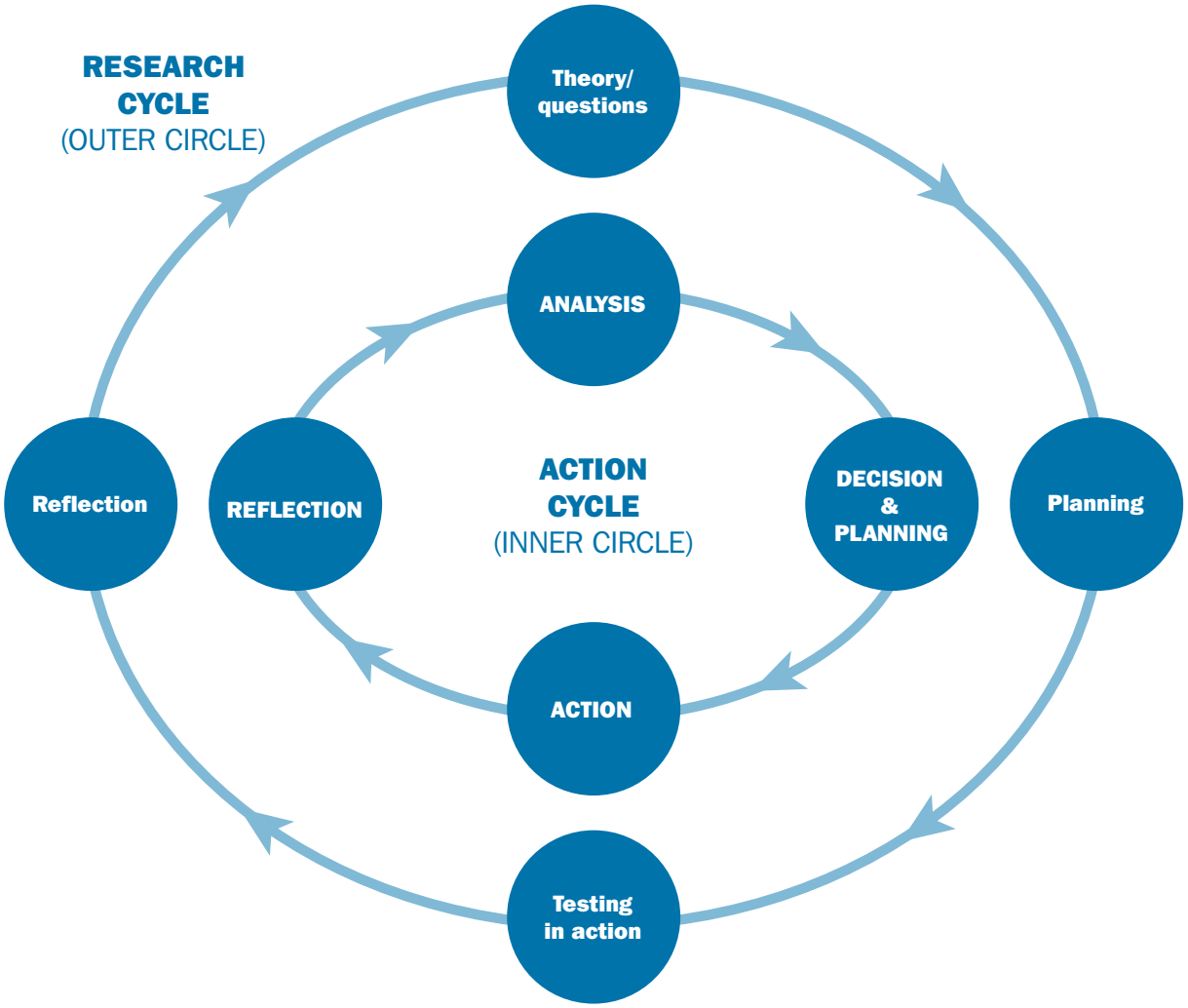
Because third-order learning adds another cycle, it is often referred to as 'double-loop learning'. In double-loop learning, the values and assumptions underlying my actions are reflected upon and tested simultaneously with the reflection and testing of the actions themselves. (Kolb 1984, Argyris 2004, Boonstra 2004, Cummings 2004).

3.3 Action research

The concepts of action learning and action research (AR) build on the idea of third-order, strategic learning. Here, too, learning takes place by doing, reflection, and experimentation – while at the same time there is a focus on the underlying implicit theories and values of the learner. The action learning and action research cycle is depicted in Figure 2 (page 11) which clearly shows the double loop.

An important difference between AR and 'traditional' research is that while "traditional academic research denies the relationships between the investigator and the empirical object", AR recognises that the presence and actions of a researcher have an impact on the reality they study, and vice versa. According to AR, "the ambiguous, dynamic and changing world cannot be understood from the detached position of the pure observer". (Boonstra 2004: 17) Thus, action researchers do not strive to be objective observers who are separate from what is being observed. On the contrary, they study a reality of which they are part and explicitly take into account their own role in shaping this reality. In response to their growing understanding of what they are

Figure 2: Action learning (ACTS 2005:13)



The inner circle represents the action learning cycle, in which an activity is carried out. This starts from an analysis of the situation, followed by the planning and then the implementation of the action itself. Next, a reflection takes place: how did I do? Do the results confirm my original analysis of the situation – or should it be adapted? If I remain on this inner circle my learning might stay at the *tactical* level, depending on how serious I am about my reflection and analysis. However, if I also follow the outer circle, the research cycle will take my learning to a further *strategic* level. Including research questions, to be examined whilst undertaking the ongoing action, then requires me to be explicit about my understanding of the world (theories, values, assumptions) that underlies my analysis of the situation. This leads to the formulation of a plan to test the research questions and my theories during the action. This testing consists mainly of being aware of the underlying theory during the action and being open to the possibility that it might prove to be inconsistent with the events that take place as a result of the action. In the reflection phase I do not consider only my action and its results, but also the way in which they relate to the underlying theories and assumptions that I have made explicit earlier on in the process. This leads me to adjust these theories and assumptions, and a new learning cycle may begin (ACTS 2005, Cummings 2004).

studying through AR, they may introduce changes to this reality in order to examine the results to which those may lead. Therefore in the practitioner-focused AR used in the ACTS programme research, questions are formulated at two levels: what do I want to know about my role in the action, and what do I want to know about the action in which I am involved? The usefulness of AR to practitioners in the peacebuilding field is considered further in section 4.2.

3.4 Local peace practitioners learn at a tactical level

The learning processes of local peace organisations in conflict-affected countries tend to take place at the micro-level and to focus on the short term in which a given project is implemented. Changes may be made within the confines of this project, but more macro, strategic questions ('is this the right project in relation to our long-term aims?' 'How does this project relate to what others are doing?' 'Are we together contributing to macro-level, longer-term peace?') tend to be overlooked. (Anderson and Olsen 2003; Fisher and Zimina 2008; Verkoren 2008). The earlier-mentioned *Reflecting on Peace Practices* project concluded that, although much well-intended, good peace work was done, all of this "should be adding up to more than it is. The potential of these multiple efforts is not fully realized." (Anderson and Olsen 2003, 10) The reason was that

> *"often peace practitioners only assume that good programmatic goals, because they are good, will in some undefined way lead to or support Peace Writ Large [the overall aim of stopping violence and building sustainable peace]. Because this connection is assumed, practitioners often do not carefully monitor their programs' real impacts on the broader peace. That is, practitioners do good things, thinking they are working for peace. But, often the connection between what they do and what is required to promote peace in that circumstance is so remote that, even if they achieve the immediate program goals, the impact of the program on broader peace is minimal." (Anderson and Olsen 2003, 12-13)*

A number of explanations for this difficulty to move beyond tactical learning have already been outlined in section 2: lack of time and capacity, the context in which people work and the competition between local organisations. Another factor which should also be mentioned is the value which is placed on local knowledge, which we will go on to consider now.

3.5 Local knowledge is under-valued and under-developed

In the top-down (outside-in) system in which many funding and peacebuilding policies are implemented, donors have little space for knowledge which Southern peace practitioners bring to the 'partnership'. In many instances local 'partner' organisations are 'subcontracted' to implement the pre-developed strategy of donor organisations (Edwards and Hulme 1996, Krieger 2004, Mawdsley et al. 2002, Mitlin et al. 2005) and in such situations organisations have little influence over peacebuilding strategy. Local peace workers are critical of the lack of recognition by donors of the local knowledge that they and their target groups have. Accountability is towards donors, not beneficiaries. Evaluation is usually done by foreign consultants. There are few examples where local knowledge is truly taken into account in the project cycle. As a result, projects that are implemented are not always the most context-relevant and effective. Most Southern practitioners are able to give examples of this. (Powell 2006, King 2004, Van Grasdorff 2005, Mawdsley et al. 2002, Verkoren 2008) And if an organisation does not have the power to determine strategy on its own, then why would it do strategic thinking?

Other aspects of the funding system also have implications for joint strategic thinking among local peace organisations – something called for by the Reflecting on Peace Practices project and others. First, local organisations compete for the same sources of funding. Since they are one another's competitors, they are reluctant to share strategic information and have no incentive to engage in joint strategy development. Second, the trend among donors to obtain demonstrable 'impact' of investments in the short-term (something demanded from them in turn by their own donors) means that they tend to shy away from financing activities that do not yield clearly

visible "direct-impact" – including activities such as strategic reflection and learning. (Verkoren 2008)

This is not only to put the blame on the donors. Southern CSOs rarely challenge the project ideas that donors introduce (Mawdsley et al. 2002). Part of the reason for this is simply that they depend upon the funding for their survival. But there is another key reason. While local actors are often convinced that they have knowledge that could change and shape the way that peacebuilding is done in their area, this knowledge remains "underdeveloped". It is largely intuitive, experience-based knowledge and it has not been systematically tested, compared with other theories, or supported by scientifically-gathered empirical data. This lack of development of local knowledge makes locals insecure about raising it to challenge the assumptions of outsiders, and this makes outsiders reluctant to accept it as "legitimate" knowledge. (Grenier 1997, Mudimbe 1988, Powell 2006)

This background helps explain a finding that emerged from 105 interviews about learning and knowledge strategies held with local peacebuilders in Africa and Asia in 2006[4]. Among the top priorities for knowledge and skills they would like to gain, 69 of these people, spread across the countries visited, said they wanted to increase their knowledge capacities: capacities for research, (joint) reflection, documentation, and knowledge dissemination. They emphasised that instead of obtaining pre-developed knowledge, they would rather be enabled to develop their own knowledge so as to expand it and make it better researched, more rigorous, and more authoritative. From this a specific picture arises of the type of capacity development local peacebuilders need: not training programmes in which existing knowledge is transferred, but the development of their own knowledge capacities. (Verkoren 2008)

Outsiders can play an important role in third-order strategic learning, as they bring in a fresh perspective that makes it easier for them to question working assumptions and underlying theories. In other words, outsiders can ask the uncomfortable questions that trigger the learner to rethink ideas that had been taken for granted. This role of outsiders in third-order learning has been called a learning 'scaffold' (Smid and Beckett 2004).

In processes to develop local knowledge, local knowledge institutions (universities, research institutes) could potentially function as 'scaffolds'. Knowledge institutions could help to do research as well as to develop research skills. A local 'knowledge structure' could arise in which knowledge institutions, NGOs and others cooperate around learning and knowledge generation. However, in most of the countries visited during the above-mentioned research project, there was little interaction between peacebuilding NGOs and knowledge institutions (Verkoren 2008).

The theories and research findings we have discussed in this section have – sometimes explicitly and consciously, sometimes more intuitively – shaped the theories of change that lie at the basis of the ACTS programme. We turn to them now.

4. Theories of change: what we thought ACTS would do

4.1 Role of insiders in creating sustainable peace

ACTS continues to build upon a key pillar of RTC's approach: that sustainable change has to be driven by those who live and work in situations of conflict. However those who are most involved in the practical work of peacebuilding are often those who have fewest opportunities to access higher education in the field. So a basic premise driving the programme is to provide locally-based opportunities for practitioners to have access to theory, research and learning skills which will enable them to develop their own knowledge.

4.2 Action research can generate new insights into peace work

There are relatively few places where those involved in peacebuilding can access research which is both based on actual work that has

4 Staff members of local peace organisations were interviewed in Liberia (10), Sierra Leone (16), Ghana (1), Kenya (11), Cambodia (14), The Philippines (10), Kyrgyzstan (8) and Tajikistan (7). Themes that were addressed in the open-ended interviews include the ways in which people learn, the knowledge they feel they need in order to improve their work, the extent to which they are able to gain access to this knowledge, and the difficulties they encounter when trying to learn new things. How NGO staff members apply new knowledge in their work was also discussed, as were the modalities and difficulties of sharing knowledge with others. Besides, the interviews paid attention to the type of knowledge interviewees think they have to offer and whether or not this knowledge reaches potential users. The role of donor agencies in supporting or inhibiting knowledge processes was often discussed, and most interviewees were asked whether they thought some types of knowledge are considered more important than others in the field of peacebuilding.

taken place and written by those who have done the work. From the experience of working in peacebuilding for over fifteen years RTC knows that practitioners have a wealth of knowledge to bring to the field. However, for reasons which have already been mentioned, it remains unprocessed, untested and therefore unavailable to others.

Action research (AR) was chosen because it provides a methodology for practitioners to look at their own work in a systematic manner and relate their activities more explicitly to their aims and values, and to the theories in the field. It enables peacebuilders to analyse the effectiveness of their work, to examine and test the theories which underpin it, and to document the peacebuilding processes in their own work. In addition to analysing the work of participants, AR requires them to focus on their own role, working assumptions, and personal change and learning.

Through the use of AR, ACTS hopes to create learning practitioners who could in turn bring new learning and thinking into their organisations. In addition, as AR is in line with the theory of 'third-order' strategic learning, it can help practitioners move from tactical to more strategic learning. Its cyclical process can become a habit and may stimulate learning within organisations, whereby at every step of a project, the practitioner and his/her colleagues reflect upon the theories and ideas on which the project is based. This could help address the issue of peace organisations' lack of strategy.

So the assumption is that through close attention to the detail of the work of peace practitioners, being explicit about and testing theories, values and assumptions, and documenting their work, AR will be able to generate new insights into peace work.

4.3 Reflexive practitioners do better peace work

The concept of the reflexive practitioner is of "one who has developed the skills and habits of self-awareness, able to pay attention to our own actions and their impact, and aware of our own inner feelings and motivations."(Francis 2005). This concept can be thought of as three levels of attention: on ourselves and how we respond and behave, on the behaviour and interaction of others involved in our work, and on the overall nature and dynamics of our work.

It is often said that the *process* of peacebuilding work can be more important than the actual activities: there are many different roads to peace, the important thing is how the road is travelled. Developing the skills of a reflexive practitioner may be one way in which practitioners can maintain awareness of this process, by being able to assess critically what is happening in one's daily practice, and to learn from and adapt to changing circumstances.

4.4 Through AR, ACTS can strengthen the role of Southern practitioners in theory generation and academic and policy debates

In 3.5 we saw that the knowledge of Southern peace practitioners is often 'underdeveloped' and as a result they are unable to participate on an equal basis in policy discussions with donors, academics and others. An assumption is that ACTS can help to correct this balance by generating new theories, or refining existing ones, through the action research of its participants.

4.5 Improving effectiveness

ACTS draws upon the 'key people, more people' concept introduced in section 3.1 in a number of ways:

- Moving from more people to key people. One aim of ACTS is to have more local people working in conflict situations who have a deep understanding of the field, the skills to engage in a strategic manner, and who are able to pass these skills and knowledge on to others. Students themselves may then become key people in their own contexts and better able to influence change. Alternatively they may develop new areas of work to target key groups of people.
- Moving from personal to societal level. The programme begins at the personal level with an

understanding that change has to start at the individual level for it to be sustainable in any wider context. ACTS hopes to develop the ways in which individuals respond to and understand conflict, as well as the skills and capacity they have to work effectively in these situations. There is then an assumption that a students' participation in the course will also have an effect on their colleagues and organisation, and that there will be changes in their work which may lead to changes in the wider context.

Overall, ACTS aims to enable participants to look at their own work, to develop their analysis and understanding of how change can be brought about so they can identify how their work can be most effective. Are they carrying out well-intentioned, but perhaps ineffective, peace work? Or are they making a strategic and effective contribution to a wider change? ACTS can then be viewed as a "learning scaffold" within which students can explore their work in a supportive and challenging environment.

5. ACTS in practice

5.1 Participants

The ACTS programme is intended for people who are already engaged in practical work for peace, and have a number of years' experience to reflect and draw upon. An initial assumption was also made that students would have already participated in a basic level conflict transformation course, such as those already run by RTC. Given the aims of ACTS the course is open to all those who have the experience and motivation to take part in the course, and are currently involved in peacebuilding work. Those who do wish to work towards a Master's degree need to meet additional requirements as set by the university – such as a Bachelor's degree and English language proficiency. Those without these formal qualifications receive a certificate and are asked to produce a final reflection paper instead of a thesis.

In the Balkans centre, 27 students have now completed the course, with 11 (out of a possible 15) gaining their Master's degrees. Students came from Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo, Croatia as well as Israel and Palestine in the second course. In the Asia centre, too, 27 students have completed the course, of whom 16 students applied for and received their Master's. A further 30 students have either just started or are midway through their studies in the Asia centre. Students in this centre come from throughout Asia, but there has been a particular focus on Burma, Cambodia, Nepal and the Philippines. So far the course has attracted participants working in both development and peacebuilding. They come mainly from the civil society sector (both NGOs and community-based organisations). In addition to civil society actors, the course is also open to participants from other sectors, such as government and security personnel, whose applications are increasingly sought in order to diversify the student groups and allow for the use and dissemination of newly-gained capacities and research findings in more than one sector.

5.2 Curriculum and teaching team

The curriculum of ACTS consists of six modules, taught in six regional ten-day seminars over the course of two years. This set-up allows students to study and continue working at the same time: as the course is based on research in people's own practice, much of the work is done at home. The first four modules all contain theory on various aspects of conflict and peacebuilding and focus on practical skills and developing action research. The fifth and sixth modules are left open to provide room for discussion on the action research of the participants. The course content has been designed to give students a broad understanding of the field of conflict transformation and to look at different phases of conflict in detail. The core papers which accompany each module were written by people with both academic credentials and practical experience, and spaces were made for the partners involved in ACTS to comment on the texts during workshops in Uganda in 2004 and Cambodia in 2005. The content of the modules, and their corresponding core papers, is outlined on page 16.

Module One Theories of Conflict	Provides a broad overview of the theories about conflict and violence, and ways of analysing and classifying them. In addition, it deals with various schools of thinking about causes of conflict – psychological, social, political and economic.
Module Two Conflict, Power and Change	Looks at how conflict can be used as a catalyst for bringing about sustainable peace. The core paper discusses ideas and theories regarding social change, the constraints and opportunities posed by power and structures, and ways in which various actors can relate to each other to bring about change.
Module Three Transforming Violent Conflict	Addresses issues and challenges that influence the design of processes to transform situations of violence and create conditions for longer-term sustainability. In addition to the practical development of peace processes it looks at assumptions and motivations , and the roles of different actors.
Module Four Building Sustainable Peace	Analyses the post-settlement phase of conflict. It deals with the concept of post-conflict reconstruction and the various socio-economic and political aspects that come to the fore after violence has ended and the task is to re-build systems that can sustain peace. It also looks at social reconstruction, reconciliation and the rebuilding of communities.
Module Five Building Theory from Practice	Focuses on the AR of the participants, exchanging findings and experiences, reflecting on AR as a methodology and preparing for the finalisation of the theses.
Module six Agents of Transformation	Provides a forum for students to present their research to a wider group of people in a public seminar. Also looks at the impact of the course on the students and how they will continue their practice in the future.

In each ACTS region the aim has been to develop a core teaching team drawn from the region who are able to support the course group throughout the two years of their study. The members of these teams have all been practitioners first and foremost but usually with some experience of academic teaching. This team is complemented by "international" tutors drawn from other regions or ACTS centres, who are brought in for their specific expertise. Again they are usually combine academic and practical experience. Both in Cambodia and Serbia there are few, if any, options for studying peacebuilding at a university level. As this is a new area for the university partners their main involvement has been in supporting students through the academic writing and dissertation process.

5.3 Action research in ACTS

AR is applied in ACTS in the following way. After the principles of the approach are introduced, making use of an especially developed reader, the participants first carry out small AR projects in order to experiment with the method. Next, they need to decide which aspect of their ongoing work they want to research and find out how it may be improved. This research becomes the 'red line' running throughout the two-year Master programme. The participants are expected to relate the theories that are introduced during the seminars to their work and look for additional sources that may shed light on their research questions. They are asked to record their reflections and findings in both learning loops – both with regard to the work and their own role and theories – in a journal. Aided by the journals, they discuss their reflections and progress during the seminars. At the end of the course, the AR projects lead to a dissertation, which the students need to obtain their degree and which, it is hoped, may contain new or adjusted theories that can be disseminated and discussed in the wider peacebuilding field.

5.4 Academic-practitioner partnerships in ACTS

In both regions, cooperation among the partners has made possible the accreditation of the Master's

degree by the local universities. The universities in both regions worked cooperatively with the ACTS tutors to ensure that the dissertations produced by the students were in line with what was expected at a Masters level. However, there have also been difficulties in the cooperation between the NGOs and universities. In large part, these difficulties have revolved around AR as a methodology. It clashed to some extent with the more traditional research methods of university staff, who therefore had trouble seeing AR as valid. In at least one of the centres, this led to frustration among the students who received conflicting feedback and advice from the ACTS tutors and the university (Francis 2007).

There are several deeper issues underlying this discussion. First of all, there is the question of whether to consider the capacity building of the university staff – at least with regard to AR – as a positive side effect, or even an aim, of the programme. As an internal ACTS document puts it, "[w]hile we want to ensure high standards and academic recognition for our students, we presumably would also want to honour and strengthen local academic capacities, rather than undermine them, and explore with them the relationship between culture and academic approach." (Francis 2007: 23) However, as is already implied by this citation, such capacity building requires openness to the ideas and perspectives of the institution whose capacity is being built.

This leads us to the second issue: ownership. It is difficult for the universities to be true partners which 'co-own' the ACTS programme, as their lack of subject knowledge meant they could not engage with much of the course development and teaching. In addition the universities have not been part of the development of the curriculum and it was only later on that they became partners. A way to make them 'co-owners' would be to jointly adjust the methodology. But given that AR is such a central part of the theory of change of ACTS, the NGO partners are reluctant to enter into such a discussion. It is understandable that ACTS staff hesitate to make concessions on the approach that has been so carefully developed and in which they believe so strongly. Still, finding ways to develop a true partnership dialogue over content with the universities seems to be a priority as the programme moves forward. This could also help the centres to find more regional content, achieve more academic input into tutor teams and the course in general, and become more familiar with the way Masters courses are generally taught (Francis 2007).

5.5 ACTS in 2009

At the time of writing the ACTS course in the Balkans has been put on hold as universities in the region are in the process of re-accrediting to move into line with other Western European universities. However, initial steps have been taken to establish a Community of Practice from the current alumni and it will be interesting to see how this progresses. The centre in Asia continues to grow and build its reputation. In Africa, after a number of false starts, a short course is due to take place in February 2009. This will draw on a number of elements of ACTS, such as linking theory and practice and the concept of reflexive practitioners. This also represents a recognition of a number of lessons learnt over the past five years: about how to gradually develop the capacity of the tutor team, and to develop the partnerships through smaller, more realistic pieces of work, rather than launching into a long-term project.

6. Has the programme met its aims? Theories and realities of change

The aims of the ACTS programme were to develop the capacity of peacebuilding practitioners to engage in their work, to support and promote effective and strategic peacebuilding work, and to develop theory and new knowledge about peacebuilding processes from the perspective of those who are engaged in the actual work. To what extent have these aims been met over the last three years? During 2008 the ACTS programme worked with all its students and alumni

HUY ROMDUOL from the first group of Asia students is an example of someone growing in confidence and pushing their work further.

The ACTS course has helped me to broaden my perspective and deepen my understanding with regard to peacebuilding. I have a wider knowledge and the literature from ACTS has opened a new world to me. Now when people ask me to give a presentation I always say okay.

I use AR in my work. I write things down more: what were the basic ideas behind this activity? I check with the theories. I ask next year how will we do this? What can we improve?

Lederach's concept of elicitive training influenced me a lot. Before I would only introduce theories, now my trainings are more experiential. Because of the Cambodia class tradition of education I have now developed a specific method that fits the context.

The course encouraged me to act. I am no longer scared or shy. Due to the ACTS course, I can explain things clearly and I am not scared to express my knowledge. I feel like I speak with more authority.

Since I attended ACTS there has been a growing interest in attending my courses, people from the ministries have participated. A consultant recently reviewed the direction of our training courses and concluded that more courses like this are needed for Cambodia.

to gather their stories of change. To do this we drew on interviews with the students, their own written reflections, their AR dissertations, and observations by the tutors and ourselves. There are many stories to tell and here we will highlight just a few.

6.1 Improving practice

Nearly every student mentions their increased confidence in their own knowledge. This seems to stem partly from the learning process, where their experience is placed at the heart of the course. Over the two years of the course, they have broadened their theoretical understanding of the field and have found models and theories which support and validate the work they do. Many mention that they are no longer "afraid" of the theory and recognise the value that it brings to their work. It also provides them with a stronger base from which to talk about and explain their work to others.

In Asia in particular students have gained enormously from simply having ready access to learning resources (especially those which provide an Asian perspective) and further information about where they can find other relevant sources. We have also seen an improvement in students' academic skills: they are reading more and developing better analytical and writing skills.

Many students are beginning to pick up the skills of reflexive practitioners. After a great deal of struggle many now see a learning journal as a key mechanism for gathering evidence and information about their work and practice, and allowing them to reflect upon and analyse their work at a later time. There is also evidence of students questioning their role and the purpose of their work. One employer wrote about their student that he "… gained skills that helped him to analyse better. People keep copying what has been done before, but they rarely wonder why they are doing it… [He] is starting to ask such questions".

The skills of reflexive practitioners become even more important when people work with groups outside their own "natural" constituency. In such situations the ACTS approach enabled participants to be aware of the personal assumptions and prejudices they might be making. A participant from the Philippines said that *"I was very suspicious of [working with] the military, because they abducted my father twenty years ago and we never saw him again. ACTS helped me to look deeper into myself, my personal bias and my role in the process. As I opened my mind I was inspired by the changes achieved…. It is a step by step process.. and my action research deepened this change."*

Participation in the course and the process of engaging in their research has also brought many students a greater level of respect and acknowledgement from their colleagues and community. There are a number of examples of students who have been asked to become involved in mediation or run new training courses because of their new capacities.

6.2 Promoting more effective and strategic peacebuilding work

It is also clear that many students are seeing their work in a wider context. This has led some of them to include more people in their activities, from involving the wider communities in trainings to carrying out or facilitating strategic planning processes with the military. This has made people more aware of where they need to get to in the future. Students are recognising the limitations of working only at the local, grassroot level when it comes to thinking about long-term sustainable change. One participant from Vietnam is working on domestic violence through a mediation approach. She recognises that their work at the moment is just dealing with the conflict at the surface level but wants to be able to work towards a more transformative approach in the future. Two students from Israel have been able to promote strategies within their own organisations which work with other groups such as academia, business and government. In both cases the germ of the idea was already there, but the process of ACTS enabled them to articulate why this change was important.

Many of the students are experienced practitioners who have been working in the field for a number of years. Through ACTS some have been able to develop fresh analysis which has taken their work forward. A participant from Sri Lanka illustrates this: *"As part of my AR I analysed the conflict. Using the theory I learned in ACTS I came to see that the Sinhalese Buddhist community is legitimising state power, and that this is contributing to the conflict. However, no organisation is working with this group – the majority. Through ACTS I was able to formulate my own interpretation and analysis, not just replicate the analysis of someone else."* Having developed a new perspective, participants test and adjust their approach to their work. For some this has led to refinements, with others it has led to new activities and projects. Examples of this include the development of new training courses, activities to work with the business community, and extending follow-up and support work.

While we have been able to see students making changes in their own work, the effect at an

NEBOJSA TASIC took part in the second ACTS course in the Balkans. He works with the Helsinki Committee in Serbia and his research focused on helping Serbian children to recognise the Srebrenica genocide.

Whenever I think about the solutions for my problems, it has something to do with ACTS, or what I have been learning there. I have become more systematic, strategic and focused. At the same time I have realised that I may be too emotionally involved in my work. I am trying to become more professional and to separate my personal life. Learning about conflicts and strategies gives me energy and made it easier to deal with my colleagues and helped me to explain things to the young people I work with. I can explain to them the larger dynamics in the world. I am also more patient now. I don't expect the youth to immediately recognise the genocide. I understand the importance of their ethnic identity and the ideas with which they have been raised.

One impact that ACTS has already had in my work has been in the way I have given shape to youth support groups for trained youth who go back to their communities. At first the groups were a mess and this was partly because I didn't realise why they were important. Because of ACTS and AR I now understand the broader picture and theoretical background. In the future there will be more participation of the youth group in the decision-making of the groups.

organisational level has been less clear. Students have taken the time to share their experience with their colleagues, and some have been asked to run training courses within their organisation so others can be part of the learning, but it is unclear whether the impact has gone further than this. A number of people have talked of the difficulty of taking their learning back to their organisations. An interesting example comes from one of the Israeli participants. She said *"I tried to introduce things I had learned in ACTS to my team of trainers and the group we were facilitating. But I met with resistance. The Palestinians said it was always the Jews who were bringing knowledge. I wanted to find a way to enable the insights to come from my colleagues. In a way I struggled to copy the ACTS method of learning, in which understanding comes from the experience of the learner and is not introduced from outside... In my organisation it was different. I introduced my new knowledge in a more subtle way. I started mentioning some examples in staff and board meetings and occasionally emailing some material around. This raised people's curiosity and they asked me to do a presentation of my thesis."*

Some people have been able to bring change within their organisations. This ranges from developing a new strategic direction for their organisation to include conflict and peace issues in organisational planning, to re-structuring the management of an organisation so that it better reflects its values.

6.3 Developing practitioner-based theory and knowledge about peacebuilding processes

Going beyond the students, ACTS also had a much wider aim of contributing to peacebuilding discourse from a Southern, practitioner perspective. Although the participants have learned tremendously and become more reflexive and strategic, the majority of the dissertations they have produced fall short of the quality and level desired for them to contribute to global theory and policy. Interesting in this light is the comment by an employer, who said that *"The research is not at an international academic level. But I think it is good that the ACTS course is working with people where they are. [My employee] has made incredible progress, and it would not have been good to force a level on him. This would have made for more superficial learning."*

What ACTS has done so far is to document people's work, and begin to make it accessible through its own publications and website. Students from the second generation are considering writing up their research so that they can and approach academic journals. Some of their dissertations may indeed provide material that is suitable for academic publication. The general consensus among teaching staff is that the academic level of the course is improving year on year, however it will still take some time to reach a higher level.

7. Conclusion: Implications for capacity development

After three years of ACTS, what can we conclude about the change theories on which it has been based?

7.1 Reflexive practitioners do better peace work

It is clear that ACTS has made its participants more strategic, confident and aware of the bigger picture. Most of them have also aquired a habit of reflection, learning and critical thinking in their work, and the process of AR has been important in cultivating this. This meets a need that is felt among all development practitioners, and particularly, peace workers. People working in that field have noted a lack of strategic analysis about how activities contribute to larger aims of peacebuilding. This is seen to limit the overall impact of peace work. In theory, then, ACTS' development of more strategic and reflexive practitioners can help peace work to have more impact. Has this been true in practice? The extent to which this has made their work better – more effective – is difficult to ascertain given the limited information available about their work before and after ACTS. However, some of the participants were asked to do activities specifically because they were considered to have gained expertise because of ACTS. And at least one employer felt the work of his employee had

improved due to his participation in ACTS. Still, more research is needed to affirm this scattered evidence and to illuminate the extent to which it was indeed increased reflexivity that led to increased effectiveness.

7.2 Action research can generate new insights into peace work

Whilst AR in many ways seems like a natural methodology for practitioners it is important to highlight that it has been a challenge, both for tutors and students, and that it is not a quick and easy practice to pick up. In addition, it has been a difficult issue for the universities. It is important that all involved in teaching and supervising AR have a common understanding of the approach and value it as a valid method. AR as a methodology is still developing and there are many variations. This understanding has given tutors the confidence to shape the methodology so that it fits the needs of the students.

But AR has proven a valuable framework to begin correcting some of the problems faced by Southern peacebuilders, namely, the lack of well-researched and articulated Southern knowledge and their shortness of time and skill to reflect strategically upon their work. AR enables practitioners not only to do research but to do it in their own practice, consciously relating it to theory and reflecting repeatedly upon the extent to which their actions – or the theory – require adaptation. It is clear from the research and stories of change that the process of AR has given many students new insights into their own work and practice, and in some cases these have been shared with colleagues and their organisations. However many also comment that this is only the beginning and that they feel further work is still required in order to be able to make more conclusive recommendations.

7.3 Through Action Research, ACTS can strengthen the role of Southern practitioners in theory generation and academic and policy debates

This is an area which requires much more attention in the future. Whilst the quality of students work is improving year on year, ACTS is not yet at a stage to make a strong contribution to academic and policy debates. On the one hand we can say that it will take time for an innovative programme such as ACTS to establish itself and to refine the curriculum, teaching team and the ways of supporting students in their research. However, the fact that this theory-of-change has not yet been validated also highlights two issues. First, the cooperation with the universities around AR may have complicated student's research process, at least in the first courses. More fruitful academic-practitioner cooperation in supervising the research is likely to lead to better results. Second, there is a dilemma regarding the selection of participants. Should those most in need of capacity building participate? Or those who already have academic skills – so that we can better meet the aim of theory development? There is some tension here between two aims and theories-of-change, one that aims to help practitioners become more effective, and one which aims for the generation of new, quality theory.

7.4 From key people to more people

As noted at the beginning of this section, ACTS has worked effectively at the personal level. The opportunity to study the field of peacebuilding and to be part of a diverse learning community has been very significant for many students. For the ACTS partners it has affirmed a belief that learning is a vital part of peacebuilding work, and that it requires long-term support and some sort of "scaffold", a framework or structure in which it can take place. Without this, as discussed in section three, the process of learning is inconsistent and does not go deep enough. Enough people have commented on the usefulness and applicability of the course content to their work for ACTS to be able to say that combining work and study is a useful approach for peacebuilding practitioners who are always busy and deeply involved in their work.

ACTS alone may not build a critical mass of "more people", although there is some evidence to suggest that there is a multiplier effect, for instance through students passing on learning from the course to

their colleagues. There is also evidence that based on expertise developed through ACTS, people are being seen as "key" in their own situations. Participants have also realised the need to develop projects that work with key and more people (in their communities, in governmental organisations etc.) and now have the confidence to undertake this work. Thus, there are examples, some quite significant, where the impact of the course has moved beyond the individual to their colleagues and organisations. However this is quite limited and highlights an area that needs to be given further consideration. How does change happen in organisations working in complex conflict environments?

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Research articles

THREE

The following articles have been written by students who completed their studies with the ACTS programme in June/July 2008. The articles are based on the research completed for their Masters studies.

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Are youth ever empowered?

by AJSA HADZIBEGOVIC

1. Introduction

This article is the result of my own reflections and a years long quest for the meaning of "real" youth empowerment in the specific context of the Balkans. It is written from the perspective of a former "beneficiary of youth programmes" who is now a youth worker. These reflections wouldn't be committed on paper were it not for the current situation in Montenegro, with the breakdown of basic human rights and a lack of energetic response by the public. In addition, the research entitled "The Future Gets Stuck with Youth"[1] (Lalic, Pilic, Naklada Jesenski i Turk, 2001) inspired some of my thinking.

Following on from my action research completed during my ACTS studies, "Power sharing in a participatory learning and developing organisation", this article will go beyond that to explore how to empower youth workers, and will look into the empowerment of the direct beneficiaries of youth work provided by the NGO Forum MNE. The concept of empowerment is very broad, and can be examined on different levels: from the personal and interpersonal, to the political, organisational, and professional.[2] (Rose, 2000) (Kruger, 2000) I shall concentrate on the personal level, and touch upon the consequences this has for the other levels. More specifically, I will look into youth as a specific vulnerable, powerless group in communities across the Balkans. The challenge of bringing "real" empowerment and finding the appropriate tools will be reflected upon from the perspective of youth work practitioners.

2. Youth work empowering youth

Structured youth work was re-introduced to the Balkans after the 1990s by community youth work[3] professionals from Northern Ireland who had over 20 years' experience in cross-community work. The programme, promoted and supported by Forum Syd Balkan Programme (FSBP), is grounded in the belief that community-based youth work is a valuable tool for building and sustaining peaceful communities. Its mission is to develop (voluntary) community youth work services that can support the personal development of young people in areas affected by the conflict in the Balkans. Since FSBP promotes a process-oriented approach, the organisational strategy states only the destination, values, and approach, leaving adequate space for each person in the programme to bring their knowledge, experience, and commitment to the creation of the route. This programme evolves and changes daily in the same way as the communities, societies, and lives of young people do.

FSBP sees personal development as a fundamental tool to enable young people to face difficulties with confidence, and to take responsibility both for their own lives and for the society they are part of. Throughout its work with young people, FSBP aims at promoting social reconstruction in

1 The original saying is "The future remains with youth".
2 The five levels are suggested by Rose (2000) and Kruger (2000).
3 It is important to note that this is not the sole example, but it is very relevant in terms of scope and philosophy. Also, the author of this text was directly involved in the process as a first-generation student of university courses for youth workers, and was later employed in the organisation that grew from this project.

areas affected by violent conflict and transition, and therefore seeks to contribute to community development in general. Community development, as defined in this programme, focuses on the development of communities through empowering people so that they define their needs and their solutions. Through this, people take an active part in creating positive change, and are encouraged to participate in decision-making processes that contribute to the development of social, economic, and political structures and policies in their society (Dunlop, 2007).

Forum MNE is one of the organisations that operated within the Forum Syd Balkan Programme. It took on the philosophy and added local knowledge in an effort to provide the best possible support, intervention, and guidance, so that young people in Montenegro could develop into active, conscious, and responsible citizens. From the point of view of Forum MNE, and of the author of this article, empowerment is understood as an increase in individual and collective choices available to young people who are at risk of social exclusion. Young people are seen as (potentially) active citizens, capable of making informed choices and contributing to positive changes in their own lives and in their communities.

Specifically, youth empowerment includes a range of issues, skills, and domains, such as personal skills, self-confidence, and a feeling of strength; social and communication skills; formal and non-formal education; cultural identity and tolerance towards other cultures; job qualifications, an entrepreneurial attitude, and skills; civic education and active citizenship; legal empowerment. Youth empowerment stands for a holistic strategy that keeps all those, and probably other, interlinked domains in mind.

The action research on “Power sharing in a participatory learning and developing organisation” that I conducted during the ACTS course dealt with the empowerment of youth workers within the organisational structure. The focus was on youth workers who were part of the senior management team (SMT) of Forum MNE, and thus had the opportunity to influence the kind of interventions the organisation was making. The organisation originally focused on direct intervention with youth to build cultural tolerance and understanding, with the aim of building bridges between divided communities. As a result of the actual situation in Montenegrin society, which was taking the European path, and the emergence of new issues directly concerning youth, the organisation recognised the need to alter its interventions, and therefore took a somewhat new direction. This involved empowering youth to react to injustice and breaches of human rights, to initiate actions for the communities’ development, and to create a positive image of youth as active, responsible, and conscious citizens. This clearly required a more proactive role outside youth clubs and in the community. That brought with it a challenge to youth workers to be role models that young people would follow when acting upon their newly-acquired awareness.

My action research raised questions about how the empowered SMT members were using their power in their work, and how a participatory organisational model influenced young people’s behaviour in group decision-making.

Following these questions, I found a particular interest in exploring how young people can (ever) become empowered, and whether the interventions of the organisation Forum MNE contribute to this to a significant level. Specific factors that I took into account were: the Balkan context and its influence on the environment for youth participation; individual empowerment that results in actions toward the “outside” – peers, community, general public, institutions, society; the impact of interventions, and more specifically the role of youth workers in empowering youth. I will explain these factors in a little more detail before I elaborate on my findings and conclusions.

3. The Balkan context

The Balkan context encompasses violent conflicts in cycles lasting around 40-50 years. The most recent cycle of violence followed the break-down of Yugoslavia that started in the early 1990s

and that had its epilogue in Kosovo in the early 2000s. The area is often described as the border between East and West in terms of history, religion, mentality, values, and politics. Primarily ex-Yugoslav societies have neglected and under-appreciated youth since the end of World War II, which found them on the winning side, to the beginning of the 1990s, when they tragically failed to live out the ideal of socialism and brotherhood.

In this context, the locals understood that international interventions were greatly needed, but at the same time there was a resistance of sorts to them.[4] Still, pragmatically enough, different education programmes on a variety of topics (more-or-less relevant or needed) were allowed by decision-makers (from government to parents) and attended by different individuals (from young people to adults). However, from my observation it was clear that protective walls and defence mechanisms against the new educational programmes, called "new preaching", were being built.

It is important to understand the current situation in Montenegro in the context of other more global movements. The situation here encompasses breaches of human rights and incidents that should cause the indignation of young, critically-thinking citizens. But such reaction is generally absent.[5] When a blind employee was denied the right to take a guide-dog to work in the municipal building in the capital of Montenegro, the public's response can only be described as weak. A boy killed in Kosovo only raised national tensions slightly, while the general public in neighbouring countries was almost unconcerned. This was very similar to a scenario in the 1990s when the general public of the former Yugoslavia became concerned only if the war was on their doorstep. So it is not strange that the waves of demonstrations seen in other countries did not resonate in the Balkans, whether they were against police brutality in Greece or against the ongoing and unnecessarily brutal war in Gaza. Critical thinking might be present in the Balkans, but critical (public) reactions are lacking. Understanding this context is crucial in identifying the setting in which youth workers need to be empowered. Without youth workers as empowered and positive role models, how will young people be empowered to take an active role in shaping their future and the future of the society they live in? There are huge obstacles, in the shape of apathy, a feeling of being powerless, and fear for individual destiny. Therefore, the interventions of youth workers can aptly be described as cautious and mild, mainly concerned to protect young people from any unnecessary negative exposure. This is the main challenge Forum MNE is facing: young people seem to need significantly different support and intervention in order to be empowered for action. The question is: would a more proactive approach actually help young people to become active citizens and achieve their own rights in such a context, or would it in effect support the status quo?

4. From empowered individual towards activism

Analysing youth issues in the Balkans, one can see that they are not very different from those facing youth elsewhere, including Western Europe. A lack of recognition of their specific developmental stage, rights, and needs is associated with different behaviour patterns, and society is often only able to provide inadequate and untimely interventions. This picture is shared among youth across communities and societies, with variations according to the context. Searching through the literature, one rarely finds research about what is considered to be "mainstream youth", as opposed to the youth groups characterised as vulnerable, marginalised, or at risk. From my experience, I can confidently pose the question: Should all youth be considered vulnerable, marginalised, and at risk, particularly in the transitional contemporary Balkans context?

To answer this, I will examine some of the literature concerning youth behaviour in a transitional society, and how it affects the immediate environment.

Drazen Lalic and Damir Pilic (2001) investigated youth behaviours, values, and attitudes through group

4 A comment that was (and still is) very frequent was: "We are not some African tribe, we are Europe, we do not need the wheel to be reinvented."
5 It is almost by default that in the Balkans the only reactions come from organised women's groups. Students are rarely engaged, and in Montenegro there is almost no example of substantial student reaction.

interviews with minor delinquents in Split, Croatia. They suggested that Merton's classification of individual responses to the social situation of anomie[6] can be built on by adding *hypocrisy* as a sixth category, along with conformism, innovation, ritualism, retreat, and rebellion. In his classification of anomic deviance, Merton explored the relationship between cultural goals and the structural means to achieve those goals. He introduced a basic hypothesis: when success goals were universally imposed on members of society while the means to achieve them were restricted for some, deviance could be expected on a broad scale.

Following this idea, I would propose a classification of youth behaviour in transitional societies, and avoid calling those behaviours "deviant", as I would argue that one cannot set standard behaviour norms in a transitional society. Such behaviours are to a greater or lesser extent displayed by every young person, and I would argue that the boundaries between each behavioural category in today's youth are very blurred. With this in mind, the explanation for Figure 1 (page 29) will only focus on two new categories:

- The category added to the original classification, **Hypocrisy**, describes behaviour as choosing the "middle way", with a formal adoption of cultural aims and a factual rejection of normative means.
- The final category that I add to the original classification, **Drifting**, brings together all borderline cases and those who switch from one behaviour to another. They are driven by both accepted and new cultural aims, and use adopted and other means. The final stage of growing into adulthood would most probably find young people settling predominantly into one of the above categories. However, they might continue to drift through life if the context remains unstable, and thus their chameleon-like skills are needed for social/economic survival.

The behaviours explained above are grounded in the values inherited and adapted by each individual. The two new categories, *Hypocrite* and *Drifter*, are particularly relevant for transitional and post-conflict societies that are marked by changing values, lack of the rule of law, and instability. The young individual is torn between the cultural aims and norms set by their parents' and grandparents' generation, and the actual norms (or lack of norms) in a contemporary and almost parallel reality. The same goes for the defined and accepted means. The young person sees and understands that the definition of means can vary from unacceptable to acceptable, depending on the situation and persons in question. In the present situation in Montenegro the lines between the five original categories are blurred, and youth behaviour today seems to defy any linear classification. If this is true, it is even more crucial to make sure that youth work interventions are designed flexibly and with sensitivity to individual cases.

In terms of current behaviour, rebellion is demonstrated less and less, and even social justice is becoming primarily and solely an individual goal. It is in this context that I am looking critically in this article at empowerment.

5. Society interventions/youth work

Even though youth work is still not officially recognised in Montenegro, it is being used by institutions and civil society organisations to the extent that I believe there is enough evidence to make some general judgements. As someone observing, assessing, and actively developing youth work interventions, I can say that societal responses are less innovative and less adaptive to the changing nature of the context and the drifting nature of youth behaviours than they could and should be. Youth workers seem to be able only to intervene to empower individuals to become more adaptive, perhaps encouraging them to adopt the *hypocrisy* or *drifting* categories. Forum MNE faces some important questions. Are these the kind of behaviours we want to nurture? Should empowerment work not encompass the issues of the wellbeing of others, of the community, and of generations to come?

I would characterise most interventions as either preventive or reactive (interventions in this area are still mainly repressive) or declarative – claiming but not really giving "the power" back to young people. The

6 Defined in the Encarta dictionary as: 1) "instability in society caused by the erosion or abandonment of moral and social codes, 2) a feeling of disorientation and alienation from society caused by the perceived absence of a supporting social or moral framework".

Figure 1: Adopted classification of youth behaviour in transitional societies (Merton)

Culturally-defined goals	Structurally-defined means	Role behaviour	Explanation
+	+	**Conformist**	Conformity occurs when individuals accept the culturally-defined goals and the socially legitimate means of achieving them. Merton suggests that most individuals, even those who do not have easy access to the means and goals, remain conformists.
+	–	**Innovator**	Innovation occurs when an individual accepts the goals of society, but rejects or lacks the socially legitimate means of achieving them. Innovation, the mode of adaptation most associated with criminal behaviour, explains the high rate of crime committed by uneducated and poor individuals who do not have access to legitimate means of achieving the social goals of wealth and power.
–	+	**Ritualist**	The ritualist accepts a lifestyle of hard work, but rejects the cultural goal of monetary rewards. This individual goes through the motions of getting an education and working hard, yet is not committed to the goal of accumulating wealth or power.
–	–	**Retreatist**	Retreatism involves rejecting both the cultural goal of success and the socially legitimate means of achieving it. The retreatist withdraws or retreats from society, and may become an alcoholic, drug addict, or vagrant.
–/+	–/+	**Rebel**	Rebellion occurs when an individual rejects both culturally-defined goals and means, and substitutes new goals and means. For example, rebels may use social or political activism to replace the goal of personal wealth with the goal of social justice and equality.
+/–	–	**Hypocrite**	Hypocrisy occurs when an individual chooses the "middle way", with the formal adoption of cultural aims and the factual rejection of normative means. For example, hypocrites have a proper job and maintain the image of a "proper" member of society, while dealing in drugs on the side, in order to provide the necessary economic means.(Lalic, Pilic, Naklada Jesenski i Turk, 2001)
?	?	**Drifter**	Drifting occurs in situations when an individual switches between all the above categories and does not stay long enough in any of them, adopting different behaviour models, aims, norms. The drifter would be driven by both accepted and new cultural aims, and uses adopted and any other means.

KEY **+** = acceptance of/access to; **–** = rejection of/lack of access to; **–/+** = rejection of culturally-defined goals and structurally-defined means, and replacement with new goals and means; **–/+** = formal adoption; **?** = all possibilities are open.

methods/areas used include sports, cultural activities, non-formal education, mobility, participation, peer education, community youth work, information, and counselling. The various actors are united in promoting and defending their current methods and interventions, and are very reluctant to grasp how small a proportion of youth is in fact reached by these activities. It is crucial to learn from the findings of stakeholders more widely – across Europe, in fact – and to review those findings critically through the prism of the Balkan context, reaching a definition of empowerment that goes beyond solely personal interest.

There are of course still many examples of good practice, although I will not go into any depth here to prove that those interventions are correct. Rather I will offer a critical reflection on where they are limited in their reach and impact. The lack of a structured and holistic approach towards youth development, and the trend of "transfer of responsibilities" in transitional societies, are two of the obstacles.

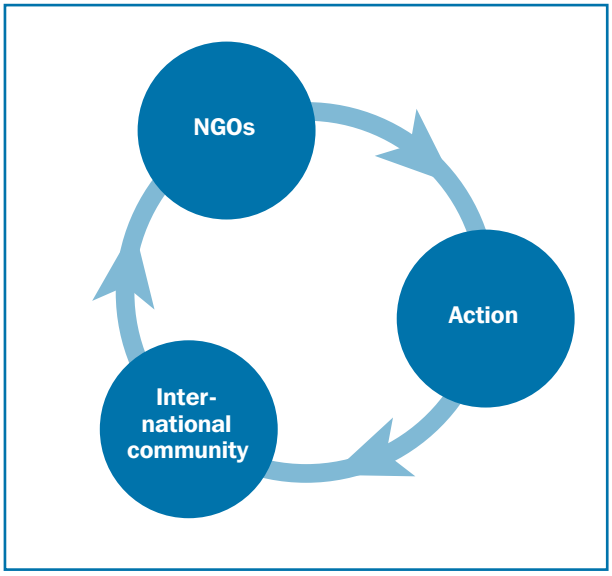
I have developed the diagram called "Transfer of responsibilities" (Figure 2) to depict the present situation, where the state has transferred its responsibilities to any interested foreign agencies, providing that they are ready to finance the programmes. The international agencies have their own agendas, and they are introducing their own models, which are inevitably based on their – usually Western – values. Local NGOs provide credibility, and are often sincerely convinced of the value of the interventions they are implementing. Almost unconsciously using local knowledge and new/adopted models, they promote and intervene without any serious long-term or culturally relevant assessment of what the impact might be. Forum MNE could be described as one of these local NGOs, were it not for the fact that a participatory, self-critical and learning nature is deeply built into the philosophy of the organisation.

I find the "transfer of responsibilities" a very dangerous cycle that needs to be broken. The breaking point in Figure 2 is often connected to the financial aspect, as it seems that the power of decision-making lies with those controlling the funds. Also, in this figure, a lack of good, critical research on impact only makes it less possible for the cycle to be broken. The "transfer of responsibilities" doesn't stop here, but is found at micro levels as well (e.g. parents, schools, NGOs).

The important shift that needs to occur in the way that society treats developmental youth needs is to take on basic youth work principles – to be innovative and proactive, to involve youth in shaping the appropriate interventions, and – most importantly – to start considering young people as individuals, rather than as only part of a group that behaves in a certain way and has certain problems. In an effort to do exactly this, Forum MNE values flexibility in planning and high sensitivity in designing interventions. The result has been that its individual youth work interventions, alongside the group work, have almost tripled in the last year. In addition, youth work no longer concentrates only on young people, but as much on its immediate environment – parents, peers, teachers. This makes the list of skills and capacities required of a youth worker even longer.

It will be obvious by now that I believe youth need to be prioritised as a major developmental sector of society. Beside much needed political willingness and clear policy guidelines, there is a need to enhance youth workers' and youth leaders' capacities, introduce common standards, and ensure quality in the work of those professionals and volunteers.

Figure 2: Transfer of Responsibility



6. Findings from observation of youth behaviours

Forum MNE tries to be a learning organisation that follows youth issues, and thus changes its focus in order to provide the most appropriate intervention and impact. As director of this organisation I have had the chance to observe the interventions, their impact, and how the shift in interventions is occurring. For the purpose of this article I was concentrating on the final stage – the impact on youth – in seeking an answer to the question: How should youth work interventions be altered to maximise the possibilities for empowered youth to bring positive changes to society?

Looking at the behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs of young people, I can say, with some sadness, that there seems to be no difference between youth who have been "empowered" through the interventions of NGOs, political parties, and (although rarely) special institutions, and those who were not exposed to any of those actors. This is because, at least on the surface, it appears that young individuals have only limited options, and accordingly display a limited set of behaviours.

Looking deeper, it is clear that there are more options – but the awareness of them may vary, and this is where the difference lies. My experience is that young individuals who have been exposed to youth work programmes have substantially more chances to become aware, to gain relevant information and knowledge, and to make their own decisions. It is another question whether they want to admit consciously to making the decision, or to recognise that they had different options. This is probably the greatest challenge put before those adolescents participating in youth work programmes: to be honest with themselves.

What is usually missing from descriptions of youth behaviour is a category depicting young people as confident in their identity, knowledgeable about their rights, sensitive about others' rights, and having citizens' courage to initiate changes and follow them through. Those young individuals are rare, and in the Balkans' transitional context they even lack protection by relevant institutions and recognition by society. Youth workers suffer from the same factors, and as professionals they find themselves outside the system. This raises the question of the sustainability of the support that youth workers provide[7] (Kijevcanin, Markovic, 2007).

6.1 From critical thinking to critical acting

Ask youth anywhere in the world whether they see something they would like to change: the chances are that they would answer "Yes". If the follow-up question is, "Why don't you then?", the answers vary from "I can't do anything alone", to "I don't know how", to "It should be changed by someone else". Very rarely is the answer, "Yes, actually I will do something about it, it just didn't occur to me that I could."

On this premise the world of empowerment is built: the first prerequisite is to raise the awareness of young individuals that they can actually "do something about it", and that they can bring about change. In the Balkans, what needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that empowered youth could get more than they asked for – that is, they could get into more trouble than before. All this is evident when they only want to fit in and enjoy reasonable social stability. Therefore youth workers in Forum MNE face the constant dilemma – whether young empowered individuals are aware of all the possible consequences they might face if and when they do "the right thing". This dilemma often leads us to behave in an overprotective manner, thus depriving young individuals of the right to decide for themselves about the level of "trouble" they can and are ready to handle.

Still, if the ideal is to help develop young, active, conscious, and responsible citizens, then there is an obvious need to identify the elements that contribute to reaching this potential in each individual. And from my observations, the more empowered an individual is, the more leadership potential is actually put to use. This, however, depends on the extent to which the following elements are present:

- The readiness of a young individual to be exposed to, and respond to, criticism;
- Personal and societal perceptions of the relevance of the issues they are engaged in;

7 "People who are the bases of happenings and without whom youth wouldn't be able to realise their ideas" as described by young people and published in Youth work in Montenegro, Forum Syd.

- Personal gain from the engagement and its value for the individual; also the relevance to other levels (e.g. interpersonal, political, professional, organisational);
- Belief in their own leadership potential that would cause others to join in for "change".

Also important, but not essential, is the existence of societal tools to protect and guarantee the rights of youth in doing so. This is not essential, as a lack of those can actually be a very relevant factor in influencing the shift from critical thinking to critical acting. Youth with fewer opportunities, and under more pressure, may be more determined to give their best and reach their full potential.

This idea was tested within the organisation by providing the same inputs in terms of information, guidelines, and resources to youth groups and young individuals in:

1. More urban areas in seaside Montenegro, where young people have been exposed to youth work interventions for a long time (since 2006); and
2. More rural areas in northern Montenegro, where youth have only recently (since the Spring of 2008) been exposed to youth work interventions.

The results were starkly different. While the youth with (presumably) more opportunities to use the resources and translate them into action were lacking motivation, inspiration, and initiative, those with fewer opportunities were maximising the effects of the support provided. The latter groups (and specific individuals within these groups) presented themselves as empowered young individuals and groups that were engaged in identifying and initiating the resolution of community issues.

Very relevant to this question is one of the assumptions explored in my action research, "Power sharing in a participatory learning and developing organisation", about the relevance of geographical closeness to and interdependence with the authority or formal decision-making figure. The conclusion was that "geographical dislocation helps SMT members to be more independent and powerful". Following on from the presented facts, one may conclude that, although youth workers are needed as support agents[8], it would be worth exploring how their presence could be reduced, and thus be less of an imposition on youth. How could their interventions be richer in options, rather than being inevitably protective towards youth? With more flexible models providing essential support, but also making space for independence in decision-making and initiative, perhaps by a lack of constant actual physical presence, the results in empowering youth to engage and use their skills could be striking.

Overprotecting youth seems to bring them back to the position of having no power for change. Therefore, I believe, youth work interventions need to be timed and tailored so that they best fit each individual/group, having in mind the final goal: empowerment to the level of independent decision-making and acting, based on critical thinking that goes beyond solely personal interests.

7. Conclusion/remaining questions

In this article I have tried to paint a picture that can offer a richer understanding of what kind of influence and impact the work of NGOs has on the empowerment of youth in our country and region. The article reflects my insider knowledge of Forum MNE, one of the NGOs working in this context. I am aware of the absence of examples from other NGOs, and of the fact that I have avoided specifying the identified challenges as joint ones. This is due to my belief that (while investigating more layers, and in one example going more deeply – in this case, one youth work NGO operating in the transitional Balkan context) the conclusions I have made could contribute substantially to resolving issues or finding new paths for other interested parties. Therefore my conclusions must be viewed critically, bearing in mind both the potential for author bias and the need for Forum MNE to be critiqued objectively in parallel with our internal learning mechanisms.

The major concerns related to the dominant question of this article: "Are the youth ever empowered?" Some of the responses formulated by Forum MNE are these:

- There is a shift in behaviour among youth towards the two categories of *hypocrisy*

8 A youth worker (known only by her first name) was the only recognised support for young people participating in the research, "The future gets stuck with youth"

and *drifting*, which has made designing interventions more problematic. Forum MNE's response has been twofold: (1) prioritising, as appropriate, an individualised approach to young people in addition to group work; and (2) focusing the empowerment work on social issues combined with personal interests.

- The "transfer of responsibility" cycles are repeated on different levels, and this is not in the best interests of young people. Forum MNE's responses to this are increased cooperation with national and local institutions, the promotion of long-term strategic thinking, and lobbying for recognition of the youth work profession and for governmental financial commitment to youth issues. Forum MNE is also moving to work with parents, teachers, social workers, and other stakeholders in order to create a better understanding and increase visibility of specific youth issues, thus creating a more enabling environment for youth participation. The great risk with those strategies is that focus and resources could drift away from direct youth work if not carefully balanced.
- The outreach of youth work programmes and their impact is tiny. Forum MNE's response involves strategic moves towards the education and empowerment of youth workers and youth leaders from different communities; the creation of conditions for volunteer youth initiatives to be supported; and outreach to youth beyond youth clubs as spaces exclusively used for youth programmes. Still, in practice, the results remain yet to be seen and analysed.

Through this article I have offered possible solutions to these problems, starting with the need to adopt an individualised approach in each designed intervention, to involve youth themselves in developing long-term interventions, and to secure political and financial means for implementing youth policies. Perhaps the most controversial idea is to design and test a youth work model that provides just enough presence and support by a youth worker, and allows space for the independence of the young people in question.

None of this should serve as a reason for reducing financial support to already under-funded youth work in the Balkans. It should rather be used as an opportunity to explore the possibility of reaching more youth in a more effective way. However, no matter how self-critical, youth workers cannot be the only ones reviewing and assessing their practice and impact on youth development. It is essential that the state take over the responsibility for a systematic, holistic approach to youth development work, using feedback from researchers and practitioners on the ground.

Ultimately, and after due reflection, one could conclude that youth in the Balkans have the same chance to be empowered as their peers in "the West"; but when it comes to acting, the situation is different, as there are many more constraining factors. This is why empowered youth who use their power in a constructive manner to change society are still rare. This needs to change, for the sake of the future of the Balkans region. Youth workers are already reflecting upon their practice and taking up the challenge. The potential of youth is indisputable. How can we generate the necessary public and political will?

Ajsa Hadzibegovic is the Director of Forum MNE, a youth work organisation based in Montenegro.

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Rethinking community-based justice mechanisms: An action research reflection from Bangladesh

by SARDER MD. ASADUZZAMAN

In the South Asia sub-continent, people rely more on community-based justice mechanisms than on the formal justice system and other state institutions to resolve conflicts in the community. In Bangladesh, traditional mediation approaches – as one of the community-based justice mechanisms – to resolving social conflicts have been further organised and strengthened by NGO interventions supported by external donors. The current approach to mediation in the sub-continent builds on traditional community approaches to mediation, but may be focusing too narrowly on the apparent conflict between the disputants rather than on the causes and structures underlying them.

During my action research it was found that the prevailing mediation approach did not adequately address factors of systematic violence and conflict at the local level, and therefore was unlikely to promote peaceful coexistence in the longer term. This article is based on my action research and reviews the effectiveness of mediation practices in rural Bangladesh particularly using Maire Dugan's (1996) 'nested paradigm' framework and argues for the use of a conflict transformation approach in this area of work.

1. Introduction

In rural Bangladesh, women are still dominated by men, and religious misinterpretation has contributed to misunderstanding and violence against women. The inaccessibility of the formal judicial system to rural women in particular is making the situation of community level violence against women worse than ever before. The present slow rate of dealing with legal cases, and the resulting backlog, are alarming for justice and the rule of law in the country, and cost much in time, money, energy, and human emotions. The delays in the judicial process have reached a point where they are an injustice as well as a violation of human rights. Seeking justice, the parties become part of a long, protracted, and tortuous process, not knowing when it will end. While it should take one to two years to dispose of a civil lawsuit, a case can drag on for 10 to 15 years, or even more (Alam, 2000). In certain cases, by the time a judgement is made it is no longer required, further creating a disincentive to pursue judicial redress. Moreover, in a society of class differentiation, the lengthy process, adversarial and confrontational in nature, gives the economically stronger party an advantage. All these conditions are the prevailing characteristics of the justice system in Bangladesh. Amidst these circumstances, the rural poor dealing with local conflicts and disputes seek the support of community-based justice mechanisms.

In the South Asia sub-continent, mediation by village elders and arbitration by impartial individuals (or a group of individuals) has been practised since time immemorial. More recently, the traditional mediation approach has been organised and strengthened through NGO interventions supported by many external donors. For the community, NGO-modified and run mediation has appeared as an alternative to the traditional local mediation system (popularly known in Bangla as *shalish*) that is commonly seen as biased, gender-insensitive, influenced by power-elites, and corrupt. However, this NGO-run mediation approach is promoting an unsustainable approach, and in reality appears as another 'power broker'[1]. Recurring conflicts and violations remain alarmingly prevalent in the community. The current approach to mediation in the South Asia sub-continent builds on traditional community approaches to mediation, but focuses narrowly on the apparent conflict and the disputants, rather than on the causes and structures underlying them.

2. Background

The present research seeks to rethink, from more of a conflict transformation orientation, the current community-based justice mechanisms

1 The author observes that NGOs and their representative(s) in Bangladesh use their influence and organisational existence as a force to bring community members into mediation sessions, using influence and even threatening to use the formal court as a potential alternative, despite its lengthy process, which is unsustainable.

– in this case mediation – that use 'problem-solving' orientations for conflict resolution. A conceptual and theoretical background to the present action research is described below.

2.1 Community-based justice mechanisms

Community-based justice mechanisms include informal justice methods (negotiated settlement, mediation, arbitration, and other forms of community justice) that are locally generated and adopted without having any state-origin. Like many other developing countries, this type of informal justice mechanism deals with more conflicts than the formal justice mechanism or other state institutions do (Golub, 2003). While there are several forms of community-based justice mechanisms, this action research will focus on mediation only. Schrock-Shenk (2000) defines mediation as a process, facilitated by a third party, by which disputants discuss their concerns and issues, and explore possible options for mutually satisfactory solutions to differences. The process is voluntary, and the parties have selected the third party. It stands in contrast to arbitration, litigation, and other fact-finding or evaluative processes, where the format is adversarial and decisions are made and imposed by a third party.

In the Bangladesh context, mediation is known as *shalish*, which aims to come to a consensus between two parties for better understanding and resolution of conflict. There is widespread use of mediation in Bangladesh. There are three primary forms of mediation (Golub, 2003): i) as traditionally administered by village leaders and other influential persons, including religious figures; ii) as modified through national legislation and accordingly administered by a local governmental body, the *union parishads* (UPs)[2]; and iii) as modified and overseen by NGOs in many parts of the country. Although traditionally administered mediation has long been in place, it has been highly criticised for being biased, male-dominated, influenced by power, non-accessible for victims, and for misinterpreting the *Shariah Law*. Against this backdrop, the mediation approach has further been organised and strengthened by NGO interventions, supported by many external donors. Khair (2002) provides a detailed analysis of the multiple benefits flowing from NGO-run mediation in contrast with other forms. These include modifications to a mediation process that is often biased, arbitrary, and harsh; cost-effective delivery of justice; enhanced community knowledge of the law; women's participation in decision-making; and greater gender equity and justice. More generally, a greater negotiating strength for the disadvantaged and a gradual sustainability of these changes over time were identified as benefits. Khair's work and the identified benefits are viewed from an 'access to justice' perspective.

In general, mediation can be understood to have two main approaches: 'problem-solving' and 'transformative' (ACTS Class Notes, 2007). The 'problem-solving' approach focuses on the specific issue or problem, while the 'transformative' approach – which does not confine itself to a specific problem/issue – makes the client-victims responsible for their attitude and behavioural transformation. The transformative approach also addresses the wider social and political context of the conflict. For mediation to be transformative, it should not only address the problem or issue, but include the wider context and perspectives of both parties. Appleby (2001) similarly argues that peacebuilding encompasses a broad range of activities, including the transformation of conflict through mediation, the implementation of negotiated settlement, and the long-term rebuilding of civil society and democratic institutions; and, not least, 'second order' efforts, such as the building of human rights regimes and the promulgation of secular and religious laws and ethical traditions that are conducive to peaceful relations. Therefore, mediation should focus on a transformative approach if it is to contribute towards building a peaceful and sustainable society.

2.2 Conflict resolution and conflict transformation

Conflict resolution addresses the causes of conflict and seeks to build new and lasting relationships between hostile groups, while *conflict transformation* addresses the wider social and political sources of a conflict and seeks to transform the negative energy of injustice into positive social and

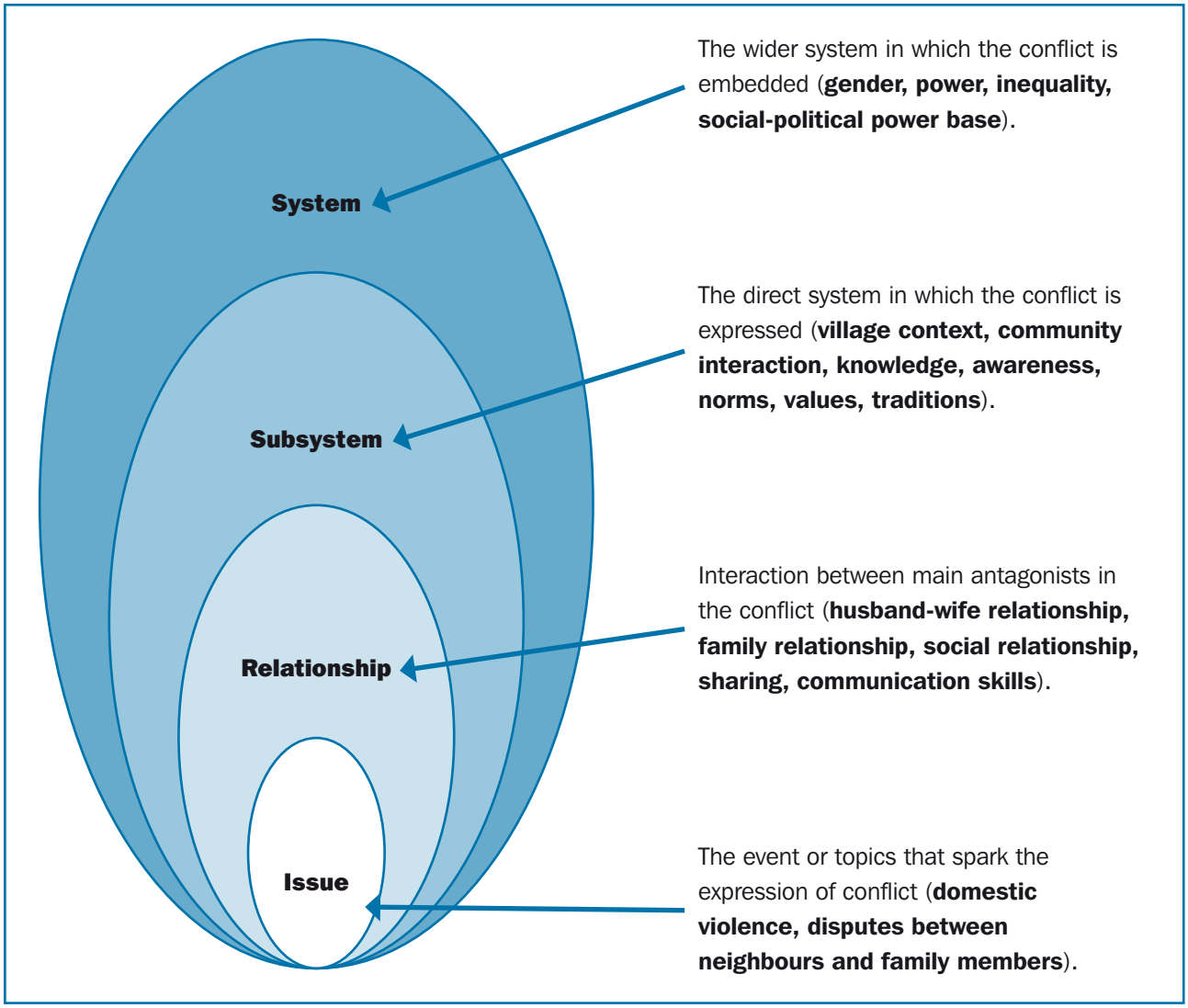
2 Union Parishad (UP) is the lowest tier of the elected rural level local government system in Bangladesh.

political change (Fisher et al., 2000). Conflict transformation aims to reduce violence and to protect and promote social justice and sustainable peace. It is an ongoing process of changing relationships, behaviours, attitudes, and structures, from negative and destructive to positive and peaceful. It requires timely interventions, respect for cultural context, patience, persistence, and a comprehensive understanding of the conflict.

Conflict transformation theory assumes that conflict is caused by problems of inequality and injustice, expressed in competing social, cultural, and economic frameworks. Its goals include changing structures and frameworks that cause inequality and injustice, promoting economic redistribution, improving long-term relationships and attitudes among the conflicting parties, and developing processes and systems that promote empowerment, justice, peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and recognition (Fisher, et al., 2000).

In the present action research context, most of the disputes and conflict cases use a resolution process, which is not aimed at changing people's attitudes or behaviours or at transforming the societal structure and hierarchy. This assumption is further explored with on-going mediation practices reviewed through the application of Maire Dugan's (1996) 'nested paradigm' of conflict foci.

Figure 1: Dugan's 'nested paradigm of conflict foci'(Source: Adapted from Maire Dugan (1996))



In Figure 1, Dugan identifies four different levels of conflict as i) issue-specific, ii) relational, iii) structural/sub-systemic, and iv) structural/systemic. Dugan argues that those seeking to address conflict on one level need to be aware how that same conflict may be manifested or rooted in the other levels. This suggests that if we truly wish to work on the root causes of a problem, mediation practitioners must be engaged on multiple levels in a multiplicity of roles that draw on multiple forms of intervention/action. For example, in the Bangladeshi context we may need to move beyond meeting in mediation with two disputing parties to include neighbours, because the problem and its possible solutions go well beyond these individuals.

Therefore, community-based justice programmes (in this case, mediation) must be prepared to address the problem/issue as systemic if it:

- Occurs within our prevailing unequal understanding of gender, power structure, inequality, socio-political power structure (*system*);
- Is exposed and expressed in the village context during community level interaction with the lower level of education, knowledge, norms, values, traditions etc. (*subsystem*);
- Represents husband-wife relationships, family and social relationships, sharing, conjugal life, communication skills, behaviour (*relationship*);
- Involves domestic violence, disputes between neighbours and family members (*issue*).

It is to be expected that the present mediation intervention will not address issues beyond the relationship level while the root causes – lying at *subsystem* and *system* levels –remain unaddressed. In rethinking this mediation approach, the role of counselling is considered within the mediation and peacebuilding nexus. That is, counselling is explored as a way of moving beyond the issue level of a conflict, especially in the context of community mediation in Bangladesh.

2.3 Counselling

Counselling here, particularly community-based group counselling, refers to facilitating personal and interpersonal functioning across the conflict context to include a range of concerns. While formal counselling as a practice encompasses a broad range of practices and expertise, informal counselling seeks to use basic counselling skills, such as deep listening and facilitation, to help people improve their well-being, alleviate distress, discuss the negative consequences of conflicts among future generations, resolve crises, and increase their ability to live in and develop within their social and cultural context. Counselling is a long-term and challenging process that requires a lot of preparation for the practitioner, including the consideration of cultural and social norms. It is seen as an important part of the overall conflict transformation and peacebuilding process, and as a critical aspect of mediation. Rebuilding community relations in this event has a multidimensional implication, which includes both the perpetrators and the victims. Psychological and social healing for both perpetrator and victim is important; but it is equally important that people in the community experience healing, because – while the community may not be directly involved – the violence and its impact affect everyone. Therefore, counselling also has a broad impact on community relationships. It has a large role in rebuilding and reintegrating the perpetrators and victims into society, and ultimately de-escalating the violent mood and breaking the cycle of violence at the community level. It has a similar potential to mediation in the conflict resolution process, because both aim to benefit the involved parties and to induce positive change.

Folberg and Alison (1988) show that as a process sequence, both mediator and counselor gain community rapport, find and assess the facts, consult involved parties, prioritize their choices and apply appropriate strategy for resolution. Therefore, the application of counselling and mediation, together, could be more effective in conflict resolution. For my action research, the mediation session takes place in the midst of the community where, apart from victim and perpetrator, huge crowds remain present and observe the mediation session, but no counselling process is followed. Therefore, addressing the wider community through counselling for dealing with

conflict and disputes in their own context could exceed the limited benefit of perpetrator-victim mediation.

3. Problem

Many NGOs in Bangladesh have been using mediation that builds on traditional community models as a useful tool for resolving local level conflicts in rural areas. As the courts of the formal justice system are overburdened and ineffective in dealing with local disputes, many donors are supporting this type of intervention as an effective community-based justice mechanism. However, there has been no assessment of the practical efficacy of mediation in dealing with local level conflicts, and recurrences of conflicts and violations remain prevalent in the community. The current approach to mediation in the sub-continent builds on traditional community approaches to mediation, and focuses narrowly on the apparent conflict and the disputants rather than on the causes and structures underlying them. In this context, action research was conducted to explore the effectiveness of the current mediation mechanism in dealing with grassroots level conflicts. It also explored how to improve its effectiveness in transforming the conflict into more peaceful co-existence – that is, how to redesign the community-based justice mechanism and move its orientation from conflict resolution to conflict transformation.

4. Methodology

Action research methodology guided a series of Action – Reflection – Action cycles within the context of my work, which is, with partner NGO, to support interventions that will enable and improve access to and delivery of services from the formal and informal justice system. I was actively involved in the whole research process, during which I reviewed the mediation method of one of our partner NGOs (PNGOs), changed the model, applied methods in the field, gathered reflections, and reapplied the model. The sources of information and the methods adopted in this research included a literature review, meetings, field observations, learning reflections, and keeping a self-reflection journal.

To begin this research initiative I had a three-phase preparation cycle. First, I needed to consult with my supervisor to allow me to do my academic action research in the field with one of my partner NGOs (PNGOs). At this time I also had consultation meetings with colleagues who are legally trained and have working experience in the justice field, which enriched my research proposal design. Second, with the consent of my supervisor, I negotiated with my target PNGO (Legal Aid Organisation-LAO[3]) to do my action research intervention with them at their field location. The action research was undertaken in Vadra – a typical village of Dhuliani Union of Chougacha Upazilla under Jessore[4] district of Bangladesh. The Legal Aid Organisation (LAO) has been working in this village for several years. The research started with a review of LAO's on-going mediation practices, along with some theoretical background to relate it to the context and understand the mediation approach being used.

Third, with the agreement and cooperation of LAO, I had a meeting with previously selected mediation committee members in the field, where I explained my proposed research. My research work was mainly guided by my regular observations, learning, and reflections, which were shared with LAO and my office colleagues. However, in some cases my research allowed me to bring myself closer to the community and to mediation committee members, to share my reflections.

Following the first cycle, I began the second cycle with a more comprehensive literature review towards building a stronger basis for my research direction and for my own conceptual clarity. I did the literature review independently, and shared my information with colleagues and LAO in order to have a level of common understanding. At this time, I also introduced a basic counselling approach to LAO colleagues. Later on, along with the LAO colleagues and mediation committee members, I took part in three mediation sessions. During these sessions I also explored the use of counselling in mediation. I observed the sessions, people's dynamics, their involvement, responses, aspirations, and so forth. It helped me to understand people's connection with the mediation

3 Legal Aid Organisation (LAO) is a pseudonym for the local PNGO where I undertook my action research project. LAO works to ensure a fair dispute resolution mechanism by promoting women's participation in mediation, facilitating its neutrality, and achieving eventual acceptance at the community level as a system for reducing violence against women. The community level justice mechanism, mediation (shalish), has historically been practised in Bangladesh. However LAO's approach of empowering the local community by institutionalising mediation in a more professional and unbiased manner is new.

4 Jessore is a district town in the south-western part of Bangladesh, 275 kms from the capital Dhaka.

mechanism. I always shared my learning and personal reflection with LAO colleagues and with mediation committee members, and sometimes with community members. My colleagues also shared their reflections, and responded to my personal observations.

My LAO colleagues and I agreed to incorporate counselling in pre-mediation, mediation sessions, and later on in the post-mediation follow-up process as well. Following the gradually positive results, counselling was practised with people in the wider community, presented in the session, and not only confined to the conflicting parties. This allowed me to explore and cross-check my perceptions and reflections with others more confidently. Again, in this context the counselling approach was not focused on formal counselling, but rather on an informal approach that encouraged reconciliation and connection with the conflict issue and the broader community context. Counselling assisted discussion and changed people's behaviour, attitudes, and mindset towards local social conflicts and its negatives consequences for the society and successive generations.

Keeping a research diary was a critical part of my action research. All the reflections received from my own perspective, and from PNGO (LAO) colleagues and mediation committee members, were documented. This accumulated information enabled a qualitative analysis of emerging issues, themes, and reflections, and contributed to writing the whole report and thus outlining the concluding findings and observations. Throughout the action research work, immediately after any cycle of action research, the observations and reflections were shared with LAO and office colleagues. The full narrative description of the action cycles is described elsewhere (Asaduzzaman, 2007).

5. Findings

Overall, mediation has a vital role in enabling a mechanism for local poor and disadvantaged people to access community-based justice. People feel very dependent on it, especially given the inaccessibility of formal justice approaches. Therefore, if it can broaden its role beyond resolution it has huge potential to transform local level conflicts. However, the present practice of mediation mechanisms in Bangladesh primarily focuses only on the apparent solution of the problem, and hardly focuses on reconciliation, counselling, or the wider context of conflict in which the disputants are located (Asaduzzaman, 2008).

Based on the whole range of my action research work, the following findings and reflections on rethinking mediation and community justice mechanisms are presented.

5.1 'Problem solving' to 'transformative' orientation for community justice mechanisms

During the research process it was found that the mediation process used by LAO is primarily oriented to 'problem-solving'. The process generally deals narrowly with compoundable cases like early marriage, violence against women (whether within or outside marriage), inheritance, dowry, polygamy, physical and psychological abuse, divorce, financial maintenance (or lack thereof) for a wife and children, or a combination of such issues. This approach primarily focuses on the issue and the clients, to resolve the conflict rather than to transform their relationship or change the social structure. Such an approach argues for a 'win-win' solution amongst the parties to the mediation, and in doing so confines itself to the parties who are directly involved and to their end-satisfaction only.

We found that people generally expected some loss or punishment as part of the justice mechanism. People are acquainted with a 'victims and offenders' framework, and they expect that at least one of the two parties involved in conflict must be penalised as part of the justice procedure. The surrounding circumstances are the least-considered phenomena in a dispute or conflict situation. We found through observation and reflection during the action cycles that, if the mediation includes counselling, its effectiveness and acceptability to ordinary people is increased many times over. This is because counselling can play an effective role in the mediation process, so that it does

not only deal with conflict issues but also with the broader context in which the problem is embedded. It does not deal only with the violation, but also with the offender who violated, the rules, their motivations, and the circumstances.

5.2 Conflict resolution and conflict transformation

In the action research context, mediation as a form of conflict resolution and transformation was partially reviewed through the application of Dugan's (1996) 'nested paradigm', to see if those seeking to address conflict on one level (i.e. 'issue-specific') were aware of the way in which that same conflict may be manifested or rooted in the other levels.

In this research context, it was found that the mediation focus was on the 'issues-specific' level, along with their relationship. Through reflection and observation it was found that we must move beyond the traditional focus of meeting for mediation with two disputing parties, to include neighbours (for example) because the problem and its possible solutions go well beyond the individuals at the *relationship* level. The action research suggests that the present mediation intervention does not address the conflict beyond the relationship level, while the root causes – lying at *subsystem* and *system* levels – remain unaddressed. In applying this paradigm it was evident that the present mediation mechanism in the community-level justice system did not properly impact on all factors underlying the systemic violence and conflict at the local level, and therefore did not promote sustainable, peaceful coexistence in the long term.

Therefore, the recurrence of conflict and family disputes was still found to be high. Curle's (1971) 'progression of conflict' model also supports this finding. It suggests that unless both the disempowered and power-holding parties begin to recognise the structural nature of their problems, facilitated dialogue is in fact counterproductive to building peace. Similarly applied in the current work of mediation, it revealed that, until the victims and offenders are aware of the full spectrum of the system, as well as the nature and extent of their problem, they are not capable of solving their problems in a sustained way. This action research tried to contribute a transformative mediation approach to seek not only resolution of the immediate problem, but also the empowerment and mutual recognition of the involved parties, and to offer them skills for changing their attitudes and behaviour, so that it can contribute to changing the unequal power balances in rural Bangladeshi society.

5.3 The role of counselling in mediation

Following the Action-Reflection-Action cycle, LAO's on-going mediation was adapted to explore the presence of counselling in their practice. The model was changed to integrate counselling methods during field mediations. Reflections were accumulated from the field and mediation committee members, and reapplied in the next action cycle. During this field action research, it was observed that the use of informal counselling in the mediation process with the conflicting parties can potentially transform the conflict into a more sustainable and peaceful solution. Our reflections on an approach that includes counselling with the broader community is that it can have more impact, and may eventually reduce the recurrence of the same conflict and disputes.

Counselling-based mediation sometimes does not require any penalties or punishment. Instead, conflicting parties are left with mutual understanding through overcoming their misperceptions about each other. It transforms their mentality and behaviour towards (for example) their family members, which ultimately enables them to influence other family members not to be violent towards others. It will then be a mediation that is transformative rather than oriented to problem-solving.

Ownership of and commitment to the counselling process is very important, because it can influence psychological and social healing. If the process is deeply rooted in the society through mediation and owned by the people, then there is little scope for them to be manipulated by 'interest groups' during local level mediation sessions. Therefore, the process should be transparent, open, and acceptable to the parties involved. Local institutions and traditional beliefs in community-building should also be acknowledged and strengthened with consideration.

5.4 Contextualization

Context is a very important factor that has tremendous influence when applying any theory to the field. Western theory-based counselling could be effective with individual victims (war, abuse, accidents etc.), but dealing with the victims of community-based or systemic violence, particularly domestic violence, requires contextualization. Contextualization of both individual and group counselling is important. During my action research both LAO and I observed that at various stages counselling strongly influences the resolution of the issue, and transforms the broader conflict in a sustainable manner. An adapted approach to mediation that included counselling was found to help not only to resolve the issue, but also to locate the victim and offender as the prime focus, and to place these in the broader context within which the violation occurred. In my country and working context I found that, apart from focusing on victim and offender, it should include a wider circle of stakeholders, including mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, and other family members, particularly in the case of violence against women. Since domestic violence against women is wrongly perceived as a phenomenon of my social and cultural context, local elites and community and religious leaders have tremendous influence in ensuring sustainable conflict transformation.

Any longer-term, eventual peaceful coexistence in the community needs to build on our value system, which encourages social capital by including strong family bonds in the social structure. Counselling in this situation requires a strong contextual consideration. As mentioned earlier, we found through our own discussions, reflections, and application that – apart from a client-centered approach – the incorporation of the victims' and offenders' close relatives, immediate neighbours, and community members recognises highly important social ties in the Bangladeshi context. The redesigned mediation was applied accordingly, and reflections were collected. Furthermore, such wider engagement also required that the counselling should be followed before, during, and after the mediation period to ensure a longer-term peaceful impact and a wider influence on communities. Moreover, the mediation – apart from focusing on issues or clients and their relatives – should consider the larger system and subsystem where the conflict is taking place, in order to change the eventual structure and system so that sustainable transformation at both individual and community level is enhanced. The mediation was further redesigned to include the larger system and its wider audiences, and applied.

5.5 Reflection on the research process

During the action research and continuous interactions with different stakeholders, I gathered more in-depth knowledge about mediation by consciously working at a practical level. My learning and its field-based application made me more committed, and generated more enthusiasm for my work and for peacebuilding initiatives for my community and society at large. I became a more reflexive learner and practised my learning in peace-building areas. With my new learning, vision, and definition, I discovered myself to be closer to the community and to affected peoples where violent conflict is more prevalent and where peace-building initiatives should be given relative priority. I now feel more connected to the people with whom, and for whom, I am working.

My present action research, although limited in scale, applied conflict transformation oriented theories in my work context and in on-going mediation interventions. We experienced changes in the field over this year-long small-scale action research, but it is difficult to make any definitive concluding remarks. These theories were developed in the Western context, while my local context (which includes a number of variables and factors, such as the educational status of the local community, their level of consciousness, their awareness of the issue and its deeper consequences, and social readiness to apply this equation) needs to be considered more deeply.

6. Conclusion

Community-based mediation mechanisms offer an important way to deal with local level conflict. In a developing country like Bangladesh, where socio-economic status in rural areas does not allow people in the community access to lengthy and expensive formal court systems, mediation

is considered an intermediate solution, providing access to justice at their doorstep. NGOs have been working continuously over the last couple of decades to improve the quality of mediation so that the rural poor and disadvantaged people can gain maximum benefit from this type of community-based justice mechanism. However, people have started challenging the efficacy of this traditional mediation mechanism, blaming its bias and low impact on the target rural community. NGOs wanted to break the power structure that has been controlling traditional mediation since time immemorial. These NGOs wanted to replace the powerful elites and influential figures with poor, disadvantaged people – women in particular. But this approach faces another challenge. The modified approaches are now considered to be very donor-dependent and unsustainable, offering a solution that does not generate any sustainable changes in the social power structure, and thus resulting in the recurrence of violations and conflicts. The theory outlined by Dugan (1996) requires a close review of this NGO-run mediation in order to enhance its quality and desired goal further. Application of Dugan's paradigm in rural Bangladesh reveals the broader context of conflict – the social power structure and system and its temporal considerations – where the actual conflict takes place. However, these are deeper issues that demand longer-term exploration and further action research at the field level with continuous follow-ups and observations. Despite the limited scope of this study, the process of rethinking the current community justice approach can guide how it can be strengthened to best deal with community conflict and to promote social justice and sustainable peace.

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The effects of inter-ethnic dialogue on prejudice reduction and improved communication: The case of the Albanian receiving community and the Serbian returning community in Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje

by SHPEND VOCA

The present study has been concerned with the case of inter-ethnic dialogue in Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje in relation to the return process. The study focuses on the participation of the Albanian receiving community and the Serbian returning community in inter-ethnic dialogue meetings. The data for this study come from observation during the dialogue meetings and from interviews with participants. The present research shows that inter-ethnic dialogue does reduce prejudice and improve communication. I have used the 'contact hypothesis' to look at this in a systematic way. My findings suggest that changes have taken place in participants' expectations, learning, and emotional experience. Moreover, the findings suggest a breaking of the barriers to communication, an increasing number of greetings, and longer conversations in a friendly manner. Regarding the generalisation process[1], what can certainly be claimed is that the experience taking place between participants does hold potential for prejudice reduction and improved communication among uninvolved community members in dialogue meetings. However, this research has also shown that external events taking place in Kosovo at the time did create negative obstacles to prejudice reduction and improved communication.

1. Introduction

Nine years after the war, the return process remains the top priority of national and international actors engaged in Kosovo. Dialogue is one component in the return process, along with economic and security components. Under the guiding principles of return, dialogue between communities is seen as a short-term initiative. However, Kosovan Nansen Dialogue[2] has been engaged in long-term dialogue work as part of the return process, and believes that it strengthens the impact of the overall process.

The present research is part of a project on which I've been working for more than two years. While the aim of the project has been to facilitate the return process between the receiving Albanian community and returning Serbs, the research is focused on the effects of inter-ethnic dialogue on prejudice reduction and improved communication. Moreover, the present research has considered how the outcomes may be generalised beyond the study to other community members. The case chosen for the study is the dialogue between Albanian and Serbian community members in Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje. The research covered four dialogue meetings held in the period from October 2006 to December 2007.

2. Theoretical background: Contact hypothesis

According to the well-known 'contact hypothesis', not every contact will result in prejudice reduction or improved communication: certain conditions need to be fulfilled. Originally developed by Allport (1958), four conditions continue to form the backbone of the contact hypothesis. For positive changes in attitudes and behaviour to take place, there need to be: equal group status within a situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom (Pettigrew 1998).

Recent research (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Cook 1985; Pettigrew 1998; Amir 1969) has generally supported the effectiveness of Allport's four conditions. In order to understand the nature of contact in this research, the reader

1 According to Pettigrew (1998) there are three distinct types of generalisation. 1) Situational – do the changes generalise across situations? 2) Individual to group – do the canges move/extend from the specific outgroup individuals with whom there is contact to the wider outgroup who have not been involved? (The second type is relevant to this paper). 3) To uninvolved outgroups – do the changes toward one outgroup lead to changes in the way other outgroups (not involved in the contact) are viewed?

2 Kosovan Nansen Dialogue is a local NGO engaged in inter-ethnic dialogue between communities. For more information on its mission and activities, see www.kndialogue.org

needs to be familiarised with the Nansen dialogue workshops that take place.

2. 1 Workshop character and dynamics

The purpose and aim of the Nansen Dialogue workshops are based on the theoretical aspects of the contact hypothesis. As Bryn (the lead practitioner of Nansen dialogue work) wrote, the Nansen dialogue concept is mainly constructed from experiences in the field (Bryn 2005). Speaking generally, the purpose of dialogue workshops is to bring participants to the point where they understand and acknowledge each other, in order to foster mutual respect and develop new patterns of relationships between groups.

Nansen Dialogue workshops are intensive dialogue meetings between participants from selected communities. These participants are municipal officials, influential community leaders, hardliners (Anderson and Olson 2003: 58), and teachers, who have the capacity to engage in the workshops and have the credibility to initiate changes both in their own communities and with the general public (Kelman 1995). 'Participants are encouraged to deal with conflict analytically rather than polemically – to explore the ways in which their interaction helps to exacerbate and perpetuate the conflict, rather than to assign blame the other side while justifying their own. This analytic discussion helps the parties to penetrate each other's perspective and understand each other's concerns, needs, fears, priorities and constraints' (Kelman 1997: 3).

The framework of the workshop and the structure of the dialogue meeting depend on the stage of the return process. The general objectives in all the dialogue meetings have been to improve inter-ethnic relations between the Albanian receiving and Serbian returning community. Although each dialogue workshop is different, a certain process and structure is followed and guided by the Nansen facilitator. An important element of the dialogue workshop is the educational aspect for participants. Training to educate participants is developed from a set of lectures on conflict theory and conflict analysis. 'Conflict is viewed as necessary for social development and destructive if it escalates into violence' (Aarbakke 2002: 21). The aim is to provide participants with a theoretical framework that can give them new perspectives on their own conflict, identify the mechanisms and the warning signs of its escalation, and through this enable them to think about how violence might be avoided (ibid). Another topic covered as part of the training process is a human rights approach to peace-building. The aim here is to introduce participants to the human rights approach and the process by which they empower themselves, and explore how they can motivate others to get involved in the empowerment process (ibid).

Group work and socialising are another important aspect of the dialogue workshops. Group work as a way of informal discussion, assigning participants to small groups across ethnic divisions, has proved to be an important means of understanding and learning about each other. My observation shows that group work gives participants a chance to sit down together and cooperate, discuss possible solutions of certain problems, and discuss pre-war, war-time, and post-war experiences. With group work and face-to-face dialogue meetings, it is important to know when to take a break for various organised social activities (Cleven 2005: 54). The social setting helps to release tension and to get to know the 'other' in a different setting, not just as a representative of an ethnic group or as a serious person in a dialogue meeting (ibid).

3. Research goal and assumptions

The present research is part of a programme of inter-ethnic dialogue meetings organised by Kosovan Nansen Dialogue. I argue from my recent study that Nansen inter-ethnic dialogue is organised on the principles of the contact hypothesis, and that the effects predicted from the contact hypothesis can therefore be expected, namely:

a) Reducing prejudice
b) Improving inter-ethnic communication, and
c) Generalisation to other members of the group.

3. 1 Methods

The data for this study came from observing dialogue meetings and interviews with participants. The

interviews were conducted with 12 participants[3]: six Albanian nationalities and six Serbian nationalities that were part of ongoing dialogue activities. For the purpose of getting more detailed information, I have used semi-structured interviews, consisting mainly of open-ended questions, with particular focus on certain elements. The open-ended questions were important for participants to express their views and experiences as freely as possible.

My roles and responsibilities in this project put me into a situation where I had a certain degree of interaction with dialogue participants. I managed to establish trust and friendly relationships with Albanian participants, whereas my contacts with Serbian participants were based on short conversations and technical assistance. Within this context I conducted my research under the term 'observer as participant'. This role includes more observation than participation. In this role, the observer interacts to some degree with participants rather than being totally detached from the group. It has been shown that participants are often more willing to talk to an 'observer as participant' who is an attentive stranger rather than with people with whom they are more familiar (Baker 2006).

Processing the data went through five stages. The analysis focused on surveying all the respondents and their answers in order to find consistencies and differences. I put all the data from each question together. Then I went through the process of categorising the information. Through this process I was looking for the main ideas, concepts, behaviours that describe a particular category. At the same time I was trying to identify common patterns and relationships across questions. And the last step was to bring all of this together, interpreting the data and identifying meaning and significance.

4. Findings

As we have seen, contact theory states that certain conditions must be fulfilled in order for prejudice reduction and improved communication to take place. The multi-ethnic setting created during dialogue workshops provides a natural laboratory for testing this theory. The present study is based on the argument that inter-ethnic dialogue should contribute toward prejudice reduction and improved communication. And it assumes, hopefully, that changed attitudes and better communication will be generalised to other community members.

Hypothesis 1: Organisation of inter-ethnic dialogue met the preconditions of the contact hypothesis

The present study concluded that four elements of contact theory were met, as described below.

Equal status. The participants of the present study are secondary school graduates, who used to live in the same neighborhood until the war of 1999, and who are seen as influential people in their local community. As the project was focused on community-based dialogue, the participants selected for this study were influential local community members from both the receiving community and the returning community.

Common goals. Common goals are considered an important factor in reducing prejudice between group members. The common goal for all participants in the present study was to accomplish the return process through joint efforts. Moreover, the common goal for both groups was to facilitate a smooth return process, through which the returning community would feel safe and welcomed by the receiving community.

Intergroup cooperation. In the present study, cooperation was the most important factor needing to be achieved. The authorities would not fund the return process if members of the different communities did not cooperate with each other. Participation in the dialogue meetings was in itself cooperation between the groups. Moreover, the initiatives that came out of dialogue meetings – like the creation of a joint Inter-ethnic Council consisting of Albanian and Serbian community members – can be seen as a mechanism for channeling their efforts toward challenges on sustainable return. However, the data from the interviews with Albanian participants show that, in their view, Serbian beneficiaries cooperated

3 In order to understand the study sample, see Appendix 1.

to a satisfactory level in the return project, but they blamed the parallel Serbian structures and Belgrade officials for negatively influencing the return process. In contrast, the perception of Serbian participants was that the Albanian participants and their community did not show genuine cooperation with the return process. Serbian participants believe that the Albanian participants used different rhetoric during the dialogue meetings (which in reality was not the case).

Support of authorities, law, or custom.
Empirical evidence shows that intergroup contact is more successful when it occurs in the context of supportive norms (see Dovidio et al. 2003:.5). The support may come from the law, customs, a spokesperson for the community, or any authority that is accepted by the interacting group. In the present study, municipal officials were invited and participated in the dialogue meetings. Their role was to support and encourage the participants to return to their place of origin. Municipal officials were present at each dialogue meeting, and made themselves available to the participants for whatever they needed regarding the return process. Moreover, my observations during the field-work, dialogue meetings, and interviews suggest that the authorities gave strong support to the return process.

Hypothesis 2 & 3: Inter-ethnic dialogue has a beneficial effect on prejudice reduction and inter-group communication

The findings do indeed suggest a positive movement toward reduced prejudice and improved communication. Although this movement appears to be small, there are some elements suggesting a genuinely positive change. While observing the initial interaction between participants, it was clear that participants were very polite and quiet, trying to avoid each other while talking to members of their own ethnic group, and expressing suspicions about the motives and honesty of the 'others' in participating in the dialogue meetings. Furthermore, statements made during the interviews, such as "I had to be quiet, I didn't want to be out of the norms", or "They were much more polite than we thought", characterise the initial interactions between participants, and give further support to the strong influence of group norms, suggesting a high level of anxiety (see Stephan & Stephan 1985; Pettigrew 1998).

Having presented the initial situation during the interaction, now I will focus on the elements I found that indicate prejudice reduction. This was evidenced in a positive shift in the participants' cognitive, behavioural, and emotional levels. By the end the Albanian participants were no longer expecting aggressive inter-group behaviour from the Serbian participants. According to one Albanian participant, "Now they are not as aggressive as they used to be in the initial meetings". Many complaints made initially by Serbian participants about the return process – requirements for changes that needed to be done, the necessary conditions that have to be fulfilled in order to complete the return process – were defined as aggressive behaviour by Albanian participants. As one participant said, "In the beginning Serbs wanted their requests to be immediately fulfilled, but now they have understood that things go slower". As for the Serbian participants, their initially negative expectations turned into positive surprise once they met Albanian participants. They were surprised by the politeness and interest shown in conversation.

On the emotional level, findings suggest that a certain degree of reduced anxiety and increased empathy had been attained. An increasing amount of inter-group interaction, increasing time of conversation, and more openness and honesty in communication between participants, suggest a reduction in anxiety between participants. Nansen dialogue meetings that provide continuing contact between participants for a certain length of time do seem to lead to anxiety reduction. This is supported by Pettigrew (1998: 71): "Continued contact generally reduces anxiety, though bad experiences can increase it".

In general, dialogue meetings have been described by participants as a positive experience, especially for those who participated in Nansen dialogue meetings in Norway, Lillehammer[4]. Direct interaction and discussion in the dialogue workshops provided opportunities for participants to begin to learn about

4 Of the 12 interviewed participants, eight had been in Norway, Nansen Akademi: Lillehammer.

each other. As they talked about the obstacles to the return process, education, unemployment rates, and security issues, participants began to realise how far their concerns, needs, interests, and fears were shared. For the Albanian receiving community, it was important to know whether the Serbs accepted the new reality in Kosovo and were willing to participate in local elections. For the Serbs, as potential returnees, the issues of security, freedom of movement, and education of their children were presented as the main discussion points. Talking about their experiences during the war and after the war, and about how they felt about the current situation, suggests that a good deal of learning was taking place between participants. In line with this, Stephan & Stephan (1985) found that learning new information about the out-group can lead to more positive attitudes about them.

My findings suggest a positive shift regarding inter-ethnic communication between participants. My interviews and observations suggest a breaking down of barriers to communication, an increasing number of greetings, and longer conversations in a friendly manner. The majority of the participants are now able to communicate honestly and openly with each other. The findings suggest that in certain situations they can even criticise each other in a friendly manner. Moreover, there are a few cases where participants initiated meetings for different purposes, and most people expressed a readiness to have friendly coffees. Now that the Serbian participants have returned, the two communities live close to each other geographically, giving them a chance to improve communication still further. However, it remains to be seen if returned Serbs will be integrated to the community or will be inclined to leave and sell their houses.

Finally, opinion is varied regarding family visits to each other. While the majority of participants expressed a willingness to conduct family visits in the near future, other participants expressed uncertainty. It was interesting also to find out that, at the end, Serbian participants still weren't ready to take their children to the same school as Albanian children. It should be mentioned that this factor is strongly related to the perception of security. The interviews were carried out at a time when several Serbian houses were robbed and Kosovo independence[5] was declared. Although during the dialogue meetings participants emphasised the importance of education for their children, it remains a real challenge to be fulfilled in the post-return phase.

Hypothesis 4: Prejudice reduction and improved communication are generalised to other members of the group[6]

According to different studies, two preconditions need to be fulfilled in order for generalisation to take place. The first is that group members must be perceived as typical of their groups (see Hewstone and Cairns 2001; Kelman 1995; Pettigrew 1998). The second is that there must be adequate time for longer-term intergroup contact so that participants have the opportunity to become friends (Pettigrew 1998). From this study it is hard to come to any definite conclusion. While I found no example of lasting friendship among participants occurring as a result of dialogue meetings, certainly, now that the return has been accomplished, there is a greater chance for participants to communicate with each other. Although my findings suggest only tentatively that participants are continuing to communicate across the community divide, what can certainly be claimed is that the anxiety initially experienced in inter-group communication has not only been reduced as a result of the dialogue meetings, but this reduced anxiety has also been transferred into daily life. Therefore, I believe, we can at least say that dialogue meetings have the potential to help the generalisation process to take place.

However, when talking about the effects of inter-ethnic dialogue, we cannot ignore external obstacles and the present unreconciled situation. The present findings have been affected by the political context, such as the declaration of Kosovan independence and the robbing of Serbian houses. During the interviews it was observed that these effects did create negative obstacles to prejudice reduction and improved communication. Moreover, the Serbian community started to feel less secure and expressed less optimism about

5 The independence of Kosovo is perceived as having created an Albanian state, where there is no place for Serbians to live.
6 The other members of the group referred to in the present study are the local Albanian receiving community and displaced local Serbs who were not present at the dialogue meetings, but who originate from Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje.

the second phase of return to Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje as a result of these events.

The present research shows that Kosovan Nansen Dialogue is the only organisation in Kosovo practising long-term dialogue in order to facilitate the return process. As it offers a unique opportunity for participants, it provides a unique setting for researchers interested in inter-ethnic contact. My findings suggest that Kosovan Nansen Dialogue should expand its programme through organising dialogue meetings between Albanian and Serb youth. The issue of language might be an obstacle to communication between younger generations in the future. The need to introduce language courses for the younger generation might serve as an integration tool for future policies. At present, the needs of the communities involved in the return process require more than inter-ethnic dialogue activities. The need for infrastructure, school rebuilding, road reconstruction, and improved security require the cooperation of different actors. That is why Nansen cannot work alone, and is not doing so. There is a constant need for coordination with different national and international actors involved in the return process.

5. Reflections on my study

It is important to add that my research faces serious limitations regarding the reliability and validity of the study. Expanding the sample size could assist in providing further evidence on the effects of dialogue meetings. But bearing in mind that inter-ethnic dialogue is related to specific participants and locations, the sample size chosen for the present study can be seen as good enough. The second limitation concerns the interpretation of the results. Perhaps a more sophisticated statistical method could provide a deeper understanding of the data gathered. And the final limitation is the issue of bias during the study. It can be seen that I obtained more detailed data from Albanian participants. This is because I am an Albanian, and the nature of my work has related much more to Albanian participants. As I am not able to speak good Serbian, a colleague translated for me during the interviews with Serbian participants. Perhaps the creation of a research team, or cooperation with another colleague to check and recheck the interpretation of the results, could provide a less biased study.

6. Conclusion

The present study has been concerned with the case of inter-ethnic dialogue in Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje in the context of the return process. The study focuses on members of the Albanian receiving community and the Serbian returning community who participated in inter-ethnic dialogue meetings. I have argued that the necessary preconditions for success set by contact hypothesis theory are met. Thus, the paper found positive effects of inter-ethnic dialogue on prejudice reduction and improved communication. It is to be hoped that the potential for generalisation referred to above is fulfilled. But more research will be needed to see if this is indeed taking place.

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Transforming latent religious conflict: An interfaith peacebuilding approach in Cambodia

by SEANG SAMNANG

Cambodia is a religiously diverse country, with the Buddhist majority, Muslims, Christians, and other faith and spiritual communities living side-by-side. The absence of visible violent religious conflict between faith communities does not mean that there is peace between them. Fear and insecurity do exist, fuelled by misunderstanding, prejudice, and discrimination. Very few peacebuilding efforts in Cambodia deal with interfaith issues, leaving much potential for religiously-based conflict. This article describes an action research process to strengthen the understanding of interfaith issues in order to strengthen interfaith co-existence and co-operation; and to explore interfaith peacebuilding as an approach for the Cambodian context. The research is based on my work as Project Manager of the Interfaith Initiative for Peace in Cambodia (IIPC) at the Alliance for Conflict Transformation[1]. Action research methods were used to explore interfaith understanding as a peacebuilding approach, in the context of a series of training and workshops engaging with community members from the Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities from the northern, western, and eastern regions of Cambodia.

The interfaith peacebuilding approach for the Cambodian context that this paper describes was founded to provide both the opportunity for facilitated interfaith dialogue, and a focus on training to support interfaith understanding. The training provides the opportunity for interfaith dialogue, and offers knowledge on conflict understanding and religious issues. The research findings support the assumption that interfaith issues are an important approach for peacebuilding in preventing future conflict and strengthening peaceful co-existence and co-operation in communities.

1 Interfaith Initiative for Peace in Cambodia (IIPC) is one of the Alliance for Conflict Transformation's core programmes. This project aims to contribute towards a culture of peace and the development of human rights by working with interfaith communities across Cambodia in promoting sustainable interfaith understanding and cooperation. Its main activities are conducting research, training, seminars, publications, and networking.

1. Introduction

While much work towards peaceful development has been done since the signing of the Paris Peace Accords[2] in 1991, social divisions remain along political, economic, and ethnic lines. Cambodia is an ethnically and religiously diverse country. Over ninety percent of almost 14 million Cambodian people are Buddhist – an overwhelming majority of the population. Christians and Muslims make up much of the remaining five percent. In many communities across the country, different religious groups live side-by-side. The absence of visible or open religious conflict between communities in Cambodia, however, does not necessarily mean that there is peace between them.

Enmity, fear, and insecurity do exist, fuelled by misunderstanding, suspicion, and inequality. For example, Cambodia's sangha, or community of Buddhist monks, is divided into two factions: the Thommayut, comprising 10 percent of the monks, is aligned with the royalty and Funcinpec[3]; while the Mohanikay faction, comprising 90 percent, is generally aligned with the Cambodian People's Party[4] (CPP) (Morris 2004: 197). This increases the potential for political leaders to use religion as a tool for political reasons. Lack of educational opportunities among ethnic Cham[5], due to poverty and illiteracy, promote the expansion of madrasahs (Islamic schools). Over time, "increased polarization of the Cham community has the potential to undermine Khmer-Cham relations, which have been generally harmonious, especially in villages where Muslims and Buddhists live side by side" (Blengsli 2003). Meanwhile, evangelical protestant Christianity is attracting many Cambodians, but insensitive or aggressive proselytisation has generated social tensions in some communities. As Morris (2004: 203) notes: some [Cambodians] view Christianity as a potential threat to Cambodia's Khmer-Buddhist identity.

Earlier research conducted by ACT, IIPC to understand the nature of interfaith issues in the community better also found fear of loss of Khmer-Buddhist identity (IIPC Preliminary Research Report Part 2, 2006: 55):

> *It is not good because when there are different religions coming in, Buddhist believers will be dispersed. I don't want to lose our Buddhism. But it is a future problem that might happen.*
>
> A 58 year old businessman living in a Buddhist-Christian community in Battambang Province

However, IIPC (2006) also found that two-thirds of all participants saw interfaith co-existence among the three main religions as a 'good thing', with the remaining one-third viewing it as 'bad' (IIPC 2006: 54). In ACT's inter-ethnic peacebuilding research project, which examined inter-ethnic relations and national identity in Cambodia (2007) involving over 1,000 people, around two-fifths of people interviewed were of the view that Cambodia is a Buddhist country, and that having other religions besides Buddhism causes problems. Yet, around half believed there is room in Cambodia for many religions (Meas & Miletic 2007: 124). While there were expressed concerns about increasing numbers of churches and mosques in Cambodia, shared values across the religions were offered as reasons why people were not concerned. Examples of such values included that all religions advise people to be good, and that everyone has the right to religious choice (Meas & Miletic 2007).

Recognising that differences in religious belief have been a source of prejudice, exclusion, and conflict across the world and throughout history, recognition is given to how religion is also a powerful force for peace. All religious belief systems share as their central concern the sanctity of life, mutual respect among people, and peace. They serve an important function in helping people to deal with suffering and to forgive past wrongs, both of which are vital to healing societies torn by past conflict and to avoiding future conflict. In fact, religious values and practices have been shown in other societies to "bring about the support, cohesion, and identity that are essential to processes of conflict prevention, mediation, and post-conflict reconciliation" (World Conference on Religion and Peace, n.d.).

2. Problem

Cambodia's religious communities are not deeply divided as much as they lack understanding and respect of each other's beliefs, values, traditions, and practices. An approach to interfaith peacebuilding in Cambodia therefore differs from interfaith dialogue conducted elsewhere in several important respects. The approach advanced by this

2 The Paris Peace Accords recognise the right to live in peace and security, free from intimidation and coercion. The agreement amongst four conflicting parties in Cambodia was signed in Paris on 23 October 1991. The parties were CPP, Funcipec, Khmer People National Liberation Front (KPNLF), and Democratic Kampuchea (the Khmer Rouge).
3 Funcipec is a royalist political party in Cambodia. Funcinpec is a French abbreviation for Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépenant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif. From the first national election in 1993 until 1998, Funcinpec and the Cambodian People's Party formed a coalition government.
4 CPP is the current ruling party of Cambodia. The party was re-named Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party in 1981-1991, and was the sole legal party in the country at the time.
5 The ethnic Cham in Cambodia mostly follow Islam.

interfaith research is to identify simple common ground or common factors among people from different religions that promote peaceful co-existence, and, conversely, perceptions or beliefs about the 'other' that may divide communities. It is not trying to foster dialogue based on theology in order to bridge deep divides, but to identify everyday social dynamics that can be strengthened in order to avoid such divisions. Religious diversity in Cambodia can offer a less threatening window for people to experience social differences as an asset, and not only to see diversity and co-operation as a common good, but also as a source of learning about peace.

Latent religious conflict in Cambodia has not been actively addressed by peacebuilding initiatives. Consequently, the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) has led an Interfaith Initiative for Peace in Cambodia (IIPC) project since 2002. IIPC believes that better understanding through research, along with developing new peacebuilding techniques in our training, helps to provide those working in different faith communities across Cambodia with the tools and knowledge to identify interfaith conflicts and to promote interfaith understanding and co-operation. There is a need to understand better the interfaith issues and approaches that are the basis for dealing with latent religious conflict between faith communities in Cambodia. Development of an interfaith peacebuilding approach in the Cambodian context can seek to transform the latent potential for interfaith conflict, and build more peaceful co-existence in the community.

3. Background

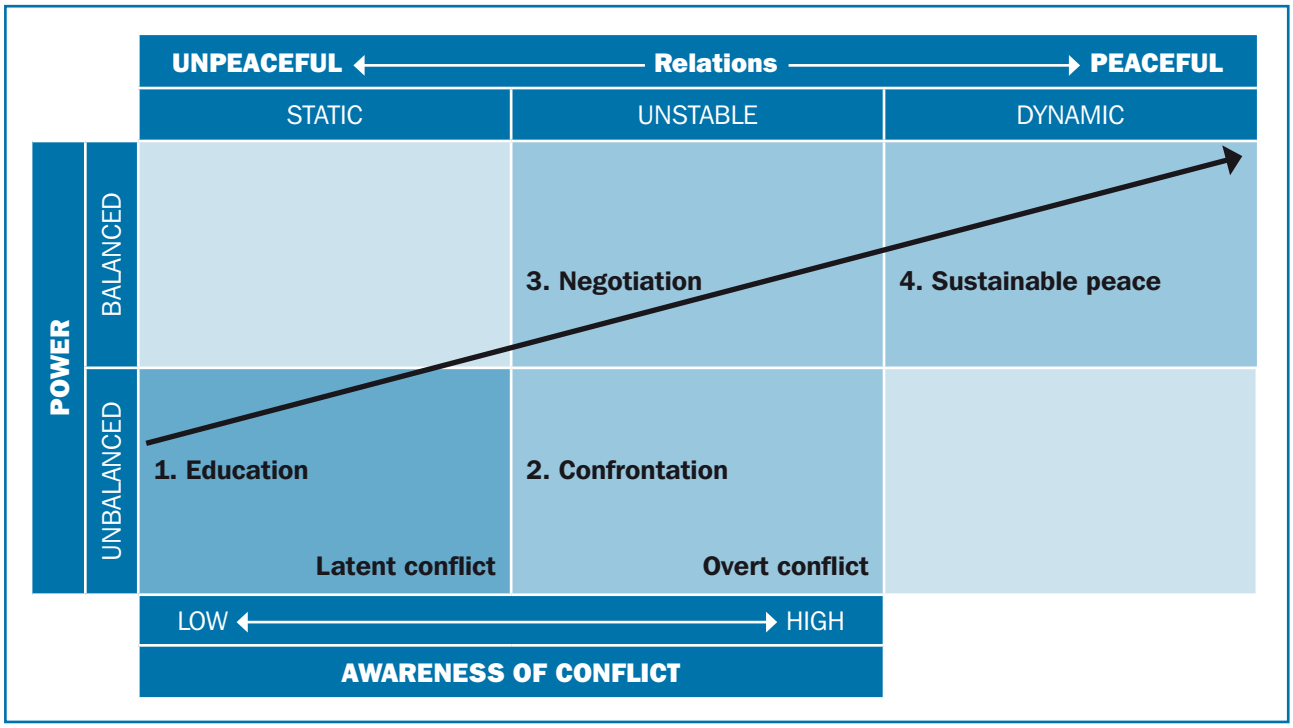
There are many pathways to building peace. Which path is chosen depends on both the context and the conflict situation. Cambodia is a religiously diverse country where interfaith communities are not deeply divided, but are characterised by misunderstanding and suspicion. In considering how to work for change in this context for Cambodia's interfaith peacebuilding Chin and Benne's approaches (cited in RTC 2005) for bringing about changes were considered. Approaches to change are described in three categories: (1) The rational-empirical approach, which assumes that people are rational and practical and will change on their own, given the appropriate conditions; (2) The normative-reeducative approach, which believes that change begins from the individual level as the starting point for changes in the wider social system; and (3) The power-coercive approach, which is most generally associated with political movements and social activism.

The approach towards change that best relates to my action research is the normative-reeducative approach. The characteristics of this approach are to improve the problem-solving capacities of a system by encouraging individuals to be self-diagnosing, and to release and foster growth in the persons who make up the system. These ideas are applied in IIPC's activities to improve not only mutual understanding amongst faith community members, but also interfaith understanding among the IIPC staff.

Another important consideration is that religious difference is seen as a *potential* source of conflict, and not as a deep social division or a major source of current conflict. Lederach (2004) notes that conflict is a progression, and peacebuilding as a process consists of different functions and roles. Citing Adam Curle's experience in mediation work in Africa and Asia, he suggested that "conflict moves along a continuum from unpeaceful to peaceful relationships" (Lederach 2004: 64). As conflict always changes in its longitudinal progression, and is constantly changed by human interaction, we can see that latent issues can also be approached in peacebuilding work.

One of the reasons latent or 'hidden' conflict occurs is because people lack knowledge of the imbalances of power and injustices that affect their lives. So, at this stage, education plays a very important role in reducing ignorance and improving awareness. As religion is considered a latent issue for potential conflict in Cambodia, the quadrant below (Figure 1) is considered further. Quadrant one in the matrix below (adapted from Lederach 2004) focuses on latent conflict and the role of education in raising awareness about the nature of imbalanced relationships.

Figure 1: The progression of conflict



At present, people in Cambodia usually avoid speaking with one another about sensitive or personal issues, including their religious beliefs and traditions. They may feel that efforts to understand one another would be an unwelcome intrusion[6]. From earlier IIPC research, we found that people fear the idea of talking about religious issues as a source of potential conflict (IIPC Preliminary Research Report Part 2, 2006: 48):

> *Because I'm afraid to create conflict; if we don't talk about religions, it is better because there is harmony. If we raise religious issues in discussion, conflict or anger would happen...*
> A 57-year-old Buddhist man living in Kampong Cham Province

Consequently, there is reluctance among the country's main religious communities – Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim – to try actively to understand each other, whether on an individual or a group level. This creates the potential for the emergence of tension and conflict in the future through misunderstanding and ignorance. To increase awareness of the potential role of religion in causing conflict – or building peace – we need to begin with increasing understanding, in order to help latent conflict to progress towards sustainable peace.

The National Conference on Interfaith Initiative for Peace in Cambodia acknowledged the potential role for peace-builders in creating opportunities for increased communication and sharing between members of different religious communities (SEACSN 2005). Religious leaders, in particular, may be uniquely placed to use their influence and moral authority to promote understanding within and across communities. As Bartoli (2004) notes, "Religious leaders, because of their training and their role, can be better positioned [than external actors] in interpreting a conflict" (Bartoli 2004: 147). In the Cambodian context, Morris (2004) notes that "monks have exceptional power to sway people at the grass roots. Their very presence in public activities has a legitimizing effect" (Morris 2004: 195). Indeed, traditionally the clergy are political neutral, mediating between the people and their rulers. However, the near-extinction of organised Buddhism during the 1970s has placed a heavy burden on a handful of monks and nuns who are experienced in peace work (Morris 2004:.200). Christian involvement in peacebuilding over the past two decades has been small, but it

6 An earlier study by ACT on nationalism and ethnicity in Cambodia found that preliminary workshops and meetings were required to begin discussion among peace-builders themselves before proceeding with the development of research, as many people had never discussed such issues as ethnicity and religion in public.

has been influential and respected at grassroots and national levels. Meanwhile, the growing evangelical movement threatens to create fresh tensions within society (Morris 2004). There is less information on the role of Cambodia's Muslim leaders in mediating community disputes or in national- or provincial-level peacebuilding activities.

'Interfaith peacebuilding' (IP) is defined here as the basic act and practice of people of diverse religions coming together both to understand each other and to seek to create social changes within society. IP initiatives, in particular 'interfaith dialogue' have been used predominantly to draw different, divided religious communities closer together through dialogue around shared religious values[7]. As a mechanism for IP, interfaith dialogue has been widely seen as an important approach to prevent the growth of religiously-based conflict (Smock 2002). Through repeated interaction, relationships can be rebuilt and years of stereotypes or prejudices can be diminished. It is a way of 'bridging divides'. Importantly, it is often achieved through a third party facilitator[8]. As noted already, Cambodia's religious communities are not deeply divided so much as they lack understanding and respect of each other's beliefs, values, traditions, and practices.

4. Methodology

The topic of this research is to develop and describe an interfaith peacebuilding (IP) approach in Cambodia, specifically on understanding interfaith issues as a way to deal with latent religious conflict. The IP approach being developed and explored involves both the process of bringing different religious representatives (Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim) together, but also provides an opportunity to share their perspectives in a form of interfaith dialogue. This will create an avenue for interfaith co-operation, and to reduce prejudice and stereotypes in the communities. The broader action research project (Seang 2008) explored both the personal and the professional development of an interfaith peacebuilding approach for Cambodia. The present action research focuses on the question, "How can (we) help people understand, practice, and share interfaith understanding for a more peaceful co-existence and co-operation in the community?"

Action research methods were applied to develop and create new understanding on interfaith peacebuilding approaches and strategies in Cambodia. The literature review and the development of the conceptual understanding of interfaith issues, as well as training workshops, seminars, and interfaith network-supported activities, were conducted as part of the work context of the Interfaith Initiative for Peace in Cambodia Project (IIPC). The full narrative of the action research cycles is described elsewhere (Seang, 2008).

3.1 Action cycles: Interfaith dialogue training, workshops, and seminars

The action was conducted across several interfaith trainings, workshops, and seminars as part of IIPC activities. In sequence, the IIPC training and workshops were: pre-consultation meetings; trainings on interfaith dialogue; follow-up workshop; skill-training workshop; seminar; support network meetings and visits; and the annual network meeting. Besides the pre-consultation meetings, these activities were implemented with selected key people from the provinces, and took place during the IIPC project's field research. The participants were identified through recommendation by provincial NGO staff members who had been contacted during the data collection process, and identified by me as a project manager who was in these communities during that time. The selection of participants was based on various criteria, including: age group, social status in their community, ability to influence the community, depth of understanding of their own religion, interest in interfaith issues, and willingness to participate in interfaith activities.

Training, workshops, and seminars enabled participants to share their experiences of building peace across different religious communities, and to share their religious principles related to preventing conflict and building peace and religious culture, tradition, and practices. It also enabled them to work together in both discussion sessions and other

7 For example, the prominent role of the Quakers and Mennonites, and of the lay Catholic organisation called the Community of Sant'Egidio, in facilitating dialogue in Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere.
8 Interfaith initiatives have been used in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Northern Ireland, Israel-Palestine, Sierra Leone, Uganda, as well as the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, using religion to help bridge deep divisions between deeply-divided communities.

activities. There was some initial reluctance, but that was also due to my own lack of experience of interfaith interaction for understanding IP. Through reflection I was able to deepen and develop my facilitation skills. Importantly, the training, workshops, and seminars provided space for the participants to seek to understand each other more deeply. This is because they felt safe to speak out and to express their previous doubts about all the religions' principles. Some of the notes I took from my team meeting describe the progress over several meetings:

> *Through our observation during the time of training, the participants had closer relationship than at the first meeting; they showed more mutual understanding, not as easy to get angry and react aggressively. They asked each other about religious misperceptions. They had willingness to clarify and answer with acceptable responses. They shared many ideas in large group discussions and also actively participated in sharing ideas with both young and old people. In this training session, participants had more understanding than last session. They were more interested in our lessons than last time. They were happy, dared to express what they want others to know about their religions, and accepted different religious traditions.*
>
> Minutes of team meeting on 16 February 2007

Participants also reflected on whether the training experience influenced their way of thinking, beliefs, and views. Much of the reflection showed how the training was able to foster greater understanding and mutual acceptance among the adherents of different religions in their communities. Some reflections from the participants of the interfaith dialogue training included:

> *"It changes my thinking of attacking a religion. I have opened my mind, which before I thought that other religions were wrong. I have given up fundamentalism, and taken up co-operation, softened my attitude to participate with others in the community development."*
>
> *"It changes me a lot such as discrimination, group-centered, and my feeling of superiority."*
>
> *"The training has been well arranged in terms of time, accommodation, food, travel and the meaning of lessons, especially, each religion's followers can have the opportunity to clarify their religion, become closer and dare to tell each other about their own religion."*

The foundation was a basic knowledge of understanding conflict, the causes of conflict, and the way to do interfaith dialogue. From this foundation they were able to reduce their fear, suspicion, and reluctance to talk about their own religions with different religious believers. Moreover they were happy to have had the chance to share and learn with others about religious misperception, prejudice, and stereotypes. Participants in interfaith training also reflected as follows:

> *"We all sat together to solve previous problems for peace in the community and the country as well."*
>
> *"It changes my previous thought which believers of other religions were not good and cuts down on discrimination, brings about understanding and solidarity among all religions, so that we could develop our community as well as understanding on interfaith co-existence principles which we will be passed on to others."*
>
> *"It changes lots. We could know about other religions' custom and practices, which enables us to make comparisons between our religions and social context."*

4. Findings

4.1 Approaching latent religious conflict

Latent issues are important to approach, through raising awareness of the situation and the imbalances that cause them, to avoid potential conflict in the future. At the grass-roots level it was important for people to have an awareness, first, of the ways of life and experiences of others from outside their faith community; and to understand and not feel superior to others but equal in their faith. During and after the training, participants' awareness grew as they came to a better understanding of interfaith issues, and how such understanding can support change.

4.2 Developing an interfaith peacebuilding approach

One finding that has emerged strongly is the importance of coming together to talk and interact with one another. This also allowed for a clearer articulation of what interfaith peacebuilding in Cambodia is: an approach that looks at the way people interact with each other from different faith groups. The way in which we bring all the different faith groups together in a shared setting to discuss, or to learn from each other as well as from us, is an effective approach for IP.

While we developed a specific approach to interfaith understanding, it was important to support this interfaith approach within the broader field of knowledge and practice for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Including content on specific topics in the training from the facilitators helped participants to learn more about peacebuilding concepts and the causes of conflict. This then helped people to understand better the interfaith issues and the potential for conflict or for peace. It also helps to have the basis to generate more ideas, have the patience and understanding to listen, and good knowledge to develop their own understanding and action. Therefore there is a need for foundational knowledge in these concepts to help their work in the community, and to enable their own behaviour and attitudes to develop.

Supporting interfaith understanding also requires the recognition that the process for trying to change our own minds in relation to prejudices and discrimination is difficult, and takes time and effort. Helping to assist positive experiences of peaceful change requires understanding through education, but also the responsibility for their own transformation, step-by-step and individually.

4.3 Engagement in interfaith peacebuilding

Another finding is that, without willing commitment by participants, there can be no transfer of these learnings to the community. During the research participants showed interest and felt able to share knowledge and experience with community members, as evidenced in their sharing in follow-up seminars and provincial seminars with their respective communities. This is seen as beneficial to their community, as the participants reported their ability to influence changes in the attitudes and behaviour of others. Through participation, people developed a belief that interfaith understanding is beneficial to themselves and their community, which is seen as essential to this approach. Participants who do so willingly and enthusiastically can have their own creative ideas on how to share these with others, based on their own level of skill and context, with longer-term commitment.

Our project does not use an interfaith dialogue approach to increase knowledge alone. Instead the project and the findings support the importance of seeking to connect people to build shared understanding and action. Only through coming together and seeking knowledge and experiences together, can interfaith co-existence and co-operation be imagined; and we found through our experience of the meetings that they know they can do it. To build on this, there is a need to develop support mechanisms for the longer-term needs of the emerging network and their activities.

In relation to understanding for transformation, deeper interfaith understanding comes from deeper engagement through organised opportunities for networking. The IP seminar provided a good chance for a large mixed-faith group to come to know each other. From the reflections of participants and the team, the trainings provided an opportunity for them to know each other better than in their regular daily lives. Some didn't know others from different faith groups personally before participating in IP activities. While Cambodia is characterised by mixed rather than segregated communities, daily life encounters did not provide opportunity to talk and share about each other's religious practice and beliefs. Even though participants only came together a few times, during these meetings they developed deep friendships and a shared sense of purpose. These bonds supported the development of an associational network that extends their work in their own communities and provides connections across their communities.

5. Conclusion

Like many countries, Cambodia is religiously diverse; but unlike some, it is not deeply divided along religious lines. Cambodia's interfaith context is characterised by a lack of clear geographical segregation between communities; it has a long history of co-existence; and non-Buddhist faith communities are proportionately relatively small. However, tensions, prejudice, and misunderstanding remain potential sources of communal conflict and political manipulation. The action research findings, while small in scale, support the conviction that interfaith issues are important in enabling peacebuilding to address and prevent future conflict, strengthen peaceful co-existence, and promote co-operation in Cambodian communities.

The way trainings, workshops, and seminars could bring all the different faith groups together to discuss or to learn from each other, as well as to learn from us in a shared setting, is an effective approach for IP. It provides an opportunity that otherwise does not seem to be available. Participants from different faiths come together to learn shared topics, and also to express their concerns, fears and misunderstandings in person to the whole group. These activities can provide mutual understanding and reduce the tensions they feel. An important component of this IP approach is that the workshops and training provide not just information but also the safe expression of fears and concerns that are a part of our underlying tensions. The training / workshop venue was a safe place to express these feelings and concerns without fear of harm for speaking out. Perhaps if they were to express their concerns to other religious groups in the community without proper facilitation, it could put themselves and others at risk, and might not be well-received. This connects to the way the process has also shown that, although interfaith issues are a less recognised source of conflict in Cambodia, they are important for building peace.

Interfaith issues remain a latent cause of conflict in the Cambodian context. The IP approach showed how the issue could move from being latent to being one that is addressed. Using the normative-reeducative approach in training on interfaith issues helped to engage participants meaningfully in identifying the importance of promoting interfaith understanding, and to release and foster growth, beginning with the community members. From the experience of this project, the issues of religious difference and interfaith co-existence moved from being latent, towards confrontation through education and dialogue, as suggested by Lederach's (2004) model for the progression of conflict towards sustainable peace. The issues become more overt and balanced because people work together and share their efforts in the broader context towards building sustainable peace.

Even though we cannot always see the conflict caused by religious differences, we can work to help reduce these tensions. It is better to prevent such conflict and build interfaith understanding and co-operation, which can contribute to more peaceful and productive community life. Building interfaith co-operation and strengthening connections between people can contribute to the prevention of escalating conflict in the future that is based on misunderstanding, or the manipulation of people's differences by others.

Mobilising this group to participate in a workshop, training, or seminar supported the creation of an associational network, like that described by Varshney (2002), that supports their deeper understanding and their connections between their respective communities. Varshney (2002) researched the link between ethnic or communal violence and the structure of civil society, and argued that the most important proximate cause of the difference between communal peace and violence is the pre-existing local networks of civic engagement between communities, which include both associational forms of engagement (which require organisation) and everyday forms of engagement (which require no organisation). Differences in identity, like religion, can be a barrier to getting to know others better, but the training/workshop context provided an opportunity to know each other better. Our findings seem to support the idea that, for interfaith understanding to strengthen interfaith peaceful co-existence and co-operation, more organised opportunities are required for engagement than just everyday contacts. The

implication from Varshney (2002) was that where such networks of engagement existed, tensions and conflicts were regulated and managed, and where they were missing, communal identities led to violence. This might also be important to consider in the Cambodian context, where the prevention of potential conflict is the aim of the IP approach.

IP in Cambodia can contribute to the field of peacebuilding which is very broad and includes varied activities. This approach can cross over both development and peacebuilding activities, and may be used in other contexts to support co-operation and strengthen peaceful co-existence at the community level. If people do not understand 'peace' in their own minds, perhaps they cannot work together or as a community to develop peacefully. IIPC's (2006) field research found that many villagers think that living together in mixed faith communities is not a bad thing, and that they can help each other. The present research shows that there is opportunity to strengthen this belief, and that people are open to the opportunity to work together more closely. IP provides one avenue for developing more connections and understanding amongst community members; and on that basis, mutual respect and understanding can be fostered.

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Having a group within the group, or, a thousand and one questions

by SNEŽANA BAČLIJA

To one who, journeying through night and fog,
Is mired neck-deep in an unwholesome bog,
Experience, like the rising of the dawn,
Reveals the path that he should not have gone.
Joel Frad Bink

In the work of any researcher, there are times when all the observations, reflections, and data simply follow the desired processes and lead to the desired outcomes. Those are the happy times, and although they might occasionally lead to suspicion or doubt, ultimately they do provide what a researcher wants. Nevertheless, soon enough the time does come when something goes completely against expectations. And although the cynic in the researcher kept warning that it might happen, a thousand and one questions arise. If the researcher is lucky, those are the most productive times: the process takes a completely new turn, and new aspects seem to appear out of nowhere. And if not… well, either the researcher gets completely lost in those questions, or the process gets buried under the answers. Either way, in the end it is clear that what happened was no coincidence: it pinpointed areas that had been intentionally ignored and pushed under the carpet. For this reason, this article is dedicated to those unpleasant surprises and the thousand and one questions that follow.

1. Background

In order to get to the questions and unexpected twists, we shall go back to the 'happy times' when the process was going as expected, following a fairly straightforward route of reflection and improvement. It is time therefore to introduce the process itself: Encompass Journeys of Understanding. Journeys of Understanding are 10-day-long residential programmes run in safe neutral environments. They are run by ENCOMPASS, The Daniel Braden Reconciliation Trust in conjunction with Outward Bound®. Each Journey brings together young people from Indonesia, America, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and the UK.

"ENCOMPASS promotes understanding and tolerance among young people of different backgrounds, faiths and cultures by means of challenging adventure programmes." And adding a more long-term perspective to it: "By encouraging the leaders of tomorrow to examine their perceptions, explore the real and perceived differences between peoples, faiths and creeds, and finally celebrate the benefits of our multicultural world, we hope that we are changing the future for the better."[1]

Encompass takes diverse groups of young people out of their familiar environments and puts them in challenging new ones where they must work together to achieve shared objectives. As they do this, they learn to trust one other, and with this trust comes the confidence to express their opinions, focusing on issues including identity, culture, stereotypes, conflict, and subjects important to the individuals involved.

Or, putting it differently: "Imagine a utopia where children from all over the world can come and coexist peacefully… add hardships which test your physical, mental and emotional endurance, and you have Encompass."[2]

Since September 2005, when the first Journey of Understanding took place, we have developed a unique programme of cultural understanding, composed roughly of 60% outdoor activities and 40% facilitated discussions complemented by drama techniques. My role in Encompass is Educational Advisor and Facilitator on all International Journeys of Understanding: I prepare the outline of the discussion programme, run most of it, and work together with other Encompass and Outward Bound® staff to create a smooth flow throughout the programme.

1 Encompass Trust website: www.encompasstrust.org
2 Words of a participant from The Second Encompass Journey of Understanding

As mentioned above, Journeys of Understanding involve five national groups of young people. An Encompass group has 24 participants: eight of them come from the UK, and four from each of the other four countries. All national groups have recruitment officers in their respective countries, and they attempt to ensure that all national groups are as diverse as possible, and that each goes through a similar process of recruitment, selection, and preparation. Given the specificities of relations between two groups, Palestinians and Israelis have a bilateral meeting before the programme. Israelis are mostly recruited from the pre-military school, whereas Palestinians mostly come from the Occupied Territories, although in some cases they are Palestinian citizens of Israel.

2. The happy times

Encompass Trust and its Journeys of Understanding were an inspiration for the year-long research that I conducted as part of my MA thesis in Applied Conflict Transformation Studies. They provided the 'action' for the action research, and offered space to reflect on and improve my skills in facilitating multicultural groups of young people.

With my research, "The role of non-formal education based on challenging activities in the process of rehumanisation", I aimed to examine the extent to which the programme, composed of outdoor activities, discussion activities, and drama techniques, influences the process of bringing into the open the images and preconceptions that young people have about each other, talking about them, and, where possible, changing and overcoming them. The core of the research was based on Gordon Allport's 'contact hypothesis', and on the work of both his followers and his critics, while the process of 'rehumanisation' has been defined for the sake of the research as "trying to put faces and human qualities on people that are meeting for the first time, whether they have been hiding under enemy images, as in the case of Israelis and Palestinians, or, due to the very rare interaction of other groups with their culture, they had no face at all, as in the case of Indonesians"(Baclija 2008).

The role and contribution of Journeys of Understanding in the process of rehumanisation was put under the magnifying glass through various research instruments. The outcomes of the research, conducted on three separate Journeys of Understanding between February 2007 and February 2008, indicated that this non-formal educational programme contributes significantly to young people confronting their images and preconceptions, as well as changing and overcoming them. Consequently, findings supported the assumption that the programme would also contribute significantly to the process of rehumanisation in multicultural groups, both where those images need to be changed, and where they need to be created for the first time. Given the fact that the programme has young people from Israel and Palestinian territories as part of the larger group, it was possible to demonstrate that this programme reduces the level of negative images, even where antagonisms exist between the groups.

3. Opening Pandora's box

In the months that followed the research, life went on, and so did Encompass Journeys. And although the research for the sake of academic recognition was finished, as promised by my tutors I found myself infected by the action-reflection state of mind, and so I continued doing my own reflection on the programmes that followed.

And just when I was feeling relaxed and most of my doubts regarding the contribution of the programme to the process of rehumanisation had long gone, the outcomes of the programme that took place in November 2008 turned out to be slightly different, mostly with regard to the Israeli and Palestinian group. That is, certain members of those two groups completed the programme either confirming their negative opinions about the other side, or even changing them for the worse.

This kind of outcome had occurred before, but never between Israelis and Palestinians. While such an outcome was to be expected (as suggested in the introduction), it

triggered a lot of structural questions for me – and suddenly all hell broke loose!

The dominant question was a dilemma I had faced for some time. It went back to when I was trying to define 'rehumanisation': what happens when the face and human qualities that are being put on people during the encounter are not very positive, or even fairly negative, particularly with groups that are already in conflict? Put differently: is an outcome in the form of a negative perception, even if it is based on a real experience and a honest encounter, still a desired outcome of rehumanisation, or is it something that should be feared and therefore be avoided at all costs?

As a facilitator, the more substantial question for me was the 'responsibility' of the programme in creating this negative phenomenon, as opposed to a number of other factors. Whether negative perceptions should be evaded or stimulated through the design of the programme and its approach to group dynamics, this question required an urgent answer.

Realising that all the questions were provoked by negative perceptions developed among the members of the Israeli and Palestinian groups, it became necessary to revisit the Encompass approach to having a group within the group. Making it this time a priority dilemma that needed to be answered when laying the foundations of the programme, the question was this: Was the approach of Journeys of Understanding suitable for dealing with a group within a group?

If the answer were negative, the result would be either a complete redesign of the programme, or an utterly different composition of the group. And if the answer were positive (which was a desired outcome), still further specific questions would appeared. For example: Is it possible to have the same approach to all of the sub-groups, or do we need a specific approach to the Israeli and Palestinian group? Related to that: Should we set different expectations about 'rehumanisation' with those two groups, and consequently interpret their results differently? Concretely, if they leave the programme with negative images towards each other, how big a concern should that be? Should it be treated in the same way as everyone else? In order to begin answering those questions, we needed to go back to the reasons behind having those two groups as a part of Encompass Journeys in the first place.

One thing that was always clearly established in Encompass was that, although there was a clear understanding of the complexity of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and therefore a need to give it a lot of space and attention in the programme, the Journeys should never be centred on the conflict or on those two groups. This caused a constant struggle. We never stopped wondering if decision and approach were correct. Ultimately we had to choose between what seemed to be the two most realistic options.

Option 1

Given the complexity of the Israeli/Palestinian situation, the programme would dedicate special attention, separate sessions, individual dialogue groups, etc. to the two groups, some of which had already been done in the past. The disadvantages of this approach, however, were that this would isolate them from the rest of the group, and the whole idea of bringing the five groups together would become senseless. In addition, the rest of the group would be treated as second class participants or little more than observers. And even if these major side effects could be considered a legitimate sacrifice, there was still a question of how far could we go in seven days, with the rest of the group present most of the time.

Option 2

Alternatively – as we have done so far – we could integrate them into the whole group, treat them as equally as possible, given the circumstances, and focus their attention not on each other but on the overall process. The risk, however, was that by not finding suitable alternatives for dealing adequately with the major issue – their conflict and their related feelings – we could, in effect,

be submitting the two groups to a dangerous experiment that could go terribly wrong.

All those concerns, questions, and dilemmas demanded urgent solutions, which I tried to discover by going back to yet another cycle of action and reflection. This promised a bumpy ride with an unanticipated outcome; but it was the one worth taking.

4. The process of reflection

While trying to bring some order to all the feedback that might provide valuable inputs in the quest for answers, I relied on my personal observations; reflections and feedback from my colleagues and from the participants; and questionnaires designed to determine the effect of the programme on participants' feelings, attitudes, awareness, and knowledge.

The first thing I looked at was the process of challenging, changing, and overcoming preconceptions that participants brought with them to the programme. My assumption was always that if participants were willing and ready to talk about their preconceptions, they would be willing to challenge them, and probably to change them. In the case of the Israeli and Palestinian participants on the November Journey, they were more than willing to confront each other with their preconceptions, and to 'talk' about them (rather than to listen). But, despite my initial assumption, and unlike previous Journeys, this one did not have such positive outcomes.

Paradoxically, looking at the whole group of 24 on the November Journey, they showed the most positive trends of all the groups up to that point in the way that their feelings changed between the beginning of the programme and the end. Yet several of the Israeli participants' feelings towards Palestinians – and vice versa – became more negative during the programme. It is fair to say, however, that the Palestinian and Israeli groups on the November programme began the programme with the least negative opinions of each other, compared with the Israeli and Palestinian groups on three previous programmes. Still, the negatives changes in those two groups on this Journey were a first for us.

Perhaps that alone would not cause alarm, were it not for some of the written feedback. When asked if they thought their attitudes towards other peoples, faiths, and cultures had changed from the way they felt before the programme, one of the Israeli participants replied:

> *"I think it changed towards the Palestinians and Israeli-Arabs. I feel now like there is nothing to talk about because we have a completely different mentality and this experience made it clear to me that I'm going to vote for a much more right-wing party in the upcoming elections in Israel, which I probably wouldn't have done otherwise."*

On the other hand, one of the Palestinian participants replied:

> *"Yes, I didn't know much about Israelis and I thought they were really mean though it was different."*

Looking at this segment, my initial conclusion was that the programme contributed to the negative images among Israelis and Palestinians, and that this negative trend was seen for the first time on the November Journey of Understanding.

In addition to breaking preconceptions of the opposing group, I tried to look at other aspects in which the programme could contribute to mutual understanding between Palestinian and Israeli, and which would also shed light on their role in the wider group.

There were other aspects that I took into consideration: how much the programme contributes to Israelis and Palestinians learning about themselves and their own identity; how much their knowledge of other peoples, religions, races, cultures, and global issues changes as a result of the programme; and how much the

programme influences their general attitudes. In all those aspects, Palestinians and Israelis on all previous Journeys showed either the same or more positive tendencies than other sub-groups. And, when I looked at the progress of the Israelis and Palestinians on the November Journey compared to those on previous programmes, there were no major difference. Here too, the trends were positive.

From my analysis of all this, I have concluded that the programme in general has a positive impact on the Israelis' and Palestinians' self-reflection and learning about their identity, their general knowledge, and attitudes. This was true of the November programme too.

This conclusion is supported by the written feedback from Palestinian and Israeli participants on their overall experience. Some of it is as follows:

> *"Now I understand there are a lot more depths than what seems and that I can't really understand them completely. Seeing how in the end we think and analyse things the same with no regards to religion, we just have different experiences and that's why we don't say the same things."*
>
> *"The questions and conflicts I had to face, alongside the morning challenges were really meaningful to me."*
>
> *"The programme helped me to put more knowledge and sense to my opinions which until now were based mostly on emotions."*
>
> *"[The programme] made me want to take part in being a person who does something to improve the connection between Palestinians and Jews, to help young people be more understanding and tolerant, and to believe that we can make change in small steps."*
>
> *"[The experience was] hard but needed and amazing."*
>
> *"[I would recommend this programme to a friend and] I would tell him that instead of talking about the conflict he should get up and do something about it."*

Finally, a colleague of mine (Amit Lavi, Encompass recruitment officer in Israel) shared his reflections on the Israeli participants once they had returned to Israel.

He reported that one of the participants who had a negative impression of Palestinians after the programme was in fact the one who was most affected by the programme. From being the most radical one of the four, s/he changed, claiming that s/he no longer believed "in a land that can be holier than human life". Reflecting on the participant who said s/he would vote for the more radical party at the upcoming elections, Amit felt that s/he had had a very challenging time, but that it was not all negative. For the moment, this experience had activated all her/his defence mechanisms, but (in Amit's opinion) s/he now "sees the complexity and cannot avoid it anymore". As for the other two Israelis, they came back very positive and optimistic, and Amit believed that they would take their "experience to productive places and will get more and more interested and involved".

5. One thousand and one answers

After going through a very exhaustive process of searching for answers, I have added one thousand and one reflections to the one thousand and one questions, even though some of them contradicted one another. However, from those reflections I have managed to generate some important inputs for the future of Journeys of Understanding and similar programmes.

First of all, I am now certain that, while putting faces and human qualities on people, some can end up negative; and that is a valid outcome of rehumanisation. As such, it should be accepted and embraced, but also analysed to see if that is just a temporary response to the challenges – a defence mechanism. If so, it is not only a legitimate outcome but also a desired one, because it shows that the person has been confronted and touched by the experience; and that, ultimately, is the only way to challenge peoples' attitudes and behaviour

(Williamson and Taylor, 2005). And although there is always the danger that those negative outcomes arise from stereotypes being confirmed (Gross Stein 1996)[3], based on data I have been analysing on the contribution of programmes like Journey of Understanding, I do not take this option into consideration. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to follow up on the opinions and attitudes of young people some time after the programme in order to be sure that the long-term influence is positive.

The research shows that the programme plays a big part in creating those negative images. The challenging character of its activities helps participants to journey through the stretching zone and, in certain cases, bringing defence mechanisms into play – which in turn generate negative responses. And since I have concluded that those responses are a desirable outcome of the process, this should not force a redesign of the Journeys of Understanding. It is exactly their challenging character that is being maintained, and as long it is carefully monitored, it ultimately leads to positive changes.

Even with these positive conclusions, the dilemma remains concerning the approach to the group within the group – in the case of Journeys of Understanding, Israelis and Palestinians within the wider group.

If we decided to focus the programme on the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, we would no longer have a group within the group, but a circus in which Israelis and Palestinians were exposed before an audience. The audience would have a choice, to be active or passive; but ultimately it would still be only an audience. This approach would betray the values of the Encompass Trust and – even without looking at the outcomes of the research – it could not be adopted.

The only remaining question – the alternative option of integrating them into the rest of the group and treating them as equally as possible – is a valid one, as long as the benefits outweigh the dangers. Looking at the results of the research, this option seems to have a very positive influence on Israelis and Palestinians learning about themselves and others, and on changing their general attitudes for the better. All those are very positive results, and, once defence mechanisms are withdrawn, they should lead to a change in negative images. Therefore, there is no reason not to accept them as a valid outcome in the case of the Israelis and Palestinians. That does mean, however, that there has to be a shift in focus and expectations so that they suit the full integration of those two groups in the wider one. And instead of being constantly obsessed by the existing conflict and by the fact that we are not fully addressing it, the programme should focus on offering them a chance to rise above their current reality, to widen their view, and to discover some of the processes that are going on in the world, as well as to regain perspectives, influence their knowledge and attitudes. Nevertheless, there is always a need for modified approaches to different sub-groups (not necessarily national ones), depending on their level of intercultural sensitivity (Bennet 1993). While this needs to be explored further, it does not contradict the overall approach.

Having said all that, my conclusion is that this kind of approach to having a group within a group is suitable for programmes such as Journeys of Understanding. I hope that it can be adopted by similar initiatives in the field.

6. A challenge worth taking

This was the upshot of an attempt to answer one thousand and one questions raised by an unexpected outcome to a familiar course. I have to be honest: it was a struggle, and not a day had gone by that I have not regretted opening this Pandora's box. Nevertheless, the struggle has paid off: the answers that emerged have shed light on some persistent dilemmas that Journeys of Understanding faced; they have restructured some of the pillars of our approach; they have given the facilitator more confidence; and they have opened up a whole new field of research into rehumanisation. In short: the programme as a whole has been improved.

3 Gross Stein, J. (1996): Image, Identity and Conflict Resolution: "people tend to seek out information which confirms existing stereotypes, and discount information which would challenge their stereotypes. They also tend to interpret information about the other negatively, in ways which support their existing stereotypes."

However, we must not forget that this was the best possible outcome. The researcher could so easily have got completely lost in the questions, or the answers could have led to the conclusion that the programme as such had no validity. Following the questions is not an easy process to give yourself into. It comes with a challenge that one should only undertake if armed with impulsive bravery, endless patience, and a readiness to be pushed at times to the brink of panic. Knowing that there are a lot of readers who possess those qualities, I wish you a safe and exciting journey with your own one thousand and one questions.

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Overcoming stereotypes through joint activities in schools: Lessons learned from work in Bosnia and Herzegovina

by NIHAD MESIC

1. Introduction

Following the war from 1992 to 1995, efforts have been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) for the gradual improvement of inter-ethnic relations and the reconstruction of society. The education sector in BiH must also contribute to this process and play a significant role in promoting peace and establishing the rule of law and democracy.

Since 2002, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina has been providing support for education reform there through its education department. At present, the department's mission is defined in the following words: "The Education Department (EDD) of the OSCE Mission to BiH has committed itself to working at multiple levels on the most complex and demanding needs of this most difficult and sensitive sector. EDD challenges aggravated forms of political manipulation, including curriculum bias, employment nepotism and institutional discrimination, as continued threats to reconciliation and return. EDD persists in working with the most bitterly divided communities, despite the severe discouragements these present, since these are liable to remain permanent flashpoints for conflict. EDD seeks to foster an education system which is tolerant, inclusive and open to all, encouraging both students and teachers to overcome the mental barriers which still bar the way to return and reconciliation. Every generation that leaves school with a group-think mindset, wary and distrustful of others, is a generation lost. It is not too late to move towards tolerance

and respecting diversity, but the need becomes more urgent with every step on the European path." (OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2009).

This paper will explore initiatives in Tuzla Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina, related to the promotion of a culture of tolerance in two main and two branch schools, with ethnically mixed students.

2. Background

The principles of access and inclusion have been incorporated into all levels of primary and secondary education *legislation*. They are also an integral part of the Council of Europe's post-accession commitments and education reform strategy.

The strategy for education reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted by the Ministers of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Brussels in 2002. That is also the year of the formation of the education department in the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. From Brussels the ministers sent a message to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which states:

> *"We must start by taking politics out of the classroom, where it has no place. Instead, we should concentrate on doing what is necessary to develop and enhance the quality of education, and to ensure that this enhanced education is available to all, fairly and without discrimination.*
>
> *"There is no place for an education system in our country that divides and segregates children on an ethnic basis. Our education system must enable our children to go to school together, so that they can learn to respect and cherish the precious cultural diversity that makes our country unique."*[1]

Over the years, the OSCE education department has worked on many aspects of education reform by providing support to education authorities at all levels. This has included support for legislative changes, promotion of access and non-discrimination in education, supporting civic involvement in schools, and following up finance and management issues in this sector.

The project I write about here came under the umbrella of the 'Culture of Tolerance' project that the OSCE education department started in 2008. The aim was to assist four schools (two main and two branches) to establish links, to strengthen communication, and to initiate thinking and action that cherishes togetherness rather than division.

3. Education through tolerance

With the above vision and agreed strategy in mind, the Tuzla-based OSCE education team[2] works on education issues in Tuzla Canton. Within the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina education department's Culture of Tolerance project, we planned a project comprising exchange visits between Turija / Panjik on one side and Simin Han / Pozarnica on the other. Panjik and Turija are situated in the Federation part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tuzla Canton and Lukavac Municipality. Panjik is inhabited by a Serb population of Orthodox Christians. The villages of Simin Han and Pozarnica are situated in the same Canton in the Federation, close to the capital of the Canton – Tuzla. Simin Han and Pozarnica are places where the return of Serb citizens has numbered several hundred, but also where many people displaced during the war still reside. Being in the suburban area of Tuzla, the population is bigger and more ethnically mixed than in the other villages mentioned earlier.

The action aimed to analyse the support for the integration of Serb returnee students in Tuzla Canton through their increased interaction with peers from different communities and of different ethnic backgrounds. Apart from bringing together children of different ethnicities, the notions of tolerance and inclusiveness were also promoted through the presence of orphans from Turija and the promotion of best practice in the education of children with special needs. Furthermore, since Public School (PS) Simin Han was recognized, both by education authorities and by NGOs and international organisations working in this field, as a model school in various segments of civic involvement, their experience and advice would

1 A message to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Education Reform; 2002.
2 The team consists of Dragan Simic, Mirela Lukic, Enisa Mulaomerovic, and Nihad Mesic

contribute to improving the work of school civic bodies in PS Turija. We planned to organise visits to where the main schools were situated, and organise workshops on stereotypes and prejudice with the aim of familiarising students and teachers with ways of "seeing those different without prejudice", and encouraging them to see differences as an important asset in building a tolerant and inclusive society.

We took into account the following facts: Turija and Simin Han, as main schools, have a majority of Bosniac students and staff, while Panjik and Pozarnica, as their branch schools, have a significant presence of Serb students who are returnees to the Canton. Bosniac teachers are in the majority in both schools. In contrast to the pre-war period in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to the assessment of our team, inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations are characterised by a lack of trust and few contacts, with a significant level of stereotypes and prejudice about neighbouring citizens from different backgrounds. This situation is of course found in many other post-conflict societies.

4. What we did

We decided to use action research as the method[3] to analyse the initiative. In particular, bearing in mind that the project had two parts, there was sufficient time to reflect on the results of the first part of the project – the visit of the students and teachers from Turija and Panjik to Simin Han and Tuzla – and to adjust the approach and plans in accordance with the experience of the first part of the project, which was in fact the first cycle of the action. We wanted to investigate, first, how the design of the joint activities influenced our overall success in empowering schools to promote togetherness; and, second, to find ways to improve the quality of a similar project the Team is planning for the future.

We designed the first event in the following manner:

1. In the preparation phase we planned the events, decided about the format of the activities, selected the schools, had meetings with relevant schools' representatives, and arranged for all the necessary logistics.
2. On the day of the workshops, a bus brought Bosniac students and teachers attending PS Turija main school and Serb students from the branch[4] school Panjik, who are rather isolated because of the location of their village and poor infrastructure, to the main school in Turija. From there all the children and teachers together went to Tuzla and Simin Han.

The actions connected two schools with a similar composition of students (a Bosniac majority with a certain number of Serb returnees): PS Turija, situated in a rural area, and PS Simin Han, situated in a suburban area of Tuzla.

This was achieved through two sets of activities. The first was a joint visit of PS Turija and BS Panjik representatives to Tuzla and to PS Simin Han. This included workshops on the work of the student and parent council, and on stereotypes and prejudice in PS Simin Han, while in the second part of the day children visited the salt lake in Tuzla, which for many of them was their first visit to Tuzla.

The set of activities for the project "Overcoming stereotypes through joint activities" took place on 2 October 2008 in Tuzla. In total 55 students (aged 11 to 15) and teachers and parents (from PS Simin Han and Branch School Pozarnica, Tuzla Municipality, and PS Turija and BS Panjik, Lukavac Municipality) took part in the activities. The interactive workshop for students, "Be tolerant – accept diversity" gathered 40 participants[5]. It dealt with human rights, identity, and the concept of tolerance. The participants were satisfied with the methods used, and seriously discussed the issues related to tolerance in small groups. It was noted that there was still a significant level of stereotyping and prejudice, especially regarding Roma and homosexuals. For the follow-up workshop all the students were given homework: to write down how they saw tolerance.

3 Action research is a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a "community of practice" to improve the way they address issues and solve problems http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_research.
4 Branch schools function as a physically distinct organisational unit of the main school. These schools are not separate legal entities, and the main school runs their administration and management.
5 It was moderated by Subhija Glinac from Human Rights Bureau Tuzla.

On the same day a workshop for teachers and parents on "a culture of tolerance" gathered 15 participants[6]. They used interactive ways of presenting issues, including an activity on "how we see the others". Examples of best practice in schools on this topic were exchanged, which was an important means of acquiring new skills for all the participants.

After the visit of students and teachers from PS Turija and its BS Panjik to PS Simin Han, a return visit was organized on 16 October. The design of the day, following arrival at the school in Turija and a welcome from the hosts, included workshops for students and adults, and then a joint walk to the SOS Kinderdorf Village in Turija where orphans live and where joint lunch and games were organised. We did our best to ensure that all the children spent the time together from the beginning to the end of the planned activities.

The two moderators conducted follow-up workshops with teachers and students respectively. While the workshop for teachers gathered the same participants as in the first event, the workshop for students, along with 40 children from the previous event, was also attended by three new participants (two from PS Simin Han and one from Panjik) who volunteered. The workshops concentrated on the issues of identity, prejudice, and stereotypes, establishing at the same time stronger links among students in particular, but also increasing the level of understanding between the adult participants. Participants of both workshops praised the content and methods used, while at the end the children from Panjik (Serb returnees) expressed the wish to host their peers at their school. The event was finalised at SOS Kinderdorf (institution for children without parental care established and largely financed by the German Rudolf Walter Foundation) in Turija. Participants in the event had lunch there and then toured the village, while children also spent some time together in the playground of the facility. The event was covered by the Tuzla Canton TV, Radio BiH, and TV Hayat, among others, which contributed to the dissemination of ideas and notions of tolerance to the wider public.

6 It was moderated by Senada Pepeljak from Tuzla Canton Council for School and Parents.

5. Problems encountered

Apart from the usual practical problems such as sheer distance between the schools, we encountered more serious dilemmas. The following is an example of one that could have become serious. At the end of the first workshop the guests from Turija and Panjik visited Tuzla Pannonian salt lakes. This visit was organised only for the guests from Turija and Panjik. The idea was to provide an opportunity for children from Panjik and Turija to get more acquainted, since these two schools and students of different ethnicities have very few joint activities. This activity was well received by the guests. However, they complained that students from Simin Han and Pozarnica were not there. We realised then that, though there had been no complaints from Simin Han and Pozarnica, they might have felt discriminated against, which would have endangered the outcomes of the action. In fact, the bus we rented was a small one with only 30 seats, and so it was not possible to change the decision on the spot, though we understood at that point that we had made a mistake in planning the sightseeing only for the guests. Thus we did not fulfil all our expectations, and the feeling of incompleteness cast a shadow on an otherwise well-prepared and overall successful event.

Following the first cycle an evaluation was made and, at the team meeting together with the facilitators, it was assessed that the programme so far had been implemented well. The evaluation forms from the participants confirmed this impression.

However, it was agreed that the decision to bring only children from Turija and Panjik to the salt lakes and archeological park in Tuzla had been mistaken, and that the effects would have been better had the others been included. This would also have helped establish confidence between students from Panjik and Turija. In addition, the participants from Simin Han and Pozarnica might have felt discriminated against by such a decision. So we decided to change this approach in the follow-up activity we organised on 16 October 2008.

6. Lessons learned and implications for other practitioners

Although the issues we dealt with in this initiative were sensitive, and we could have expected those from the Turija-Panjik side – which are schools at quite a distance from Tuzla, in an area where the war had significant consequences – to express reservations, there were no objections or hesitations about taking part in the project.

In addition, it was noted that the group of 40 students was far too big for the workshop. Nevertheless, it was important to have all of them included in the activities; so it was decided to keep all of them in the plan for the second workshop. In the second phase it will help to have two trainers for this group.

The analysis of the whole project was done through evaluation by the participants, and through self-evaluation by the OSCE team and moderators. The aim of the actions was to provide input and identify lessons learned for practitioners in the field of promoting tolerance and understanding, as well as peace-building in the divided communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially in bringing together schools. One of the students told us: "It was great to connect with the school from Tuzla and meet new friends. I wish they could all come to Panjik as well."

Our experiences, which might be useful for other practitioners, have shown that:

- The schools, students, and teachers agreed to take part in this project and to send their delegations to visit other schools, paying particular attention to the equitable ethnic representation of the participants. Thus they contributed to reaffirming the quality of relations within their organisational units – branch schools, which had a significant percentage of students belonging to the non-dominant group (in this case, students of Serbian ethnicity). In a wider sense this could mean that reluctance to take part in such programmes, which is sometimes found in the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, can be overcome through the promotion of programmes like "Overcoming stereotypes".
- Events like this should be inclusive in terms of all participants attending all the parts of the programme. In this case, the participants' evaluations showed a heightened appreciation when all the students took part in all activities, as was the case in Turija, as opposed to Simin Han / Tuzla, where students and teachers from Simin Han and Pozarnica did not take part in the visit to the Tuzla salt lakes. This also could have diminished their feeling of ownership of the activities in the first cycle. The second event in Turija, where all the children had activities together, confirmed our belief that activities should be organised together for all the participants.
- The issue of quality, quantity, and desired impact on the attitude of the participants needs to be carefully considered at all stages of decision-making. That is, although we knew that it would be very difficult task, our decision to include 43 students in the workshops facilitated by one trainer had both positive and negative consequences. On the negative side, the quantity of the knowledge and skills acquired was surely reduced due to an attention deficit at some points; while on the positive side, the objective of starting to build relationships between members of the group from different ethnicities, children placed in an institutions for orphans, and children from the rural and suburban areas, was fulfilled. In this sense we could say that this action contributed to strengthening mechanisms to ensure that education is increasingly accessible, acceptable, multi-cultural, and free from bias for all children, judging from the comments of the participants and the assessment of the team.
- In the case of projects that have several cycles or events over a period of time, it is important to adapt the programme in accordance with the needs that arise during the implementation, and the lessons learned on the basis of experiences during the first action. In this respect it is highly desirable to have a flexible, strategic approach, and to leave space when planning projects to adapt and improve their phases.

- In such activities, it may be especially important to be responsive to suggestions coming from one group of the participants – such as in our case the idea of hosting similar events in Panjik, which we plan to organise in 2009.
- When it comes to students, experiences with the group size in this project have taught us to plan carefully the financial parts of the activities, so that the group facilitated by one trainer should never have more than 20 to 25 participants. We tried ourselves to follow this rule in our next similar project with schools from Orasje and Srebrenik.
- Media involvement should be planned, since it significantly increases possibilities for disseminating and promoting ideas of tolerance – especially when one bears in mind the present problems with the media, which often foster divisions between religions and ethnicities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

7. Conclusions, moving forward

The OSCE education team in Tuzla plans to continue to work on the Culture of Tolerance projects in the future, encouraged by the solid results from Simin Han and Turija. The experience gained will serve as a starting point for other similar projects in multi-ethnic areas.

Our team will continue to use action research as a method, since it is a good tool for analysing and improving the work to promote a culture of tolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina schools.

In this respect, schools participating in the project could be a very good base for a transfer of ownership to local actors, including education authorities, in order to expand the culture of tolerance in our country.

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Sustaining the GRP-RPM-M peace process in Mindanao through community participation

by CHARMAINE MAE J. DAGAPIOSO-BACONGA

This study is about the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and Revolutionary Workers' Party in Mindanao (RPM-M) peace process (GRP-RPM-M) on the island of Mindanao. Commonly known as the 'the other peace process', it is the only peace process in the Philippines that is mediated by a non-governmental organisation (NGO), Balay Mindanaw Foundation, Inc. For Balay Mindanaw, the principle of community participation provides the framework for peace work at every level of engagement, and is central to sustaining the GRP-RPM-M peace process. Using action research methods, community participation in the peace process is examined in the context of Balay Mindanaw's role in the GRP-RPM-M peace process as the Independent Secretariat (IS).

The research explores how the peace process uses local level peace consultations to strengthen the communities stake in the peace process. The role of the local level peace consultations in getting the stakeholders to participate actively in development and peacebuilding efforts in their respective communities is also considered. The findings highlight community participation in the peace process where people gather and talk about their situations. The results are common actions based on a common understanding of conflict, a recognition that communities are part of both the conflict and the solution and that they are key actors in achieving small gains towards transformation. Thus we learn how this process has contributed to the continuing peace process between the parties, the GRP and the RPM-M.

1. Introduction

'Peace talks' can be tedious processes intended to end war, violence, and conflicts that affect families, communities, organisations, and intra-state and inter-state actors. According to Anderlini (2004), negotiating to end war and violence involves mutual trust, compromises, and consensus-building. Indeed, peace processes require courage and a willingness to risk facing the 'enemy' at the negotiating table as well as in the communities. Trust and confidence is needed between both parties, and with the people helping the negotiating parties, to keep the parties talking. The process requires patience in crafting agreements, pursuing delayed commitments, and accepting that agreements fail. The process also requires openness, sincerity and patience both between the parties directly involved in the process and with those who feel the impact of the conflict and of the talks seeking sustainable peace in the communities.

In the Philippines several peace processes are underway between revolutionary groups and the government. The revolutionary groups are engaged in an armed struggle in response to longstanding "social inequity and injustice, social and economic dislocation of the indigenous peoples, marginalization of sectors" as key issues (Sta. Maria 2003). The marginalisation of sectors of society is characterised by poor governance, lack of access to basic services, lack of control over the resources of the majority, as well as lack of respect for the culture and rights of the indigenous peoples.

These armed struggles cut cross cultural and geopolitical boundaries, and have been going for four decades. To date there have been six formal peace talks between the GRP and revolutionary groups[1]. Five of these peace talks include Mindanao as an issue[2]. On the island of Mindanao (dubbed 'the Land of Promise'). the on-going conflict has affected a quarter of the total *barangays*[3] (villages) in the Philippines. The conflict has challenged every Mindanaoan and every peace advocate to address the different facets of conflict and violence that exist.

1 The groups are: Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA), Communist Party of the Philippines/National Democratic Front/New People's Army (CPP/NDF/NPA), Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Revolutionary Workers' Party of the Philippines/Revolutionary Proletariat Army/Alex Bongcayao Brigade (RPMP/RPA/ABB), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Revolutionary Workers' Party in Mindanao/Revolutionary People's Army (RPM-M/RPA).
2 Of the five, two talks are with the primary Muslim groups and three with Communist groups. One of these is the long-standing Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines' (CPP) armed wing, the New People's Army. The two peace talks have been with the rejectionist groups that split from CPP. The term 'rejectionist groups' refers to the groups who broke away from the Communist Party, rejecting 'armed struggle' as the only way of pursuing the revolution against the government for reforms.
3 25%, or 45,000 barangays.

The GRP-RPM-M peace process between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Revolutionary Workers' Party in Mindanao (RPM-M) is the most recent peace process in the Philippines, yet it has begun to achieve local and international recognition due to its unique nature and process. It is the only peace process in the Philippines mediated by a local non-government organisation. It is also unique because *local* peace consultations have an integral part in the framework of the GRP-RPM-M peace process formalised by both panels during the first formal talks in 2003. While it is crucial to include the various revolutionary groups in addressing the issues, it is also crucial to engage people in their respective communities, and allow them to voice their thoughts, ideas, ideals, visions, thus strengthening the community's capacity for peace. As Balay Mindanaw mediates the peace process, it highlights community participation as a principal framework for doing peace work across all levels of engagement in the Mindanao peace process.

2. Problem

As Mindanao struggles with on-going war, economic recession, and limited opportunities for livelihood and basic services, the chance of heightened armed struggle and greater conflict increases. If the peace process is to be sustained, a variety of stakeholders, including the local community, must be engaged. Not all peace processes in the Philippines have been grounded in the relevance of community efforts as fundamental to the process. Engaging the community requires a focus on relationships, trust, and a common vision among those engaged in the process.

The present action research looks at how community participation sustains the GRP-RPM-M peace process. Community participation is when people, communities, and key actors in the peace process share their struggles in attaining small victories and successes. The process engages communities in peacemaking: it is where people can gather and talk about their situations, resulting in common actions based on a common understanding of conflict; it recognises that communities are part of the conflict and the solution; and it provides opportunities for people to achieve small gains in peace. These processes are seen as the beginning of the transformation from conflict to peace in Mindanao.

The next section gives background information to the peace process, including the framework agreement and key actors in the peace process, to provide a context for understanding the nature of community participation in the peace process through local consultations. The theory of 'social capital' has been used, where community participation is seen as integral to a sustained peace process.

3. Background

3.1 The GRP-RPM-M peace process

The GRP-RPM-M Peace Process began more than six years ago, in late 2002, when Enrique de los Reyes and Atty. Franklin Quijano[4] explored the possibility of peace talks between the GRP and the RPM-M. However, both recognised the importance of a trusted third party to mediate the peace talks, and both agreed to approach Charlito "Kaloy" Manlupig, president of the local NGO Balay Mindanaw Foundation, Inc. Before the talks were formalised, two core values were agreed that needed to be upheld in the peace talks: trust, and community participation. These were incorporated into the framework of the peace process. "Empowered and sustainable communities are the real foundation of lasting peace. The process itself (and not the process' end) will already allow these communities to win small victories, and build peace by and for themselves. The final resolution is important but communities need not wait for this. Building peace is here and now" (Manlupig 2004). This framework[5] was jointly adopted by the GRP and the RPM-M during the first formal peace talks on September 22, 2003.

3.2 The panels

On the government side, there have been a lot of changes in the key people involved in the process[6]. Members of the secretariats have changed, staff in the general secretariat of the OPAPP have changed,

4 The former chief executive of the city of Iligan who was appointed by President Arroyo to chair the GRP Panel to the GRP-RPM-M peace process.
5 The framework is an affirmation of the NUC Principles of the Peace Process, as found in http://opapp.gov.ph/index.php?Itemid=147&id=155&option=com_content&task=view.
6 The government panel was originally chaired by Atty. Franklin M. Quijano. His colleagues on the panel were Atty. Froilan Melendres, the former president of the Philippine League of Councillors, and Sec. Corazon Soliman, then Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. However, after the national elections in May 2007, the GRP reconstituted its panel and appointed Atty. Nabil Tan, Undersecretary of the Office of the Presidential Adviser to the Peace Process (OPAPP), as chair. The present chair is Ms. Moniva Pascual. For further details visit: http://www.balaymindanaw.org/grprpmm/index.html

and – following the recent national elections – the GRP announced a new set of members for the GRP panel negotiating with the RPM-M. Reasons for the membership changes are based on the current administration's changed preferences, and on the movement of the leadership in the cabinet.

These changes have affected the continuity of the peace process, for the GRP did not consult the head of the IS or the RPM-M Panel on this matter. The RPM-M questioned the reconstitution of the panel, and argued that much had been invested in relationships with the previous GRP panel, given that both panels had formulated the framework of the peace process and had a stake in the history of the process. The RPM-M wanted to be reassured that what had been previously agreed and decided upon would be followed. Despite the changes in the GRP panel's membership, the implementation of the projects identified in the local consultations continues in the communities[7].

3.3 Revolutionary Workers' Party of Mindanao/Revolutionary People's Army

The Revolutionary Workers' Party of Mindanao/ Revolutionary People's Army (Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao/ Rebolusyonaryong Hukbo nga Mamamayan) is a Marxist-Leninist party founded on May 1, 2001, "launching its revolutionary struggle towards the attainment of Socialism" (Heywood 1992). The RPM-M was a regional component of the only Communist Party in the Philippines, along with the National Democratic Front and the New Peoples' Army (CPP-NDF-NPA). RPM-M was part of the Revolutionary Workers' Party-Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Bongcayao Brigade (RPM-P-RPA-ABB) when it broke away from the CPP-NDF-NPA in September 2004; in March 2001 it broke away from the RPM-P. Serious ideological reasons were the cause of the split, with the Communist groups forming their own revolutionary group still adhering to Marxist-Leninist ideology. As a revolutionary group, it has been working closely with the masses, concentrating on the *barangays* of Mindanao in both rural and urban areas, and in some other parts of the Philippines, especially Metro Manila (RPM-M 2007).

The RPM-M's reasons for engaging in the peace process since 2003 are attributed to the belief that engagement will continue as long as the peace talks focus on the communities. A revolution to attain radical and sustainable change does not take place only through violent war; more often today it is appropriate to struggle for non-war options. Through consultation with the IS, and among its constituencies, the active participation of the people is used to gauge the effectiveness and rightness of such options (IDLR 2007). Furthermore, the consultation process, and the discussion of issues and concerns about the peace process is part of internal efforts to build a peace constituency among their troops. This is considered important to their pursuit of peace, and it is a significant realisation, having just engaged themselves in the peace talks[8]. It was not until December 20, 2006 that the RPM-M signed implementing guidelines on the cessation of hostilities with the government (Gallardo 2006).

3.4 The third party mediator

The third party in this peace process is the Balay Mindanaw Foundation, Inc. (BMFI), a non-stock, non-profit, non-governmental organisation based in Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao, Philippines. Since 1996 it has worked to build sustainable and empowered communities, and to help build peace (BMFI 2005). At present, it is implementing the Balay Mindanaw Peace-building Program[9], which includes the GRP-RPM-M peace process. In the peace process BMFI is referred to as the Independent Secretariat (IS): it mediates between the parties in negotiations, and facilitates community processes of analysing the situation and planning programmes – a process known as the Local Peace Consultations.

3.5 The present situation

Since 2003, the GRP-RPM-M peace process has had three formal peace talks (September 22, 2003; October 28-29, 2005; December 19, 2006) and has signed six documents[10] that guide both parties, as well as the IS and the supporting institutions, in pursuing the peace process. Both parties agreed to start all the planned activities, which included pre-

7 Project proposals were drafted and submitted to resource partners like the Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Program (PACAP) and German Technical Cooperation (GTZet) after project proposal workshops had been held, which these two institutions organised only for the RPM-M partners. So far, 70 communities have been implementing projects, while 19 are still in the process of negotiations with the resource agencies mentioned above. The Asia Foundation (AF) has also been supporting the projects in the Zamboanga del Norte area. The German Development Service has been assisting the conduct of local peace consultations, while Cordaid and MISERIOR have continued supporting all peace efforts involving the GRP-RPM-M peace process.

confidence and confidence building measures and the holding of local peace consultations in the first 100 *barangays* (villages) in Mindanao. Most of the time informal talks take place between the principals and the secretariats, discussing and analysing current situations such as the Philippine national elections (May 2004/ 2007), or the most recent declaration of the government stand on peace and the process of demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration after the talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which have been postponed following the skirmishes on August 18, 2008 in the province of Lanao del Norte. All these have an effect on the peace process through the informal discussions among panels and secretariats, with constant updating with the communities and partners taking place.

3.6 The local peace consultations

The local peace consultations (LPCs) are an integral part of the framework of the GRP-RPM-M peace process. One of the first documents signed by both panels in the first round of formal talks institutionalised the participation of peoples and communities through the conduct of barangay and tribal consultations. The LPCs are three-day participatory workshops that aim to identify community resources, to surface sectoral and conflict issues (human resource development, land use, economic development, and agri-aquatic and development administration), and to craft a plan that includes strategies in pursuing the tribal land/ancestral domains claims in some *barangays*. The target participants are the members of the Barangay Development Council, composed of the barangay chairperson, barangay council members, representatives of all the people's organisations, and sectoral leaders.

There is an emphasis on conflict profile/mapping specifically of the barangay, consolidating issues with a focus on the causes of conflict and on the marginalisation of the tribal groups, and identified priority projects. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods and tools are used in the consultations. PRA approaches emphasise local knowledge, and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans for contextually appropriate programmes (Theis & Grady 1991). Transforming the priorities into concrete projects occurs by mobilising the resources of the IS and the government agencies through the Office of the Presidential Adviser to the Peace Process. One of the strategies was to hold stakeholder forums for the first 69 villages that finished the process of local peace consultations in 2005. The teams conducting the workshops came from the secretariats of the three main parties – the GRP, the RPM-M, and the IS. Volunteers from the trained RPM-M group and from the partner communities of the Balay Mindanaw Group are key facilitators and documenters during the actual workshops. The Independent Secretariat coordinates all these sessions.

Since 2003, LPCs have been conducted in six areas, with 89 villages[11]. Of these villages, 70 are already implementing their plans, ranging from capacity-building and agricultural development, to small-scale livelihoods like raising goats or hogs, for which community revolving funds have been set up (BMFI 2008).

3.7 Social capital

Balay Mindanaw took on the task of helping in the transformation process in communities and with different groups through the GRP-RPM-M peace process. As an NGO that believes in the capacity of people in different communities to pursue their visions, and to bring it into the peace process, the theory of social capital has been drawn on, because it affirms community participation and involvement in the GRP-RPM-M peace process. According to Putnam (2000) social capital is "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue'" (Putnam 2000: 19). Putnam emphasises people, networks, and relationships based on trust among the people involved. He emphasises that such virtues are worth upholding for people to achieve progress. According to social capital theory, relationships are essential in building a common vision that motivates people to undertake common

8 RPM-M formally signed a ceasefire with the government on October 28, 2005, but its implementation was held back until December 2006 while the RPM-M called for the government to consider "environmental destruction as part of violation of the ceasefire agreement and environmental issues should be clearly stated in the implementation guidelines" (RPM-M 2007). Furthermore, in February 2006, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declared a state of national emergency that RPM-M considered for a time to be unhelpful to the peace talks.
9 For further information visit: www.balaymindanaw.org
10 These are: (1) Joint Commitment to the Pursuit of Peace and Development, (2) Rules for the Conduct of the Peace Talks, (3) Rules on the Conduct of the Peace Consultations, (4) Agreement on the General Cessation of Hostilities, (5) Guidelines and Ground rules on the Monitoring of the General Cessation of Hostilities, and (6) Joint Commitment in Protecting the Gains of the Peace Process.
11 Details of participating villages can be found at: http://www.balaymindanaw.org/grprpmm/community/areas.html

action in a collaborative manner (Cohen & Prusak 2001). Hobbs (n.d.) indicated mechanisms by which social capital theory can be realised, suggesting community experience of helping themselves identify and resolve their conflicts as one such mechanism.

The value of people undertaking common processes is the basis of my theoretical framework for studying the GRP-RPM-M peace process. Unrest and armed conflict is seen as caused by social inequity and injustice manifested through landlessness, lack of access to basic services, graft and corruption, and poverty in the communities in Lanao provinces and in Mindanao as a whole. Hence, in addressing this problem, social capital theory recognises the great importance of the people, of the whole society, as critical to any decisions made and implemented. Strengthening social capital is thus the basic element in achieving development and progress in a society. Furthermore, The World Bank supports Putnam's definition, which focuses also on relationships, adding that social capital is what holds people together: it is like a glue that ensures nothing shall be separated (The World Bank 1999). Social capital affirms community participation in the peace process, as it is a coming together of people where there is trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that bind these people into a strong network in a community that will help to bring about action that benefits all (Cohen & Prusak 2001).

4. Methodology

This action research aims to show how the local peace consultations strengthen the stake of the communities in the peace process, and draw out active participation in development and peace-building efforts in their respective communities. The learnings are based on my reflections on my work with Balay Mindanaw on the peace process, both as a member of the IS and as part of my ACTS studies.

Methods associated with the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process are used. AI is most often used for organisational development, but it is also used in other spheres to facilitate the process of 'a new way of seeing the world'. It does not avoid the rigours of critical thinking and analysis, but leads participants towards a better perspective on positive change despite the challenges of failure and disappointment (ACTS 2005: 23). This is seen as an important methodology, given the difficult and often disheartening experience of conflict over time, and the need to support positive engagement in the peace process.

In attaining my insights into this action research, I based the discussion on the responses of the communities in two major activities, which formed the main action research cycles: the workshop on community participation in the peace process, and the post-consultation workshop.

4.1 Workshop on community participation in the peace process

The workshop was a two-day activity held in Barangay Mahayahay, Sultan Naga Dimaporo, Lanao del Norte, Mindanao, Philippines on February 18 and 19, 2007. The purpose of the workshop was to have a discussion with the communities on the Mindanao conflict and situate themselves in it; to determine people's perceptions about the local peace consultations; to share what they have experienced during the local peace consultations; to let us know if they have seen or experienced any difference after their participation in the local peace consultations; to share some of their thoughts on how to improve it and to make it more relevant and useful to them; and to understand how they see their role in the peace process.

Forty residents from Barangay Mahayahay, Barangay Capucao, Barangay Mabuhay, Barangay Calipapa, and Barangay Cabongbongan participated. Sixteen of them were key leaders and representatives of the above-mentioned *barangays*, composed of barangay captains, barangay officials, people's organisation leaders, youth, women, and children, and the workers of Demokratikong Kilusan nag Magbubukid sa Pilipinas (DKMP-Lanao).

4.2 Post-consultation workshop

Almost one year after the workshop, on January 29 and 30, 2008, IS and DKMP held a post-consultation. For IS, the post-consultation was

to ensure that communities were continuing with their initiatives, that peace talks were popularised, and that communities – as well as the panels – were well-informed of what was happening at the community level. It was also a venue for people to review their situation and their participation in the local consultations, and to share their thoughts on how they have sustained and will sustain the peace process through community participation. Part of the review was to take a closer look at how they had implemented their plans, the changes and developments that resulted in their communities, and how they had made them happen. Representatives from five *barangays* were present. They were residents who had participated in the local peace consultations in *Barangays* Mamagum, Calipapa, Capucao, Cabungbongan, and Mahayahay, and were barangay captains, leaders of people's organisations, and members of the project implementing team. After the workshop, they went back to their respective *barangays*, agreeing that they would reconstitute their Barangay Development Councils and strengthen them to implement further their barangay development plan.

5. Findings

The main findings from this action research can be summarised as follows:

5.1 A framework for a peace process agreed by both parties is fundamental

One cannot pursue a peace process if the framework has not been established and translated into concrete action that sets the direction and maintains the common ground of both parties. Formulating and upholding the framework of the peace process that includes community participation by both parties is key in this peace process.

The results of the community efforts were seen by the community leaders themselves. Hon. George Dayle, captain of Barangay Mamagum, said: "There is peace, no more fear of military operations. There are already projects and support from resource agencies. The women already assert their rights and are active in revolving capital for livelihood; the farmer associations are into micro-financing; and the barangay officials have regular sessions twice a month discussing on how to further develop the barangay in a democratic manner. We also have barangay development councils. The farmers are now into learning diversified integrated farming." This quote demonstrates how communities have become more active, more involved in the peace process, for they know that they are included in the framework, and that they have been identified as key people in the process.

5.2 Local peace consultations are an essential part of the peace process

Local consultations provide a venue where people can gather and talk about their situations. Through observation, reflection, and discussion with participants, we found that the local consultations can result in common actions based on a common understanding of the conflict; and a recognition of communities themselves as part of the conflict and of the solution. The emphasis on providing space for the people to participate and achieve their vision through planning and implementing projects themselves allows small gains that create potential changes.

It is through these consultations that stakeholdership and ownership of the peace process by the communities and partners is shared. As an example, initially the RPM-M had difficulty in revealing the names of the villages where we were conducting the peace consultations; but there now seems to be an increased openness in participation. The findings suggested a more open participation of their support groups to engage and to work closely with the communities. They saw participation as risky, but they now see it as a risk worth taking.

With parties being open, and sharing a stake in the peace process, the widening of civil society participation through implementing priority projects by communities has been facilitated. "There is a strong development agenda for the talks, which has, so far, taken precedence over the more usual political demands" (Clifford, CCTS No. 28).

I remember Mr Enrique de los Reyes (RPM-M's political adviser to the peace process) saying that for the years that they had been involved in the process, they (as a revolutionary group having an armed unit) had restrained themselves from firing their guns even before the cessation of hostilities agreement had been signed. They believed that there was a need for the communities to gain victories, not always to be victims of war and violence; to be not just 'the masses', but people who are working to attain their visions of peace. When the RPM-M almost withdrew from the peace talks following the presidential declaration of a state of emergency in 2004, the communities were the ones that made them rethink their decision. The communities said that they had already put their lives at risk by opening up their communities to the peace process. Thus, as Mr de los Reyes shared in the joint secretariat's meeting, the impulse to engage in violence had been channelled into proactive participation in maintaining peace and order in the community.

5.3 Showing and protecting the gains strengthens the stakeholdership of communities

The institutionalisation of the communities' problem analysis and implementation of projects with personal, organisational, and institutional counterparts has enabled the communities to be proud of their concerted efforts in bringing themselves together for action. It has enabled them to protect the gains of their efforts in strengthening their communities and implementing simple yet meaningful livelihood projects.

A related result is the increase in the participation of civil society, funding agencies, and government offices, including the security sector's awareness of and support for the alternative way of doing a peace process. This was because the process was found to offer revolutionary combatants an alternative way of achieving what they had been fighting for all these years. From participant reflections, this was seen as a stepping stone in making the armed struggle and the presence of revolutionary groups gradually less important. As Susanel Encabo, PIT Member, Barangay Mahayahay (SND) said in the first workshop: "Farm, not arm!" as she reflected on her journey as one of those who were involved in the peace process, implementing a project that improves her farm.

5.4 Social capital is a foundation of an on-going peace process

Following social capital theory, where relationships are essential in building a common vision that can motivate people into common action, the collaborative manner of communities' experience of planning together was observed during the consultations. The consultations encouraged community members to come together and work on the best that can be achieved, based on the resources that they have – money, goods, and labour.

Trust and confidence were established at the beginning of the process between parties to the conflict, communities, and support groups. This is an essential element of social capital. IS members were able to join in learning sessions with the RPM-M in their camps, which also showed trust and confidence. Communities were now very open in discussing their views, for example on the government's promise for infrastructure and livelihood worth five million pesos in 2005. For example, Kag. Candido Sabiron of Barangay Cabongbongan was honest about it: "As history has shown, our disappointment with the government, the usual resort is rebellion to correct the wrong. A child will not stop from crying until his needs are provided for. Like us, we will not stop from hoping and working for it, with the help of Balay Mindanaw. I am discouraged that the 5m pesos may not be produced, which made me think not to be back in this post consultation."

As Hobbs (n.d.) states, social capital involves trust, reciprocity, relationships, and obligations to achieve mutually beneficial collective action. Over time people may forget that the mobilisation of peoples in these communities for positive action began with their participation in the peace process. The communities have continued with the implementation of peace processes, and have stood firm on this. The trust among themselves

has brought them together to face any threats. The people affirmed that participation in the local peace consultations had enabled them to gather and work together as one community. This collective action is consciously observed as the peace process goes on.

6. Conclusion

Peace processes are continuing journeys of building trust and relationships, increasing networks of alliances, and the capacity of partners. What has guided us is the framework of the peace process between GRP and RPM-M: "Empowered and sustainable communities are the real foundation of lasting peace... final resolution is important but communities need not wait for this. Building peace is here and now" (Manlupig 2006). The GRP-RPM-M peace process experience has set an example of a community-grounded process, where communities are the ones keeping the peace talks going.

The local consultations are a process by which the communities are given space and a venue to identify issues, analyse situations, and plan for community development and peace. It is the villagers – not just the village chief and village officials, nor just the government agencies – that decide on their future. The communities themselves participate in all the processes that can potentially benefit the community.

The GRP-RPM-M peace process is the only process in the Philippines where community participation is being done and where an NGO is the mediator. This could also be one way of building a model of how peace processes can be done, or building the criteria for sustaining a peace process that is context-laden, and that shows how mediation processes can be more effective.

I have focused on community participation. In undertaking this study, I may have limited myself by referring to community participation as participation at the grassroots village level. However, I learned that the 'community' is not only the community in the villages: it includes the greater public – the combatants, the military, the parties to the conflict, the government, civil society, you and me. Galtung (2002) was correct when he said: "Another world is possible, but only if we work on it together."

An ongoing challenge among us and among the villagers is this: How do we continue to assess the community situation, analyse issues, and plan for the future, so that they can make real their hopes of bringing about concrete changes in their communities? Through our continuing work on the peace process, and through action reflection in this project, we have learned one great lesson which, in Kaloy's words, is that peace is not only the journey's end; with community participation, it has been a way of journeying (Manlupig, 2005). The peace process is not the end of strife, but a way of striving.

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Overview of students' work

FOUR

[description]

Asia Group

A number of students from Myanmar took part in the course but their work will not be listed here for their safety.

BELLE GARCIA-HERNANDEZ: Creating spaces for dialogue towards transforming military policies and doctrines.

Belle Garcia is from Mindanao in the Philippines, and works for the Balay Mindanaw Foundation where she manages the peace centre and is involved in the delivery of training. The Balay Mindanaw Foundation have been involved in the GRP-RPM-M peace process for the last four years and through this have begun to deliver training courses for the military. Her research focused on the work of creating spaces for dialogue and problem-solving among the military as a way of enabling them to create policies and structures which would enable them to be a part of the peacebuilding process and to strengthen civil-military relationships.

CHARMAINE BACONGA: Sustaining the GRP-RPM-M Peace Process through Community Participation

Charmaine Baconga is from Mindanao in the Philippines, and works for the Balay Mindanaw Foundation where she is involved in the work on the GRP-RPM-M Peace process (between the Government of the Philippines and the Revolutionary Party of Mindanao). This process is one of the only ones in the Philippines to include local community consultation as a key element of the peace process. Her research therefore looks at the role of these consultations, and how they can strengthen ownership and lead to more active participation in local development and peacebuilding projects.

DISHANI JAYAWEERA: The role of socially engaged Buddhism in conflict transformation training for Sinhala Buddhist groups in the southern part of Sri Lanka.

Dishani is the Director of the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation which is based in Sri Lanka. Her research looks at whether the principles and practice of socially engaged Buddhism can be used to transform the negative attitude of the majority Sinhala Buddhist community toward the Tamil community and the potential for a pluralistic state. The research took place with a variety of groups of people using a workshop format and found that such a strategy can help people to begin to question and challenge the dominant discourse put forward by the state.

SARDAR ASADUZZAMAN: Redesigning the community-based justice mechanism for grassroots level conflict transformation.

Asad is a Programme Officer for Danida in Bangladesh. His research focuses on the community-based mediation processes which are used to resolve disputes and issues at a local level. These types of processes are widely used by those who are unable to afford or access formal legal approaches. However he found that recurrence of issues was higher than expected as community mediation often only deals with the immediate problem and with the victim and offender. The research then went on to test different approaches which could be used to transform and address the underlying issues and involve the wider community.

SUSHANTHY GOBALAKRISHNAN: Enhancing the practice of conflict sensitivity in humanitarian assistance through 'Good Humanitarian Practices'

Sushanthy works in Sri Lanka. Her research looks at the relationship between conflict sensitivity and good humanitarian practice and explores whether

the former can be promoted through the Sphere minimum standards guidelines. The research found that there is a wide variation in understanding of conflict sensitivity and good humanitarian practice between field and management staff. She also concludes that the Sphere framework does allow for conflict sensitivity to be included.

SOM CHANMONY: Encouraging Faith-based Peacebuilders to Apply Their Faith-based Principles to Support Community Conflict Prevention and Intervention

Som Chanmony is the Conflict Counselling and Mediation Training Coordinator for Peace Bridges which is based in Cambodia. Through his research he looked at the application of faith-based principles: how can they be applied in his own work and practice, and can this further support people to deal with their problems in a way in which it will transform their situations? He found that these principles promote a positive attitude to peacebuilding work and a holistic response to resolving conflicts.

MUKTI SUVEDI: Designing a Nepali context peace training manual using an action-oriented participatory learning approach

Mukti Suvedi works for Caritas Nepal as a Peace Programme Coordinator. As an organisation Caritas have invested in peacebuilding training but were looking for ways to increase the impact and outcomes from this work. The research is focused around the process of designing a training manual specific to the Nepali context and the use of participatory approaches to make the learning more effective.

SEANG SAMNANG: Interfaith Peacebuilding in Cambodia: Understanding interfaith issues as a way to strengthen peaceful interfaith coexistence and cooperation.

Samnang works for the Alliance for Conflict Transformation which is based in Cambodia. Cambodia is a religiously diverse country, and whilst there are no open conflicts, there are few opportunities for integration between the communities. Therefore a degree of fear and insecurity exists between them. His research looks at the development of an Interfaith Peacebuilding approach as a way for different religious groups to come together and develop a common understanding on interfaith issues. His findings suggest that this is an important process to strengthen peaceful coexistence and cooperation between communities.

TO THI BAY: Inclusion of domestic violence into conflict resolution skills training for local mediators in rural Vietnam.

To Thi Bay works for the Peacebuilding programme of the Mennonite Central Committee in Vietnam. Her research looks at how the inclusion of training on domestic violence will benefit local mediators. Her research showed that though local mediators are often called on to intervene in situations of domestic violence they have no training in this area or in conflict resolution skills in general. The response is often to try to maintain harmony within the community and reduce the occurrence of the violence, rather than to support the rights of the victim or look at the underlying causes of the situation.

Balkans and Middle East Group

BEGO BEGU: The influence of the conflict transformation workshop on participants' attitudes towards differences and their behaviour in conflict situation.

Bego works in Montenegro for the Foundation Open Society Institute. In his action research Bego explored the influence that conflict transformation workshops can have on participant's attitudes to people from different socio-ethnic groups, and on their behaviour within a conflict simulation exercise. He had a further underlying question as to whether training is a sufficient tool to promote tolerance in an area characterised by ethnic differences. In his workshops he worked with 49 young people from different regions and with different ethnic backgrounds. The changes in participants' attitudes and behaviour was evident within the workshop setting, especially when people had the chance to reflect on their own personal real-life examples.

ASJA HADZIBEGOVIC: Director's role in sharing power and enabling others to use it in a participatory learning and developing organisation.

Ajsa is the Director of Forum MNE, a youth work organisation based in Montenegro. Her research focused on a transition period within the organisation and the process of developing a senior management team as a mechanism for empowering staff to take more responsibility and ownership of the organisation. Her assumption was that this approach would mirror the values of the organisation and make them more effective and better able to work towards their goals. Through the research she learnt a great deal about her own management style and the process of introducing this type of approach, although it was too early to say whether it would in turn have an impact on the effectiveness of Forum MNE's youth work.

ANAT REISMAN-LEVY: The impact of Triangle Encounter (T.E.) in the minority group: the case of the Palestinian minority in Israel at inter-group encounter with Israeli Jews and Palestinians from the Occupied Territories.

The triangle encounter model looks at the process of developing a facilitation team which draws its members from three different groups: Israeli Jewish, Arab Israeli and Palestinian Arab. In particular the research focused on how the minority group in the situation could have equal status within the group, how could their "voice" be heard, and what are the conditions for a true encounter to take place.

FADI SHBITA: Building a core leading team for bi-national youth activist movement in Israel-Palestine. Creating the foundations for conflict groups training for youth workers.

Fadi works for Sadaka Reut, an Arab Jewish youth partnership which actively works for social and political change in Israel. His research deals with the process of forming a youth group, with people who are already involved in issues around the Israel/Palestine conflict, and are actively challenging the structures in joint Israeli/Palestinian organisations. In particular he looks at the process undergone by the facilitation team that works with the youth group and focuses on the link between the facilitators' nationality and their understanding of the conflict and the means by which change can be realised, and the process of forming a new group with a common vision and mission.

MICHAEL STERNBERG: Working on conflict and experiencing conflict: conflict transformation practice in the context of ongoing violence.

Michael has been working for Shatil, a capacity building organisation for social change organisations in Israel since 2004. His research relates to the challenges he experienced whilst establishing the Shatil Conflict Transformation and Management Center (CTMC); focusing specifically on the learning process which was established to develop the CTMC teams capacity for conflict transformation practice. Through his research he explores the impact of the diverse background and identity of the staff (knowledge, gender, age, nationality, ethnicity) and the affect this has on the learning, particularly whilst they themselves are deeply involved in the societal conflict. He looks at mechanisms for creating a positive learning environment which can nurture the tensions which arise, and balance the dual needs of learning and planning the actual work.

NIHAD MESIC: Empowerment of returnees, school and authorities to work together on education issues in Turija, Rosulje, and Panjik, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nihad is the Education Officer for the Tuzla field office of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina where he is involved with monitoring and supporting education reform processes to ensure equality among the different groups. His research focuses on the schools which serve three villages which were on different sides during the war, but which are now all part of Bosnia Herzegovina and have a mixed Serb and Bosniac population. Nihad looked at the role an outsider can play in empowering students and parents from both Serb and Bosniac families to work together through different school mechanisms. Nihad found empowerment to be a critical component of peacebuilding and reconciliation, and also that the example set by himself (as a Bosniac) and his colleague (from Serbia) working together was particularly successful.

SANJA RISTA: The impact of gender distribution on student's engagement in peer mediation school trainings.

Sanja's research built on previous experience gained through her work with the Provincial Ombudsman's Office in Vojvodina on peer mediation with high school students. Her action research focused on the effect of gender balance / imbalance on group dynamics when carrying out peer mediation in schools. She found that the ratio of boys to girls in the group had a big impact on the quality and the effectiveness of the work and in particular on levels of participation. Her research then goes on to look at ways in which participation, particularly of boys can be increased.

SHPEND VOCA: The effects of inter-ethnic dialogue on prejudice reduction and improved communication: the case of Albanian receiving community and Serbian returning community in Fushe Kosove / Kosovo Polje.

Shpend works with the Kosovan Nansen Dialogue Centre (KND) as a 'dialogue facilitator'. KND aims to provide a safe space for interethnic dialogue and reconciliation as well as developing peacebuilding and conflict management capacities and strengthening regional cooperation. Shpend's research used observation and interviews to examine the effect of interethnic dialogue in the Fushe Kosove / Kosovo Polje region. Shpend found that interethnic dialogue made a positive contribution to reducing prejudices between the groups and improving communication.

SNEZANA BACLIJA: Role of nonformal education based on challenging activities in the process of rehumanisation: the example of Encompass Journeys of Understanding in the UK.

Snezana focussed her research on her work with the UK organisation Encompass and their Journeys of Understanding programme. The programme brings together young people from Indonesia, Britain, Israel, Palestine, and America on a ten day residential course. The aim of her research was to examine the effectiveness of the programme at confronting, challenging and overcoming young people's preconceptions about each other. Through observations, feedback from colleagues, and feedback from the participants she was able to show that the combination of outdoor activities, discussion groups and drama exercises was successful at beginning to challenge the attitudes and beliefs of participants.

XHEVKI PRUTHI ZAJAZI: How to increase the participation of parents in schools in multiethnic and post-conflict settings: the case of divided schools in the community of Jegunovce.

Xhevki works for the Nansen Dialogue Centre in Skopje, an organisation which works to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation. Her action research focussed on a specific project in a primary school in Jegunovce, Macedonia, which serves students from both Macedonian and Albanian background. The aim of the Nansen project is to integrate children from different ethnic backgrounds into a bilingual school, and the research looked at the process of encouraging the participation of parents in decision-making processes on education. The project showed that this type of initiative was welcomed by parents', and that they valued an opportunity to begin to influence their child's education. The hope is that projects of this type will also begin to influence wider relationships between communities in Macedonia.

DEJAN ATANASOV

During his studies Dejan worked for the Center for Psychosocial and Crisis Action on a programme on providing safe schools in Tetovo. Gender research is an area which he felt was uncommon in Macedonia, therefore his research looked into the attitudes and behaviour towards the gender of school children in the traditional and divided society of Macedonia.

JAGODA VJESTICA

Jagoda works as senior associate for gender issues at the office the Provincial Ombudsman in Vojvodina / Parliamentary institution for the Protection of human rights. In her research she looked at the use and benefits of role plays in mediation training.

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