

Just Wasting our Time? Provocative Thoughts for Peacebuilders

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1. Introduction*

Although the overall number of violent conflicts in the world is now relatively low,¹ we need look no further than Iraq and Afghanistan, Darfur, Zimbabwe and Israel/Palestine to see the apparently unquestioning faith which the powerful continue to put in weaponry, and its terrible results for people and the planet. Militarised views of the world still dominate its politics. The capacity and the will of global society to solve conflicts and address injustice peacefully is desperately inadequate in the face of today's need, let alone tomorrow's; the risk of intense conflict arising from a nexus of four core issues – climate change and energy constraints; economic injustice and poverty; denial of rights and participation in society; and armed violence – is given scant attention.

International peace practitioners, for their part, and other global civil society players who have peace as part of their remit, remain weak and implicitly focused on a relatively narrow approach to peace, without full recognition of the interconnectedness and flux of the system. As a result, the strategies they offer tend to be inadequate, in the sense that they merely serve to reinforce the circumstances which gave rise to violence and warfare in the first place. Yet as the field itself postulates, peace is not simply about the absence of visible violence, but requires addressing underlying drivers and dynamics.

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¹ There were 32 armed conflicts in 2006, a decline from the average of more than 60 in the immediate post-Cold war years. See Harbom/Wallensteen 2007; Human Security Report 2005 and Human Security Brief 2006.

Granted, there are some international signs of positive change, indicating a window of opportunity. One can point for example to the following:

- *A UN milestone: climate change on the agenda.* In April 2007 the Security Council met to discuss climate change for the first time. It did so, surprisingly, and at the behest of the UK government, in the context of conflict and security and, again surprisingly to many, there was broad agreement that the issue poses a clear threat, perhaps the major threat, to international relations and global stability in the future.
- *Changing international consensus.* Despite the dominance of the neo-conservatives in the US, and their allies in the UK in the early years of this century, governments and civil society alike are developing a consensus over some of the key pillars of peacebuilding, including the salient importance of early warning and prevention of conflict (i.e. violence), international cooperation and agreement, the effectiveness of peacekeeping, security sector and governance reforms.
- *Increasing impact of negotiation in ending wars.* Since the 1990s more wars have ended through negotiated settlements than victory: between 2000 and 2005 negotiated outcomes were four times as numerous as victories.² However, it must not be forgotten that the longer-term success of these negotiated outcomes is as yet unknown, and inevitably fragile, as the case of Sudan currently illustrates.
- *Recognition of limits of militarism.* In many locations and at many levels there is evidence that a search is underway for new ways to address conflicts. Increasingly, for example, the military in the UK and US are saying publicly that wars do not work any longer – even for them (Smith 2006). However, there is as yet little sign of more than sporadic, patchy political acceptance of the need for new thinking, let alone systematic planning about how it might be met. Institutional changes at the UN, such as the new Peacebuilding Commission are a start, but they are far from adequate to address the issues we are facing.
- *Openness of government agencies.* There are exceptions to this, notably among Scandinavian governments, and signs that indicate a hunger in other government circles for new insights and models in relation to peace. In the UK, for example, the Department for International Development (DFID) recently organised a consultative process in drawing up its new policy document on conflict.³ A new All-Party Parliamentary Group on Conflict Issues, dedicated to getting realistic, nonviolent alternatives into the UK policy debate, is beginning to attract attention, if not yet the consequent understanding, in political and military circles.

Underlying this apparent momentum is what has been described as a “huge upsurge in activity in conflict prevention, conflict management, diplomatic peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding activity that has occurred over the past fifteen years, with most of this being spearheaded by the UN itself (but with the World Bank, donor states, a number of regional security organisations and literally thousands of NGOs playing significant roles of their own)”.⁴

But as yet, the peacebuilding message seems too muted, weak and fragmented to capitalise on these potential advantages. Peacebuilders are failing to make the political waves necessary to convince others, and perhaps even themselves, while globalised corporate power exerts ever more undemocratic control over the essential components of peace. Now that the political window may be opening, and an opportunity knocks, will we be unprepared and divided? What can we do? What have we got to say?

² Human Security Brief 2006; quoted in Barnes 2007, 11.

³ Preventing Violent Conflict, UK Department for International Development, March 2007. Available at www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/preventing-conflict.pdf.

⁴ Gareth Evans, Conflict Prevention: Ten Lessons We Have Learned, Toronto, February 2007. Available at www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4653&l=1. Similar findings are portrayed in Human Security Brief 2006.

Peacebuilding and conflict transformation undoubtedly have the potential to offer viable alternatives to costly, ineffective and often highly destructive methods of dealing with conflicts and their causes. A nascent peacebuilding paradigm is beginning to prove itself in practice, little by little, evolving from its foundations in disciplines such as philosophy, political science, social psychology and international relations, and in a variety of religions, providing an invaluable source of insights and innovative approaches, both at policy and practice levels.

But the impact of the peacebuilding community is stunted by a variety of factors, among which are: a lack of clarity – or is it consensus? – about values and goals, the often incoherent, short-term manner in which goals are implemented, excessively deferential attitudes to those holding political power, organisational rivalry, and a shortage of competent practitioners. Peacebuilding and development organisations alike seem to be failing the challenge.

While the evidence suggests that peacebuilders have made some considerable inroads, despite accompanying ambivalences and confusions, this paper argues that the peacebuilding community – all those who see themselves as working for peace, justice and development – needs to start getting its own house in order if it is to match up to the intensifying challenges. It needs to have further conversations about ‘peace writ large’, a term introduced but not substantially explored by Collaborative for Development Action (CDA).⁵ Whose peace are peacebuilders working for? Is such work regarded as ‘transforming’ – seeking ultimately to challenge the unsustainable, unjust status quo and bring about profound change towards greater justice and wellbeing? Or is it essentially ‘technical’ peacebuilding, focused on project-bound locations and time-scales and trusting that the bigger picture will look after itself?

These are the core questions we want to invite practitioners and scholars to discuss. In *Section 2* below we give an overview of the main achievements of the field. We do not try to do full justice to what has been achieved in the relatively short space of time since the late 1980s; however, we name some of the key elements which now need to be built on purposefully. *Sections 3* and *4* then set out to ask critical questions and suggest some options for what needs to be done in the impending multiple crises going forward.

2. What has the Peacebuilding Field Achieved?

2.1 A Distinctive Conceptual and Methodological Basis

Methodologies

Distinctive and innovative methods of analysis and intervention have been developed, often inspired by developments in a range of subjects, from social psychology to adult education to management studies. Especially notable perhaps have been graphic, easy to use tools of participatory conflict analysis, many forms and styles of dialogue at different levels, from grassroots to high level, continuous development of mediation processes, including a substantial movement in peer mediation in schools, elaborate schemes for early warning and, though less successfully, early response. At a global level, organisations such as the Mennonite Central Committee in the US and Responding to Conflict in UK, amongst others, have developed practice-focused methodologies for cross-cultural training. Many people, including civil servants and staff of intergovernmental organisations, have participated in these programmes, lasting up to three months.

⁵ Reflecting on Peace Practice Handbook, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2004. Available at www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/manual/reflectingonpeacepracticehandbook_Pdf.pdf.

Education and Capacity-building

There has been a huge expansion of intellectual endeavour in peace studies and related areas at universities and colleges across the world, including those undertaking military research and training. A welter of opportunities has emerged for people to undertake peace studies up to PhD level. Initiated by the establishment of the first Peace Studies Department at Bradford University in 1973, this has produced a large number of graduates looking for work in the peace sector, as well as a growth of theoretical contributions, though still largely from Western universities. A huge amount of work has been undertaken in US universities, think-tanks, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and foundations, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and US Institute of Peace. Elsewhere many prominent universities have enhanced their reputations with peace studies departments. This essentially intellectual development has been complemented by a variety of academic courses which include a practical dimension, such as the European University Center for Peace Studies, and a new programme entitled Applied Conflict Transformation Studies, which is helping to pioneer the use of action research in peacebuilding. Many civil society organisations (CSOs) have also developed their own training programmes, usually a few days in duration, providing initial skills in conflict analysis and various forms of intervention. Typically these courses are highly participative and experience-based.

Theory and Discourse

An increasingly clear, if still contested, theoretical articulation of different strands of peacebuilding and conflict transformation has thus emerged, putting further flesh on ideas. Creative thinkers such as Johan Galtung, Elise Boulding, Adam Curle, Mary Kaldor, Chris Mitchell, John Burton, John Paul Lederach, Diana Francis and Mary Anderson are among those who have helped provide inspiration and leadership, and there are many others.

In addition, adaptations have helped popularise aspects of peacebuilding, and give it credibility, amongst governments and development/humanitarian agencies. Work on civil society's experience of peacebuilding globally (such as through CDA's Reflecting on Peace Practice project) has been invaluable in helping to crystallise theory of peace work.⁶ Likewise, the Berghof Research Center has become a respected resource for developing theory from practice through its Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation.⁷ And the *Accord: an international review of peace initiatives* series by Conciliation Resources has built up a record of peacemaking experiences around the world.⁸

Analysis, Commentary and Lobbying

A number of think-tanks now provide reliable analysis of international issues from a conflict transformation perspective, informing and challenging governments and civil society alike, and at their best proposing viable alternatives in current conflicts. Among these, the Crisis Group, Oxford Research Group, Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, International Center for Transitional Justice, International Alert, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Human Security Center and Center for Humanitarian Dialogue have established a strong international presence and are listened to at government and international levels.

At the same time systematic work has taken place to develop the field of peace journalism, which entails the application of insights from peace and conflict studies to the everyday job of reporting and editing news.⁹ Such training on critical analysis of war reporting, and on practical guidelines and options, is increasingly offered to journalists in war-affected areas.

⁶ For more information, see www.cdainc.com. See also Anderson/Olson 2003.

⁷ For more information, see www.berghof-handbook.net and www.berghof-center.org.

⁸ For more information, see www.c-r.org.

⁹ See, for instance, www.peacejournalism.org.

2.2 A Host of Actors – from Grassroots to Government Level

Civil Society as a Source of Innovation and Social Mediation

As a broad range of organisations and groups which are distinct from government and business, and which exist to promote the interests of their members and the issues they seek to address, civil society includes local, national and international organisations, trade unions, academia, faith groups and non-profit media. These can make a significant contribution to the transformation of conflict and building peace by supporting individual development, cultivating positive norms in communities and tackling those policies, systems and structures which exclude minorities and thus give rise to grievances. They are also sometimes in a position to develop contacts with groups proscribed by governments, yet crucial to peacebuilding.¹⁰

While civil society is not always a force for peace, varied as it inevitably is in the views and positions its members take, the debates and initiatives cultivated by civil society organisations, and the protected space they provide for diversity and creative thinking, often serve as an impulse for it. “[U]ltimately, a widespread, inclusive and vibrant engagement within civic life can be the incubator for the institutions and habits needed to resolve conflict peacefully and generate more responsive and better governance needed to make peace sustainable” (Barnes 2006, 13).

Civil society has organised itself apace in both North and South since the early 1990s. There are now over 1000 organisations working explicitly on peace and conflict issues worldwide,¹¹ and many more if one includes those aid and development agencies that have recognized peacebuilding as a key principle of their work. In addition, there are many agencies working in at least implicit alliance, both globally and locally, on aspects of what peacebuilding describes as ‘positive peace’¹² – human (including gender) rights, democratic governance, disarmament, poverty reduction and development, education and environment.

Local Peacebuilding Work

In many parts of the world people have demonstrated what it is to be truly human by mobilizing at local level to reduce violence and develop new ways of working on conflict. Coming together in small groups, they have worked with the existing ‘traditional’ structures such as elders and chiefs, or refashioned them, or created their own organisations. This has enabled the emergence and spread of innumerable self-help grassroots initiatives dedicated to preventing violence and building peace. The range of activity has been remarkable, and includes reconciliation, mediation, nonviolent action and promotion of nonviolence, setting up peace zones and campaigning. Often these have been integrated into work for development and environmental protection. Widely acknowledged is the role played by women’s organisations with a peace mandate, ranging from global organisations like the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to local groups such as Mothers for the Disappeared and Black Sash.¹³

These groups and organisations, at their best, have proved uniquely able to work on the core issue of identity, finding ways in which people can come into everyday contact with others across geographic and conflict boundaries, resisting the pull to seek safety in one exclusive group, whether of faith, caste, ethnicity or nation. Many of these community-based organisations are

¹⁰ See, for instance, <http://conflictsforum.org/>.

¹¹ 1028 were listed in the European Centre for Conflict Prevention’s (ECCP) directory of NGOs working in the field of conflict prevention (as of 9 March 2008). See www.gppac.org/page.php?id=1481.

¹² The concept was introduced by Johan Galtung in the 1960s to denote the absence of structural violence as well as personal violence (see, for example, Galtung 1996).

¹³ See, among others, the Key Findings from the 2006 “Women and Governance” Project Evaluation (www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/womengovkey.pdf) and Burundi Programme Overview (www.sfcg.org/programmes/burundi/pdf/burundi.pdf).

playing (necessarily) unsung ‘frontline’ roles in highly volatile dangerous confrontations, building the space necessary for political dialogue. While it is rare for grassroots efforts to transform wider systems of conflict and war, it is now evident that these wider systems cannot be transformed without stimulating changes at the community level.

Box 1 – A First Example from Kenya

For example, during the post-election violence in Kenya in early 2008, an informal group consisting of an ambassador, two former generals and two civil society activists established an open forum in Nairobi where individuals could share experience and initiate actions. Critical information about what was happening, rumours that were circulating, and concerns of the people on the ground were channelled to the mediation team, which was then in a position to take action to pre-empt potentially violent activities in the country and prevent the cycle of violence from spiralling completely out of control. As the situation in the country began to stabilise, the group – which by then had formalised itself as Concerned Citizens for Peace – set out to establish similar groups in other parts of Kenya, in order not only to defuse outbreaks of violence but also to uncover and begin to address the underlying conflict issues.

For more information see www.peaceinkenya.net, also Abdi 2008.

Mass Nonviolent Movements for Regime Change

When conditions are right, popular organisations may develop into coalitions which prove able to challenge and unseat governments. During the 1990s and on into this century an increasing number of movements have achieved differing degrees of regime change with minimal or no violence. The Philippines, Nepal, Serbia and Georgia are among them.¹⁴ Many of these were supported and strengthened by the work of local CSOs, but emerged as a result of popular feeling and mobilization by various groups – not infrequently assisted by outside parties (although it must be noted that sometimes the ‘outside help’ was pursuing its own ends, e.g. Western governments supporting Western-leaning actors, which may or may not have been in the best interest of the local population). The conditions for success tended to depend on the determination and ruthlessness of those in power – thus, widespread efforts in Burma have succeeded in mobilizing popular support but continue to be brutally repressed. There are questions too about the long-term impact of such seismic changes on the power structures of the countries concerned.

International Civil Society Programmes

As peacebuilding CSOs have expanded, they have spawned international programmes. Relatively few are yet of a substantial size and the sector is characterised by medium-sized and small organisations, many of which tend to be dedicated to specific issues or constituencies, such as arms sales, war children, peace education or trauma healing. But others have been running more comprehensive, multilevel programmes over several years in critical areas such as the Great Lakes, Middle East, the Caucasus, South Asia and Latin America.

In the wider dimension of ‘positive’, or ‘greater’, peace, some development-focused organisations have taken on aspects of the peace and conflict agenda. They have done so in different degrees, from a proactive stance on violence prevention and peacebuilding, to a minimalist conflict-sensitive approach. Many rights, gender, environmental and community relations organisations, who are key players from a peacebuilding perspective, would share similar long-term goals but may often use a different vocabulary to express them.

¹⁴ For a concise list of civil resistance movements, see Selected Cases of Civil Resistance Since 1945, available at www.sant.ox.ac.uk/esc/civil_resistance/map_and_Timeline.pdf.

Government-level Awareness and Influence

Individual governments have made their own efforts: for example, in Kenya the National Peacebuilding Commission brings together the different parties concerned with peace and security, including CSOs. In the UK, DFID undertook a consultation process during 2006-7 to develop a conflict policy which reflects much mainstream peacebuilding discourse. Another example is the recently established Bolivian Alternative for the Americas, a trade and cooperation organisation in Latin America. In Germany, the Federal Government launched the Action Plan on Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building in 2004.¹⁵ The attempts by Scandinavian countries to develop national policies which integrate peacebuilding ideas into national defence and security have been pioneering.¹⁶

The establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission in 2005 is potentially an important step forward in enabling the expertise of global civil society to access global intergovernmental thinking. It follows on from earlier pioneering work by the UN, including the joint Armed Violence Prevention Programme run by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Health Organization (WHO), the Agenda for Peace, many peacekeeping missions, and the drawing up of the Charter itself, as well as the emergence of the body of international legal instruments.

Global Networking

Various international networks have sprung up, linking individuals and organisations on a regional and global basis. Those of a more general orientation include Action for Conflict Transformation, which comprises regional networks in Asia, Africa (Coalition for Peace in Africa) and Latin America, and networks emanating from organisations such as Transcend and the Mennonite Central Committee.¹⁷

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a worldwide civil society-led network, with fifteen regional sections, aiming to “build a new international consensus on peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict” and working on “strengthening civil society networks for peace and security by linking local, national, regional, and global levels of action and effective engagement with governments, the UN system and regional organizations.”¹⁸

Some networks have characteristics more typical of a movement and have proved very effective. Examples include the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Combating Conflict Diamonds campaign, which seeks to prevent the diamond industry from being used to fund wars.

Religious networks have flourished, too. Attempts by the ecumenical movement to link justice, peace and environmentally sustainable development go back to the 1970s. In the 1980s and 90s the World Council of Churches took this further by introducing the concept of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), and more recently proclaimed 2001-2010 the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence.¹⁹ A network of Catholic Justice and Peace Commissions forms a web of international relationships and often has a strong impact locally.

¹⁵ Available at www.ded.de/cipp/ded/lib/all/lob/return_download,ticket,g_u_e_s_t/bid,139/no_mime_type,o/~fachheft_zfd_eng.pdf.

¹⁶ The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's (SIDA) Policy on Promoting Peace and Security through Development Cooperation states: “Because of today's broader security concept, development co-operation is increasingly seen to have an important role to play in the areas of peace and security, in tandem with military security policy, diplomacy and trade policy” (www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=118&a=3585&language=en_US). According to Raymond Johansen, Norway's State Secretary, “our involvement in [peace] processes and our efforts in the UN and development assistance are gradually being fused with security policy – security policy for the 21st century – security policy for the age of globalisation” (Speech at the 2nd Annual Somali Peace Conference, Oslo, 22 May 2006; available at www.norway-un.org/News/News+Archive/20060523_johansen_somalia.htm).

¹⁷ See www.action-global.org/action/, www.transcend.org, and <http://mcc.org/> respectively.

¹⁸ Source: www.gppac.org.

¹⁹ For more information, see www.oikoumene.org.

3. What is Holding us Back?

Looking at what has been achieved, and the potential within the field, some will say that there is real hope: with this array of successes, it may be possible to provide a distinctive and practicable alternative paradigm for civil society, politicians and business to set aside the grossly inadequate models now in use. If only there were more resources and more time, the argument goes, this paradigm could get adopted, with more political access and more coherent and sustained implementation of peacebuilding. Maybe then there would be a real impact beyond specific programmes and projects...

But there are other, more questioning voices: what if there are serious flaws in the whole process and vision, assumptions and values? What if there are contradictions at the heart of peacebuilding?

Such voices speak of the potential of the field being curtailed by a number of factors, all of which have to do with two vital aspects of peacebuilding: vision and politics. This section identifies several of these, all of them major obstacles to the achievement of big picture change: value-based divisions, a lack of in-depth understanding of – and commitment to – ‘peace writ large’, submissive attitudes to power, fragmented relationships between CSOs – including suspicion, mistrust and competition over resources – and a shortage of in-depth practitioner expertise.

3.1 Vision and Values

The current field of peacebuilding has its origins almost as far back as you wish to go. We especially need to acknowledge those who after World War I sowed the seeds of popular involvement in peace work, the fruits of which included the setting up of the League of Nations and the mobilization of a grassroots movement for peace. Since World War II, many thinkers and activists have built on this foundation, in a variety of disciplines, expanding exponentially from the 1970s onwards through a range of writers and academics.

All of them have put great importance on values. Amongst the landmarks, Adam Curle’s *True Justice* was one of the seminal books in the development of Peace Studies in the West. In it he was in no doubt that peacemaking involves radical social and personal transformation, requiring deep personal commitment and a high level of self-awareness (Curle 1981).

Linked to these qualities was the importance of empowerment and nonviolence. Peace work required a major shift from conventional thinking, because it concerned building the fundamentals of a healthy society. It involved struggle: resistance to attempts to remove hard won achievements and rights as well as creative promotion of new strategies and institutions. You cannot do peace without, to paraphrase Gandhi, ‘being the peace you want to see in the world’. The implications were potentially revolutionary and many were inspired, as the authors have been, by these writings and by the people themselves (Fisher 2004). As a consequence of these beginnings much effort went into developing a deeper, applied understanding of peace, conflict, violence and their underlying dynamics.

Today, one of the central messages of the peacebuilding community is that peace requires more than behavioural change to reduce and eliminate direct violence. Mission statements and public documents talk about negative and positive peace, about addressing structural violence and working for deep cultural change. They speak of the need to ask whose peace one is working for, and to change the perception of conflict as necessarily violent and harmful. Conflict is inevitable, and potentially a force for constructive change as it signals critical fault-lines in a community or society

and thus presents opportunities for addressing them. Development, in so far as it seeks to change a situation of poverty and injustice, is recognized as inherently conflictual. How that conflict is waged is key to the quality of the development process.

Peacebuilders also point to major world issues such as economic injustice, denial of rights and participation, and environmental destruction as underlying drivers of violence. They talk of systems, and how big changes can be initiated by small strategic interventions. This strategic thinking has embedded within it the idea of multilevel, long-term change. In short, much of the conceptual underpinning looks to far-reaching change. However, there is a real question as to how far these values are actualised when it comes to implementation.

3.2 Transformative and Technical Approaches

One sign of practice contrasting with the proclaimed goals and conceptual bases is the reluctance of many organisations to spell out their core values beyond comfortable generalities: what do they understand by the ‘bigger picture’, and what are the ensuing implications for their work? A glance at a sample of documentation of peace organisations confirms this.²⁰ Many are happier to develop strategic plans, funding proposals and risk assessments, than to clarify their ethical stance and draw out rigorously, and realistically, what that means, not only in the long term but in the here and now.

Further, the programmes and the expertise often seem to amount in practice to little more than ‘patching’ – attempts to create the minimal stability that would allow the current world order, driven by market forces and geopolitical power constellations, to step in. Numerous pieces of peacebuilding research hosted in countries of the North address the causes of war far away from their shores without seriously drawing attention to the unprecedented militarising role played by their own countries as preservers of global economic and political order in their own image. The activities of multinational corporations, arguably the biggest players in ‘the way the world works’, are often entirely excluded from conflict analyses, and where they are included, any work with them tends to be confined to a bit of conflict sensitivity here, a bit more social responsibility there. And where, for most peacebuilders, do climate change or energy consumption figure, either as factors in conflict dynamics or in the way international organisations travel across the world to conduct their meetings?

There is a global reflection going on as to what peace and wellbeing means for the world, and who should be responsible for it. The mantra of ‘the more you have the happier you are’, which has been the motor for economic and political development, is increasingly seen as not only unsound in terms of human development but also impracticable and self-defeating on a global scale. But the peacebuilding community does not seem to take much part in these debates. Many continue in the default mode of subscribing to the idea of liberal peace (defined by a democratic system, human rights and free market economy),²¹ afraid perhaps of venturing into the areas which might label them as utopians, or socialists. Viable alternatives are of course not straightforward, but by refusing to name or explore these issues, or incorporate them into its work, the peacebuilding community runs a real risk of becoming complicit in the maintenance of the current, unsustainable global system.

²⁰ International Alert describes its vision as “a world in which, when people pursue their human rights and seek chances for betterment for themselves and their communities, conflicts that arise are pursued with honesty, with forthrightness and also with wisdom so that they do not erupt into violence” (International Alert Strategic Perspective 2005-2009, available at www.international-alert.org/publications/245.php). Crisis Group spells out its goal as “prevention – to persuade those capable of altering the course of events to act in ways that reduce tensions and meet grievances, rather than letting them fester and explode into violent conflict” (Crisis Group Annual Report 2007, available at www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/miscellaneous_docs/crisis_group_2007_annual_report_web.pdf). The mission of the Carter Center “is guided by a fundamental commitment to human rights and the alleviation of human suffering; it seeks to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health” (see www.cartercenter.org/about/index.html).

²¹ As defined, for example, by the ongoing Liberal Peace and the Ethics of Peacebuilding research project at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (see www.prio.no/page/Project_detail/d/9244/49241.html).

The provisional typology below between vision and practice highlights some of the contrasting approaches used by those working in the peacebuilding field. It seems that, with an acceptable degree of oversimplification, one can situate much peacebuilding practice in one of two camps. On the one hand there is work aimed at fundamental political and social change – ‘transformative’ peacebuilding. On the other is incremental activity, which aims to make a practical difference in a specific domain, without necessarily challenging the deeper context. This we can term ‘technical’ peacebuilding. *Table 1* illustrates some of these distinctions.

It is interesting to note that roughly two thirds of the headings can actually be seen as complementary, not contrasting. In these cases, a technical approach can lead on to, or contain within it, a transformative one. For example, under ‘priority’ it requires only a shift of emphasis to include a deliberate focus on building relationships as an adjunct to addressing the explicit content or task. This framework, then, demonstrates that we do not necessarily need to be more large scale or global in scope in order to be transformative. The seeds of transformation can be sown in the smallest pieces of technical peace work, if only we are creative and courageous.

Still, some key elements in the table are almost inevitably at odds with each other. These point to choices which may have a major impact on the direction the initiative takes: whose agenda is it, who are we accountable to and whose peace are we working for?

It seems to the authors that most organisations in the peacebuilding community are focused on technical peacebuilding. Development organisations which adopt a peacebuilding perspective tend also to follow the same trend, often limiting their options to conflict sensitivity, which in many ways resonates with the technical approach.

Of course such a typology is oversimplified, but there may be some value in looking at the activity in our organisations and our field in this way if we are concerned with impact and big picture change. It might for example direct us to think about the obstacles to bringing transformative elements more to the fore. This would necessarily involve us in thinking about who is doing what in each of these columns. Are we talking of insiders or outsiders? If it is the latter, there is an argument that outsiders will do less harm if they stick to their technical expertise and do not try to transform situations they do not know from the inside out. If this is so, how can they do this without limiting the initiative of insiders?

Other issues arising from such a discussion might include the roles that bureaucracy plays in stunting the personal commitment of people and teams. Then there are implications for the role of professionalisation and what it is deemed to signify in the context of peace. Is the current view of professionalism consistent with transformative practice?

The technical approach on its own is, however valuable in the immediate situation, unlikely to help change the wider system. In fact, as we suggested above, it may well serve to reinforce the unstable and inherently unjust status quo – all in the name of sustainable peace. More broadly, this approach allied to the reluctance to spell out what is meant by positive or ‘greater’ peace is potentially disastrous. If we have nothing to say, or more importantly to do, about the way the world is now, what are we really doing? Our projects may simply hang in empty space. And such a position is manifestly self-defeating, because the ever more prosperous way of life apparently on offer as a result of the peace we are building is a chimera, never achievable, as the planet creaks under the combined weight of rampant consumerism for some, and the struggle for survival for – many – others.

TABLE 1 – Technical and Transformative Approaches to Peacebuilding

		Technical Approach	Transformative Approach
GOALS	Overall Purpose	To end a specific situation or open conflict: 'negative' peace	In addition, to influence the underlying structure and culture as an integrated element in building something better: 'positive' peace
	Agenda	Set by funders and project holders, with some limited consultation with community	Set and continually reviewed with community, in consultation with funders and project holders
	Objectives	Achievement of project objectives	Promoting shared vision of/for community, of which project/programme work is part
	Priority	Content of programme	Solidarity; relationships as well as content
STRATEGY	Focus	A specific piece of work	Building elements of wider change into a specific piece of work
	Evaluation	Focus on efficiency, project successes	Efficiency plus bigger picture impact
	Learning	Downplaying failures	Taking failures as starting points; inclusion of self-reflection and action learning
	Issues	Solve present issue	Expand, change, transcend contested issues
	Theory of change	Implicit: change in immediate situation will ripple out	Explicit: developed in relation to analysis and systems thinking
	Scope	One level, one sector	Multilevel, local-global, alliances across sectors
	Time horizon	Duration of project (plus extension)	Medium to long term
VALUES	Accountability	Primarily, in practice, to funders	Primarily to identified partners/community
	Whose peace?	Power relations are unchangeable: need to accommodate	Peace is for whole community, especially the weakest: option to work to change power relations if better future requires it
	Self image	A professional doing a good job	Agent of change, modelling struggle and transformation
ANALYSIS	Context	Project and work-focused, done by project staff	Adds ongoing conflict analysis and future scenario planning, all undertaken with wider community
	Actors	Good working relationship	In addition, works for change of perspective, goals, heart, will, inclusive sense of identity
	View of violence	Prevent and defuse it; ambivalent about its use	Race, gender and class dimensions are integral part of violence; transforming the energy into positive outcomes; active promotion of nonviolent approaches
	View of conflict	A problem in the way of achieving goals	Inevitable, an opportunity for development and change; consider options to intensify

3.3 Attitudes to Power: Deference deters Transformation

There are local grassroots organisations and movements in this field which have no problem with addressing vested interests and structures. Resistance to violence and injustice is often the prime reason they came into being. Struggle and a degree of hardship are part of their life; nonviolent direct action and imprisonment are not unusual.

When they team up with INGOs, they often expect them to take an equally robust attitude to their own governments and other vested interests located in their countries of origin. In this they get frequently disappointed. INGOs behave altogether differently – in what they themselves see as a professional manner. Research, dissemination of information, advocacy and argument are their tools of trade. Letters, meetings and reports are used to press a case. If and when this is refused – as it often is – little more can be done. Resistance and nonviolent action are only used by small, relatively fringe organisations. Partnerships between CSOs engaged in civil disobedience and Northern-based INGOs seem relatively rare.²²

This disparity between the apparent level of commitment between INGOs and local CSOs is often justified by suggesting that CSOs are ‘on the frontline’, while INGOs are backing them up. Such a position is hardly justifiable in a world where peacebuilders everywhere are adopting a systemic approach to their analysis of violence. In a globalised world, all of us are on the frontline of major world issues. It may be more obvious if the frontline happens to be a firing line as well, but political decisions which dictate the exclusion of parties from talks, or the tariffs on imported goods, are made on the frontline too, and in the name of the citizens of those countries.

So why do INGOs not take on their governments, or risk their livelihoods, in support of the causes espoused by their local partners? One reason may be that it is simply, and naturally, not sufficiently a matter of life and death to them. Another may be down to what processes guide the internal operation of INGOs and to who makes decisions on these matters. In some agencies there is disagreement on the message for public consumption on the home patch between programme departments, which tend to favour confrontation and protest, and policy departments, which take a ‘softer’ stance.

A further reason may be the increasing interchangeability and inter-relationship of government and INGO staff in some countries. In Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban, a quarter of the cabinet were from civil society.²³ At least one has gone on to become an ambassador. In many other countries civil society provides a natural rung on the ladder into politics. In the UK, Oxfam workers have been seconded to DFID and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, or moved over into government. The former head of policy at Oxfam is to become ambassador to Cuba. Is this creative thinking on the part of government, or a sell out from the agency side?

Above all, perhaps, there is the issue of power. With few exceptions, INGOs defer as a matter of course to their governments: they normally do not oppose them, especially in public, or risk disagreements over anything significant. After all, these governments are supposed to be democratic. Even when the invasion of Iraq loomed in 2003, and huge numbers of UK citizens marched against it in the streets, UK-based INGOs did not come together and take a public position against it. They have not been at the forefront of any subsequent moves to hold the political leaders publicly responsible.

These contrasting roles in relation to government and other powerful groups in their own societies are intriguing, and arguably a source of major weakness, especially when seen within the concept of ‘equal partnership’ so often espoused. Indeed it raises questions about the nature of

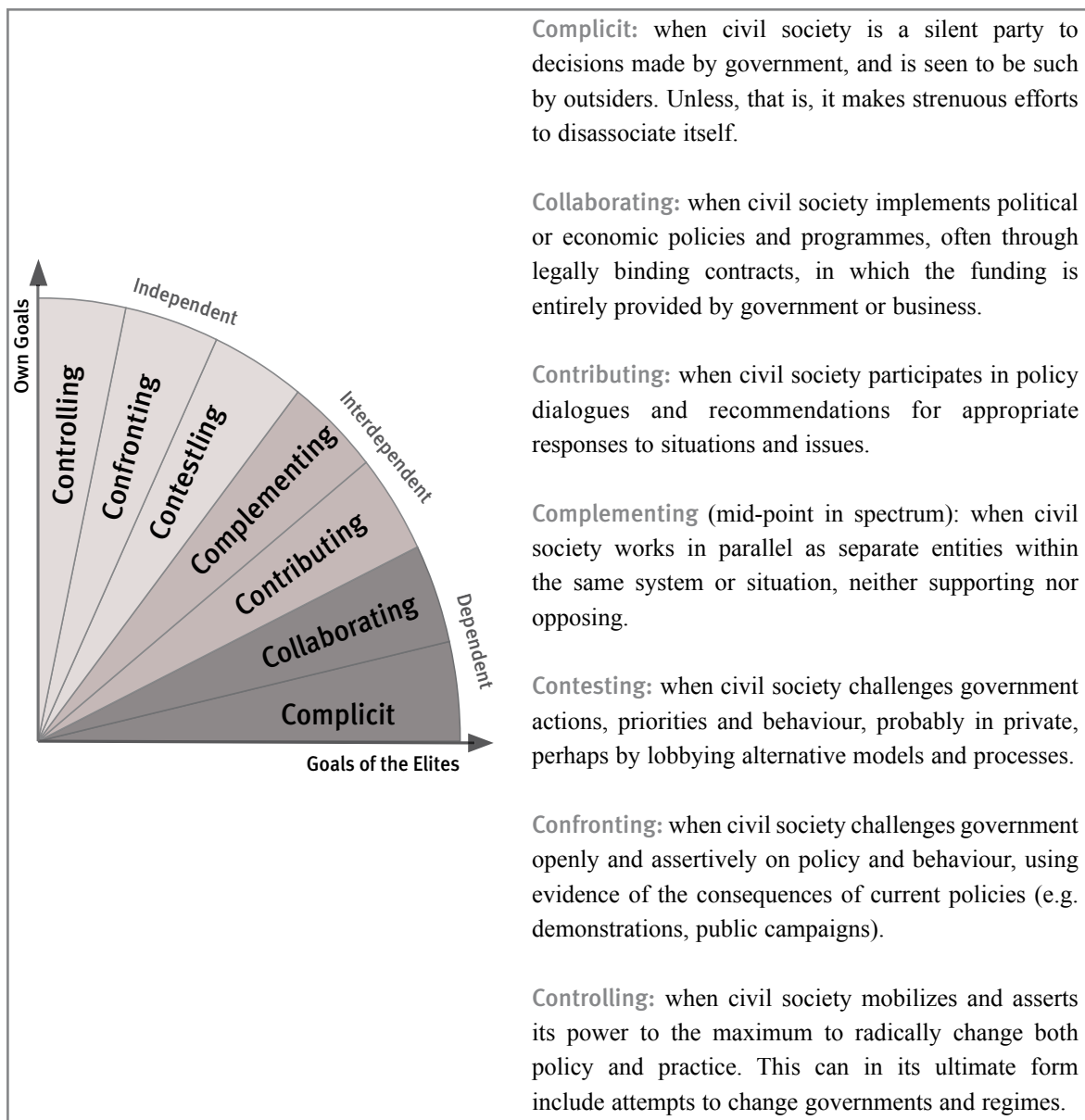
²² Exceptions that come to mind are cases when Northern-based INGOs have covertly supported resistance, and protected partners when their lives were at risk. For example, throughout the appalling violence in Central America in the 1980s, Oxfam kept no paper documentation that could be dangerous if it fell into the wrong hands. Reports were made orally to central committee meetings. Only when change came was the whole experience written up (Bridget Walker, comments on the draft of this paper, December 2007).

²³ From private conversations with cabinet members, 2003.

partnership itself, which is so often taken for granted and yet frequently serves merely as a veneer on highly asymmetrical relationships, whether between international and local civil society, or between governments and INGOs. It might help in part to explain the weakness of joined-up (grassroots to top) peacebuilding work, and the tensions evident in many North-South partnerships.

The diagram below²⁴ identifies a range of relationships which civil society can have with the controlling power elites in their societies. These reflect the salience of the goals of each party in the context of their perceived relative power.

DIAGRAM 1 – Civil Society Relations with Power Elites: A Spectrum of Options



²⁴ Adapted and developed from Barnes 2005. The original version of this framework was developed by participants in a workshop in 2003, in which Andy Carl (Conciliation Resources) and Simon Fisher took active roles.

It can be helpful to use this framework to map civil society relationships with either or both government and business in a particular situation. These will of course depend on factors such as the nature and policy of the government in question and the values and vision of civil society actors. Where there is a substantial degree of independence and a wide spread of values, one could expect to see a significant number of relationships which fall into all categories, except perhaps the last: controlling. In relation to the different roles and relationships of local and international organisations, we suggest that while both overlap in the interdependent category, peacebuilding and related CSOs tend to fall in the independent/interdependent categories vis-à-vis their governments, while INGOs largely tend to be dependent.

3.4 The Role of Funding

The unnamed ‘elephant in the room’ so far has been funding. This issue arguably affects INGOs differently, but remains powerful in determining policy and deterring transformative approaches. Most INGOs working specifically in the peacebuilding sector do not generate their own financial resources to any significant extent. When one looks at the huge increase in their size and activity since the early 1990s, it comes as no surprise that this has been engineered largely through funding made available by Western governments, who have come to see the success of this sector as critical to their own foreign policy objectives. INGOs and CSOs alike may have their own views about cause and effect, but when faced with large amounts of money to undertake work which implies acceptance of the current structures of a conflict (such as in the Middle East at the moment, where UK government policy explicitly excludes working with some of the key players in the conflict, labelled as terrorists²⁵) the temptation is too high for many. Further, the UK and EU guidelines currently being developed for preventing terrorist abuse of CSOs are likely to further undermine this work by aligning it with the political agendas of the ‘war on terrorism’, creating excessive bureaucracy and reducing the scope of programmes and partnerships (Hearson 2008).

In this situation of largely monopoly funding, accountability is increasingly directed to the funder, despite the rhetoric, not to those whom peacebuilders purport to support in their struggle. This in turn induces a culture of caution: only successes are reported in any detail, though failures are inevitably frequent and are often the most fertile arena for learning.

The dependence on the ubiquitous logframe also means that implementers are often unable to respond to unfolding events, as they did not predict them at the outset. Certainly, logframe analysis at its best can enable planners and activists to sketch out a framework in which everything clearly hangs together. However, the way it is often used in relation to funding leads to compartmentalisation of precisely those factors that in the peace field need to be observed in interaction with one another. Thus a useful planning tool gets turned into a mechanism whereby each issue is treated separately, and risks losing its meaning in the evolving picture of a conflict.

With the rise of both government and private spending on peacebuilding and related issues such as rights and development, civil society’s relationship with the elites has tended to fall progressively into the dependent category. This is hardly surprising, perhaps, but it does highlight the trade-off between resourcing and the realisation of the full spread of peacebuilding vision and values. If the outcome is that truly transformative approaches by INGOs are rare, at least partially because governments in particular are unlikely to favour deep-seated change, then the moral cost of funding to the peacebuilding field as a whole is high indeed. At the same time, for many smaller peacebuilding CSOs with less access to a range of income sources, civil society-based peace work

²⁵ The list of proscribed terrorist groups currently includes 44 organisations (14 of which are in Northern Ireland). It can be accessed at <http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/legislation/current-legislation/terrorism-act-2000/proscribed-terrorist-groups>.

often becomes dominated or skewed by their relations with funders, and therefore risks being undermined both in reality and in public perception.²⁶

3.5 Jealous Autonomy: Organisational Rivalry Restricts Joined-up Strategies

An additional main factor which seems to be holding the peacebuilding community back from achieving its potential is a lack of cooperation, both horizontally and vertically. Peacebuilders teach about working together and the virtues of cooperative problem-solving in the delivery of their programmes, but the reality is often markedly different. While the key issues of violence and war, economic injustice and poverty, denial of rights/participation and environmental degradation are analytically distinct, the way they manifest themselves in the world is interconnected. They are not separate problems, each requiring their own pressure groups and discrete interventions; on the contrary, they are inextricably intertwined. Major areas of intractable violence all over the world are self-evidently a mix of these factors, be that Sudan (Darfur), Israel/Palestine, Burma, Colombia or others. If environmental or peace issues are pursued in isolation from the others, the action risks being at best ineffective, and at worst exacerbating the entire situation. Yet much of the world, and civil society, persists in seeing and treating each as distinct.

That is not to say there are no significant joint efforts (Atwood 2006). Of course there are, but they are almost always around a specific piece of work, and usually rooted in joint funding of some kind – which, as discussed above, often substantially limits the scope of cooperation. Coalitions of INGOs across these issues which are seriously intent on developing and implementing common strategies are still a rarity. In-depth cooperation has been missing both globally and in-country.

On a country level, one can find a plethora of cases where local and international peacebuilding organisations and governments are working on a specific approach to a ‘hot’ conflict but do not check who else is active, let alone coordinate their activities. This risks an overlap, which can become damaging and be used by the protagonists to their advantage. (For example, in the experience of one of the authors, at one point in the Northern Uganda peace negotiations there were at least eight institutional players engaged in mediation, most of whom had no knowledge of the others.) In these cases the interest or intention to network with other interveners may often be there, but is simply not followed through due to pressure of events and perhaps organisational agendas.

Even in cases where INGOs are based in the same home country or region with easy access to each other, they often do not find the time to explore learning and synergies between them on an ongoing basis. This is changing in some areas as work on influencing government policy develops, but the culture of secrecy which exists about most activities where there are problems severely limits the extent of the learning.

A similar absence of cooperation can often be observed in regions where conflict is endemic and of low intensity, when both local and international organisations with different areas of expertise do not take the time to check out who is doing what and how their respective activities might reinforce each other to reduce the drivers of violence. There is a particular gap between peace and environmental groups, neither of whom seem as yet to fully realise how their respective work is mutually dependent.

This narrow field of vision is often combined with a ‘programme’ view of peace, which assumes a connection between the success of a particular programme and the advancement of a bigger vision for peace and wellbeing in the area, without further assessment. Many organisations also lack an explicit theory of change – an understanding of the way in which their work contributes to change in the broader context. When they do have this, it is still rarer that the vision comes from the people of the area.

²⁶ An account of some associated dilemmas can be found in Vukosavljevic 2007.

Looking at many peacebuilding organisations' self-descriptions, it is often difficult to see why and how their programmes emerged and were prioritized, how various activities were linked or coordinated, what their content was, what links and alliances have been made with other organisations, and ultimately, what difference they made. Without more joined-up work, and joint vision, there is a risk that peacebuilding will not be able to move beyond isolated programmes, successful or not in their own terms, and thus ultimately will not affect the overall situation.

3.6 Depth of Expertise: Lack of Imaginative Investment in a Competent Cadre

A final factor holding back the development of the peacebuilding field is, we believe, a critical shortage (compared for example to the development field) of experienced people, both inside a conflict and outside it, with the level of skills necessary to deal creatively and successfully with complex conflict issues. The lack of a sufficient number of such people can often, in our experience, militate against genuinely transformative work being carried through. There are of course leaders who emerge within every crisis with courage and commitment. They, however, often lack the necessary support, and get bypassed after the initial stages.

This may seem an odd statement given that over the past 20 years there has been a huge expansion of both NGO-based training programmes and academic courses in peace studies and related subjects. NGOs offer a plethora of opportunities for basic training in conflict skills, from 2-3 days to several weeks in duration. The best offer a mix of experience-based, practical methods which draw on the state-of-the-art of current adult education practice to introduce people to basic elements of peacebuilding and give them a chance to contribute their own expertise as they learn from others.

However, if we look at the needs of those working on intractable conflicts in many parts of the world, at all levels, insiders and outsiders, it is clear that peacebuilders and change-makers need a range of skills and knowledge which are not met through the current opportunities for training and support. Most of these courses are inevitably superficial, with little follow-through or tangible impact. Often they take their place alongside other introductory courses fitted into a heavy schedule, without being integrated into the strategies and plans of their organisations' work.

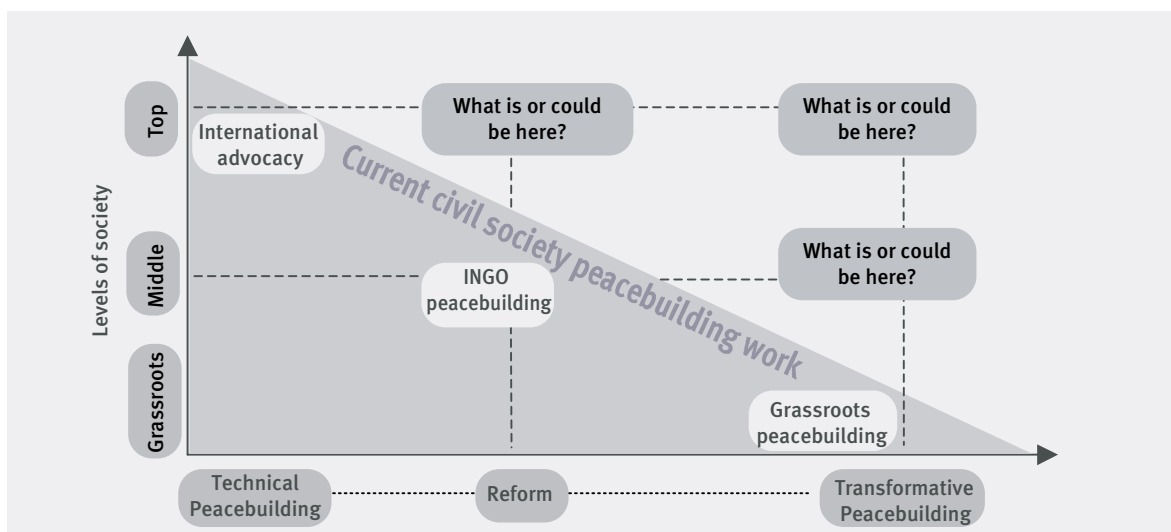
But when people want to develop their skills beyond this basic level to greater specialisation and sophistication, the options shrink. Training for trainers is sometimes seen to fulfil this need, but it rarely goes beyond the same introductory level. The only route for most is through university courses in peace studies, conflict resolution and related subjects. These are of course invaluable for many people who are looking for deeper knowledge and awareness of aspects of the peace and conflict field. They are an important element in the growth of the field as a whole, but are not necessarily suited for change agents, for whom the 'how' is as crucial as the 'what'.

The exploration of change, and the process of bringing that about, is rarely undertaken in university courses, and when it is, it tends to be from an abstract point of view, largely unconnected to students' life and work. This often has unfortunate effects for activist peacebuilders. Having accepted the path of taking a course in higher education (because it was the only option available, and perhaps having been given a scholarship), they find that their aspirations are not responded to and sometimes undermined. Not infrequently, having come back from a distant university course, they find themselves unable to re-establish the relationships and trust they once enjoyed, and end up switching to research or bureaucratic work. This process not only deprives their communities of leadership, but also reinforces the notion that the only valid researchers are those based in universities, usually far from the conflict they are writing or theorising about. Thus the pioneering work of hands-on peace workers – who, in seeking more effective ways to address violence in all its aspects, inevitably undertake research too – is for the most part lost to the field.

3.7 Mind the Gap?

The sum of the factors described above inevitably curtails real change, both in policy and in practice. Where our values and analysis suggest the need for transformative action, we often fall back on technical approaches. The result is a lack of transformative work – work that would reach below the surface issues and seek to affect the underlying dynamics which brought about the manifestations of violence in the first place – at crucial levels, including that of political decision-making. The diagram below indicates where the technical approaches tend to predominate, and where transformative work seems most lacking.

DIAGRAM 2 – Civil Society and Transformative Peacebuilding: Gaps and Options



When INGOs aspire to extend their work ‘upwards’ in a society, the tendency is to become less radical, more conventional, due perhaps to a natural deference or the assumption that such a tactic is necessary in order to be heard. If we accept that for peace to be sustainable we need to incorporate some radical changes in the current world order into our work and vision, then we have to address the apparent lack of significant interventions, especially at middle and higher levels, in favour of far-reaching change. In particular, this lack may mean that, as peacebuilders work to establish different policies at higher political level, they will not be able to adequately resource their adoption.

In summary, a discomfiting conclusion looms: INGOs seem to be palpably weak and ineffective as peacebuilders, and poor partners for their local colleagues who face the heat of often violent and protracted oppression and conflict. In the face of the unjust world order, their banners of ‘sustainable peace’ may amount to little more than a delusion. Those ‘on the frontline’ might even consider them fraudulent.

Why should this be so, when at the same time the peacebuilding community is full of well-motivated, committed people? One possibility is that many do see these contradictions but do not act on them, for pragmatic reasons.

4. What Can We Do? An Agenda for Transformative Peacebuilding

There is a long way to go to realise the full potential of the field, from grassroots to high politics. There are tantalising signs of what could be, if peacebuilders can mobilize imagination and their own power, and reach out to their natural allies. The shifts that civil society needs to make will almost certainly require more research, linked to clearer articulation of the emerging alternative(s), skilful engagement with the wider public, and determined lobbying, especially perhaps in political and business circles. The following areas, we suggest, need to be addressed simultaneously.

4.1 Accountability

Looking closely at who INGOs are accountable to in reality, it is often much more to funders and governments than to the people they work with and the communities they serve. Project proposals are, due to understandable practical constraints, often made with minimal consultation between local CSOs and INGOs; instead, a wealth of discussion between an INGO and a funding body, governmental or private, culminates in a logframe. This does not sit easily alongside a commitment to positive peace, justice and wellbeing of people and their communities.

How would practice change if these were to become the unambiguous central priorities? What would it look like if INGOs became more accountable to their partners than to their donors? What would it look like, for example, if INGOs encouraged local partners to set and monitor their own change agendas, and accompanied them as needed?

In addition, peacebuilders could also see themselves as being more accountable across time:

- *connecting to the past* – to those who have struggled for peace and justice, often paying with their lives, as well as those who laid the intellectual and practical basis for the field and the very concept of peace;
- *connecting to the future* – to those who will build on what will have been achieved, hopefully with increasing success.

4.2 Global Issues

Peace, as we have seen, cannot be separated from economic justice, or environmental issues, or human rights, including the right to participate in public affairs. In order to have a transformative, not simply technical impact on policies, a new kind of politics needs to evolve at all levels, one which is built on the values of respect, care and cooperation (Francis 2007), and which challenges the current power disparities that distort and divide societies, including those associated with wealth, gender and race. Economic analysis will need to play a much larger role in conflict analysis. If so much of the way the world works is driven by the global market and the corporations that dominate it, these must clearly feature more in our understanding of why things are as they are, and in our theories of change. This may in turn necessitate an increasing willingness to challenge the behaviour of market capitalism, well beyond corporate social responsibility, where this bears down on the communities by whom, and for whom, the struggle for peace is being carried out. It may mean being more willing to build alliances with those who are creating social and political alternatives, whether through popular movements or more local initiatives and structures.

At national and international levels this will certainly mean that INGOs will have to start serious conversations with others working on different issues. Exploratory steps on linkages between conflict on the one hand, and climate change or business practice on the other, have recently been

made by organisations like International Alert and Crisis Group.²⁷ Yet these are only initial steps. In building upon them, peacebuilding organisations will inevitably need to rethink and restate what they mean by positive/greater/sustainable peace. And they will need to start taking their potential for shaping the future more seriously.

The UK government's geo-strategic forecasters recently produced a review of strategic trends in the next 30 years, which depicted the global future as fraught with dangers and risks, arising from issues such as population and resources, identity and interest, governance and order, knowledge and innovation.²⁸ The recommended responses are largely along the lines of 'getting there first': if only 'we' keep ahead of the game, 'we' will stay safe. But doing so will inevitably involve restricting the rights of citizens, in the interests of national security, and risks further exacerbating those same dangers it tries to address.

The absence of imaginative, future-oriented policy-making, found in many places at governmental levels, is ultimately self-defeating. The challenge is out there now. The crucial question is: How can peacebuilders resist pessimism about the future and respond to the need for a better way to manage difference and disagreement that is evident both in politics and elsewhere? For example, could there be a cooperative effort to research and publish a formal response to the above-mentioned review?

4.3 Empowerment

The need for local empowerment as the centrepiece of analysis and practical work has been long recognized in the development field. Peacebuilding organisations have adopted the same rhetoric, but often fail to honour this at local level. In a world characterised by huge power disparities, changing power relations needs to move to the heart of peace work, at the local as well as global level, encompassing both political and economic structures. Yet it is not possible to be serious about such change and stay out of politics.

Perhaps this points to a need to develop new and varied forms of power, more cooperative and persuasive, at the same time highly political and hard-nosed, which would be based on an integrated analysis of global issues. Could this mean a greater willingness to support civil resistance movements – whose record of mobilizing political change is much stronger than that of CSOs? Could it mean a renewed interest in, and commitment to, active nonviolence? There are huge possibilities for expanding this dimension of peacebuilding, including working intensively alongside disaffected groups and those showing civil courage by resisting oppression, defending the rights of nonviolent resisters, and promoting fair and accurate media coverage of nonviolent initiatives and movements. More broadly there is great potential for developing a stronger discourse of nonviolent struggle and to promote this through educational and wider information programmes.²⁹

It is as well to remember that civil society is already far from powerless in the face of its own governments. How would, for example, the UK and US government have responded to a unanimous and well-publicised position taken by peace, relief and development organisations before the Iraq invasion in 2003 that they would boycott all 'post-conflict' work in that country on the grounds that the invasion was illegal? Many democratic governments have come to need civil society to deliver key aspects of their domestic and foreign policies. Other, more authoritarian regimes can be vulnerable to assertive civil society movements and organisations, who have access to external media and may be in a position to challenge the regime itself. There is no *a priori* reason why peacebuilders should adopt the apparently cooptive, 'me-too' attitude to government so

²⁷ For more information, see www.crisisgroup.org, www.international-alert.org and www.voluntaryprinciples.org.

²⁸ The DCDC Global Strategic Trends Programme 2007-2036 is available at www.dcdc-strategictrends.org.uk/.

²⁹ Similar ideas are developed in Merriman/DuVall 2007 and Francis 2002.

uncontroversially prevalent at the moment. In this context, it could be beneficial if peacebuilders came together to look at their relations with government, to explore ways of maximising their collective power and thus developing more symmetrical relationships with the state and other places of influence. In so doing they might also want to consider:

- to what extent government funding shapes programming and the organisations that deliver them;
- what work they want to do which is not acceptable or fundable by government or business;
- how it might be possible to become less dependent on government funding;
- what the advantages and pitfalls are of alternative models of resourcing, including corporate funding.

4.4 Improving Networks and Linkages

Much peacebuilding work, whether local, national or international, consists of separate projects by independent organisations. There is a wealth of successful projects at the local level. However, all too often they remain unconnected to the wider context at the regional and national levels, upon which local peace ultimately depends.

There is a range of existing networks and coalitions, of varying quality and effectiveness. How can these be reinvigorated in order to connect work for change at different levels and across the different issues and locations? For genuine peacebuilding to take place, we need to challenge the idea that each organisation is an island seeking its own independent wellbeing and begin to share information and resources systematically. Building such alliances requires substantial time, effort, determination and trust, but pays off by creating a new source of legitimacy and power. Process – policies, techniques and methods – may often provide the most acceptable entry point to other constituencies.

Networks can also be subversive, in the best sense. There is a significant number of people in government and business institutions who would like to see their organisations adopt a more creative, values-based approach to peace and conflict and who are in a position to influence policies on these issues if they have the arguments and relevant knowledge to hand. They can be seen as ‘insiders’: people who are looking for alternatives, can see the advantages of systematic, well-resourced peacebuilding work and recognize the failures of the dominant control-oriented, militarised paradigm. They are interested to learn how to do things differently, but do not want to buy into a significantly different values system. Nor could they while retaining their jobs. Is this a possible space where informal approaches, either explicit in intent or perhaps based initially on common identities or interests, can lead towards cross-fertilisation of ideas and a gradual change in attitudes and practice? Would this perhaps call for a single forum, real or virtual, where the different actors and viewpoints in the field can share experience and seek synthesis?

4.5 Delivering Change

Evaluation and needs assessment have been areas of major progress in recent years. There is now a greater tendency to focus on delivering ‘outcomes’ of a particular project, and to gain more reliable knowledge on whether they are achieved. But, with the focus on projects, the bigger picture often remains unaffected. Reporting, honest or not, still largely overlooks the effect on the wider context. There is a need to broaden horizons, and to value process as well as significant outcomes. Peacebuilding is not only about programmes that have impact in their own terms, but also about delivering real transformative change. It is about making sure that programmes connect with,

and affect the ‘peace writ large’. In doing so, they need to be influencing policies of others, local, national or international, political or economic. What real difference is made? How does one know? What are our criteria of change? Who cares?

Sometimes the impact sought will be not so much about new initiatives as about building resilience and resistance, by not allowing political expediency to interfere in a particular situation, by challenging short-term solutions that have negative long-term implications or by defending the gains won in previous years. It is also important to keep in mind that the seeds of transformation can be present in any single piece of work, as *Table 1* above demonstrated.

Box 2 – A Second Example from Kenya

The now well-publicised initiative in the Northern Kenyan district of Wajir during the 1990s to end inter-clan fighting was in its origin just one piece of work, comprising many technical aspects to ensure that the objective of ending violence was achieved. But it had transformative elements which ensured that its impact went further, both geographically and in time. These elements included the fact that the initiative was led by women, who themselves were members of wider networks; it aimed to include, influence and empower every person who encountered it, including government figures and intelligence services; it built a cumulative, multilevel infrastructure of peace embodied in the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC); and, crucially perhaps, in the initial stages it refused external funding and raised the necessary resources from those involved and from local sympathisers and businesses.

For a detailed description of WPDC’s work see, for example, Jenner/Abdi 2000.

Thus, delivering change is often less about scale than about a careful integration of creatively subversive elements into everyday activity. It involves joined-up thinking and conscious linking, both within peacebuilding work and with other sectors, at different levels. It means thinking and planning long-term, and thus moving beyond the project mentality.

4.6 Action Learning

It is not surprising that peace work produces many unintended outcomes, from positive ones to outright failures. We do not live in a world of linear causes and consequences, yet we often plan as if we did. A systems framework would offer more useful insights into how change happens, but it also requires a high degree of reflexive learning and adaptability, at personal and institutional levels. This calls for a willingness to learn from the work of peacebuilding and other sectors, and bring those insights back into practice. For most organisations this will mean a change of culture towards a more proactive and open sharing of successes and failures, and a greater willingness to plan future work with others. In addition, there is a need to invest in specially designed education for peacebuilders and change-makers, which would put action learning at its heart. An instructive example in the development field is the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methodology and its many offshoots. In the peacebuilding field, one such initiative uses action research methodology as the cornerstone for Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS), a 2-year graduate degree for practitioners, currently offered in Asia and the Balkans.³⁰ How might peacebuilding organisations innovate, still more vigorously, with the conscious aim of taking this constituency to a new level?

³⁰ For more information, see www.globalacts.org.

5. Conclusion and Outlook: Generating Change

Peacebuilding insights and frameworks continue to be selectively appreciated yet largely ignored in political decision-making, and investment by governments in generating and implementing nonviolent solutions remains limited. A practical step towards more effective engagement could be to work on an integrated policy platform that would seek to articulate policies founded on cooperation, not domination (Eisler 1990; Francis 2004). Such a move could initially bring together a range of civil society organisations, with the aim of sharing and deepening an analysis that recognizes the interconnectedness of the four domains of peace, economic justice, respect for the environment and human rights/political participation.

Such a process could begin in any country and should commit to:

- researching the interconnections of these issues at different levels;
- incorporating the resulting insights into the work and planning of participating organisations;
- formulating political policies with attention to all four areas;
- lobbying for the adoption of these policies, within government where possible, and at the same time looking for new ways to advance them outside and beyond government, including the UN, global civil society and platforms such as the World Social Forum;
- helping to publicise the understanding behind this approach as widely as possible.

If we are to make bigger waves, we need to clarify our theories of how political change happens. This is a topic now frequently covered in peacebuilding programmes, but is less often practically addressed at strategic level, especially perhaps by INGOs. Whatever conclusions we reach, it will be vital to work from grassroots up as well as at middle and top levels. One of the possibilities is to initiate a time-limited process to synthesize and articulate, more effectively than has been done to date, the core experience of practitioners in bringing about joined-up, multilevel change. The outcomes might take a range of forms: a resource for lobbying and campaigning for coherent policy alternatives at governmental and intergovernmental levels; a video or pocket book aimed at the wider public: short, sharp, with clear policy-making options backed up by evidence and rationale. A principal aim could be to show how adopting these approaches and principles would make life easier for those in decision-making and influencing positions, both domestically and in foreign policy – if such a distinction can be maintained any longer.

Such a process would impel peacebuilders to come together and identify the distinctive insights and alternatives they can realistically provide and advocate for from their knowledge and experience on various areas of policy including, for example, counter-terrorism, climate and the environment, community relations and education. There would be distinctive opportunities and entry points in different countries.

Yet this is not enough. The UN offers opportunities for engagement, especially perhaps through the Peacebuilding Commission where, so far, local civil society has had limited opportunities to influence policy. Another current process is The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, signed in June 2006 and by now endorsed by more than 70 states. It commits its signatories to supporting “initiatives to measure the human, social and economic costs of armed violence, to assess risks and vulnerabilities, to evaluate the effectiveness of armed violence reduction programmes, and to disseminate knowledge of best practices.”³¹ There is huge scope for

³¹ Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, June 2006, 2. Available at www.genevadeclaration.org/pdfs/Geneva_Declaration_English.pdf.

the engagement of civil society in turning such laudable sentiments into action, though governments are not universally keen. The Quaker UN Office in Geneva is providing the formal link for civil society to engage with the implementation of the declaration. A similar focal role could be played by regional and global networks with regard to other policy initiatives.

Much of this may sound random, but policy change is more an art than a science. Insiders often say it is a chancy process, in which critical moments of genuine receptivity and openness to change come unpredictably, but when they do, policy-makers will look seriously at whatever is on offer which comes from a credible source and provides answers to their predicament. Milton Friedman, the economics guru whose disciples have wrought far-reaching and highly contentious change in many societies, wrote: “Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, and to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.”³²

However, political will must also be mobilized. What is known about political influence suggests that the role of experts in the field who have ample information, experience and good argument at their fingertips is vital, but far from enough. There is also a need for at least two other kinds of inputs, rather as Malcolm Gladwell (2002) suggests: (1) We need *people who know people* – networkers who can spread the word to ‘insiders’ and those with influence through their range of contacts in the political world; and (2) we need *charismatic people who know how to persuade* – champions who can promote these ideas and values so that they become an accepted currency.

With networkers, champions and practitioners coming together in a concerted manner across global civil society, this could bring the main elements essential for generating political will for a different approach and for developing new structures and processes where current forms of governance resist or fall short. The relationship between civil society and state-level policy-makers is, and should be, inherently a difficult one. But it will at least become less characterised by dependency as and when policy-makers begin to recognize that there is useful, applicable, cost-saving knowledge coming from the community of peacebuilders. Power, in this case, would come from more research and better promotion of insights backed by international cooperation and solidarity.

Overall then, those concerned about peacebuilding will need to stop (yes, stop) and think together about how what they do contributes to the world they want to see. Such a process will need to be creative in itself and require people involved to think outside the box. It will involve working both at governmental levels, to resist or develop policy, and within society, to create alternatives and build movements.

The peacebuilding community, and those who see themselves as part of it, cannot shirk the challenge. In turning away from its core transformative values and rejecting a wholehearted engagement with power and politics, it has found the resources necessary to develop institutionally, and gained a measure of official acceptance, but, perhaps, lost much of the *raison d’être* which brought it into existence. If the future of peacebuilding is to provide technical expertise to help powerful states and corporations assert their dominance over the global system more amicably and cheaply, in the short term this is an easier choice to make. But in the long run it will not stand up to scrutiny, as the resources of the world become ever more contested, and rapid deterioration of the environment alters hopes and assumptions about a sustainable future for all.

³² Quoted in Klein 2007, 6.

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