

Chapter Three. 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 change the 'terms of trade', so to speak, 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? While these voices have already been raised in peacebuilding and other movements for change, they were highly contested and often muted. Now they are being heard more loudly, demanding a response.

This Chapter explores the rationale behind these critical points of view. It identifies some major obstacles to the achievement of big picture change. The subsequent Chapter 4 then sets out some possible and practical ways forward, if suitable energy can be mobilised.

3.1 Internal divisions weaken the field

The potential of the field seems to be curtailed by a number of major factors: value-based divisions, a lack of in-depth understanding of '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. All have to do with two vital aspects of peacebuilding, vision and politics.

3.1.1 Vision and values

The current field of peacebuilding would have 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 mobilisation 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 in the 1970s onwards through a range of writers and academics.

All of them 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.¹⁸ Inner peace, many of the pioneers agreed, was a crucial aspect of the development of peace workers.

Linked to these 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 in some real way being peace, or in Gandhi's words, 'be the peace you want to see in the

¹⁸ Curle, Adam. True Justice: Quaker Peacemakers and Peace Making (Swarthmore Lecture), Quaker Books, 1981.

world'. People who joined the field at that time were challenged to think about these values, and how to achieve them in the societies in which they lived. The implications were potentially revolutionary and many were inspired, as the authors have been, by these writings and by the people themselves.¹⁹ As a consequence of these beginnings much effort went into developing a deeper 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 recognised as inherently conflictual. How that conflict is waged is key to the quality of the development process.

Peacebuilders point to major world issues such as economic injustice, denial of rights and participation, and environmental destruction, as underlying drivers of violence. In their work, 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 and peacebuilding training often includes the skills and approaches needed for this.

In short, much of this background and conceptual underpinning looks to far-reaching change. The term 'conflict transformation' is perhaps most widely used now to express how this work is expected to contribute to building a big picture which would be radically different from the current state of the world.

3.1.2 Transformative and technical approaches

And yet, the practice contrasts with the proclaimed goals and conceptual bases. It is as if the perceived arena for what is possible has shrunk inexorably, and peacebuilders have lost the ability to see the wood for the trees.

One sign of this 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 will confirm 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. Yet one could argue, on the

¹⁹ See, for example, Fisher, Simon. *Spirited Living: Waging Conflict, Building Peace* (Swarthmore Lecture), Quaker Books, 2004.

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 <http://www.international-alert.org/publications/245.php>); International 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" (International Crisis Group Annual Report 2007, available at http://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 <http://www.cartercenter.org/about/index.html>).

strength of what people say about themselves and the field, that this second activity is a prerequisite of the first.

Further, the ‘sustainable peace’ being sought, the programmes and the expertise in hand 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.

A glance at the available information on the programmes of INGOs suggests that the peace they are working for is little different from that envisaged by the world’s power elites, entrenched in both governments and corporations. At least it is hard to find much serious evidence that they are making any kind of stand in principle or practice. 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 conduct their meetings?

There is a huge 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 to this silence 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.

The provisional typology below between vision and practice highlights some of the contrasting approaches used by those working in 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 can be termed ‘technical’ peacebuilding. The table below illustrates some of these distinctions.

It is important to note from the outset that, in our experience, the same people tend to find themselves on different sides of the line in different circumstances. This table therefore compares two approaches, not two types of actors, though it is possible that many in the field prefer the technical peacebuilding as more conducive to what they see as a realistic approach.

²¹ As defined, for example, by the ongoing ‘Liberal Peace and the Ethics of Peacebuilding’ research project by the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo. See http://www.prio.no/page/Project_detail/d/9244/49241.html

Table 1. Contrasting approaches to peacebuilding: ‘technical’ and ‘transformative’

	Technical approach	Transformative approach
GOALS		
Overall purpose	To end a specific situation / 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 presenting issues	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	Multi-level, local-global, alliances across sectors
Time horizon	Duration of project (plus follow-up)	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 of work	Agent of change, modelling struggle and transformation
ANALYSIS		
Context	Project and work-focussed, 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

It is interesting to note that roughly two thirds of the headings above 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 conscious 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. The seeds of transformation can be sown in the smallest pieces of ‘technical’ peace work, if only we are creative and courageous.

Incidentally, development practitioners may see a parallel in the long-running and sometimes acrimonious debate about the relationship between humanitarian relief and development. In the former case, it is argued, a task is to be done, a humanitarian imperative to be followed. The counterargument says that no action involving human beings can be solely technical, there are social relations involved in every intervention and they can be damaged or enhanced by the action. This has stimulated further thinking on how relief can be done in a developmental way.

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, whose peace are we working for?

It seems to the authors that most organisations in the peacebuilding community are focussed 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 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. And 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?

Case study 3. Search for Common Ground's programme on 'Women and Governance' in Burundi – what makes a project genuinely transformative?

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) started working in Burundi in 1995, in the aftermath of Rwanda's genocide. Its project on 'Women and governance' was launched in 2004, aiming to increase women's participation in political processes at the municipal, provincial and national levels. This was done through providing support to women's associations throughout the country. Capacity-building activities ranged from inter-ethnic meetings, to training in conflict resolution, leadership, organisational development and civic education, to awareness-raising through media.

In 2006 it undertook an external evaluation of this programme, which revealed that because much of it was implemented in the period preceding Burundi's elections, which took place in June 2005, the programme's focus shifted towards women's participation in elections, and largely overlooked work on municipal and province-level influencing.

One of the clearly transformative aspects of the programme was that it intentionally targeted different levels: from grassroots women's reconciliation to attempts to establish a national women's lobbying network. However the project scope (140 associations throughout the country) was probably too wide to aim for an in-depth impact. Ultimately it proved impossible to organise the national network, but because of the focus on the national level, organising smaller municipality-level lobby group did not materialise either.

Following the evaluation, a number of modifications were introduced to the second stage of the project, such as restructuring the country programme to merge women and youth work; narrowing the number of

beneficiary associations and the number of provinces targeted; strengthening staff's training skills and improving the project's monitoring framework. However, none of these seem to specifically address the issue of engaging women in political processes at municipality / provincial levels.

This example raises questions as to the orientation of a programme run by an INGO. In what circumstances can opportunities for a more transformative approach be accepted? What then constitutes its legitimacy? If it remains at the technical level, how does it minimise the risk of reinforcing a potentially unjust and unstable system of governance? It is worth noting that SFCG uploaded an external assessment undertaken in 2006 and its staff's response to it on the website. This is a rare practice of openness among peacebuilding organisations and is potentially transformative in itself.

Sources: 'Key Findings from 2006 "Women and Governance" Project Evaluation' (<http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/womengovkey.pdf>); Burundi Programme Overview (<http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/burundi/pdf/burundi.pdf>)

Why does it all matter? Well, one reason is that the technical approach on its own is 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 reluctance to spell out what we mean by positive or 'greater' peace and how to get there 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 weight of both rampant consumerism of many, and the struggle for survival of millions more.

3.2 Attitudes to power: deference deters transformation

There are 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.

This, however, is inevitably a generalisation. One can think of cases when Northern-based INGOs have supported resistance *sub rosa*, 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.²² Security concerns might have limited what INGOs now feel they can do – but there is still need for support for brave people resisting injustice in difficult circumstances.

²² Walker, Bridget. Comments on the draft of this paper, December 2007.

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 we, 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 citizens of those countries.

So why do INGOs do 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 more 'soft' stance.

A further reason may be the increasing interchangeability and inter-relationship of government and INGOs staff in some countries. In Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban, a quarter of the cabinet were from civil society. At least one went 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 FCO 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, or just different sides of the same coin?

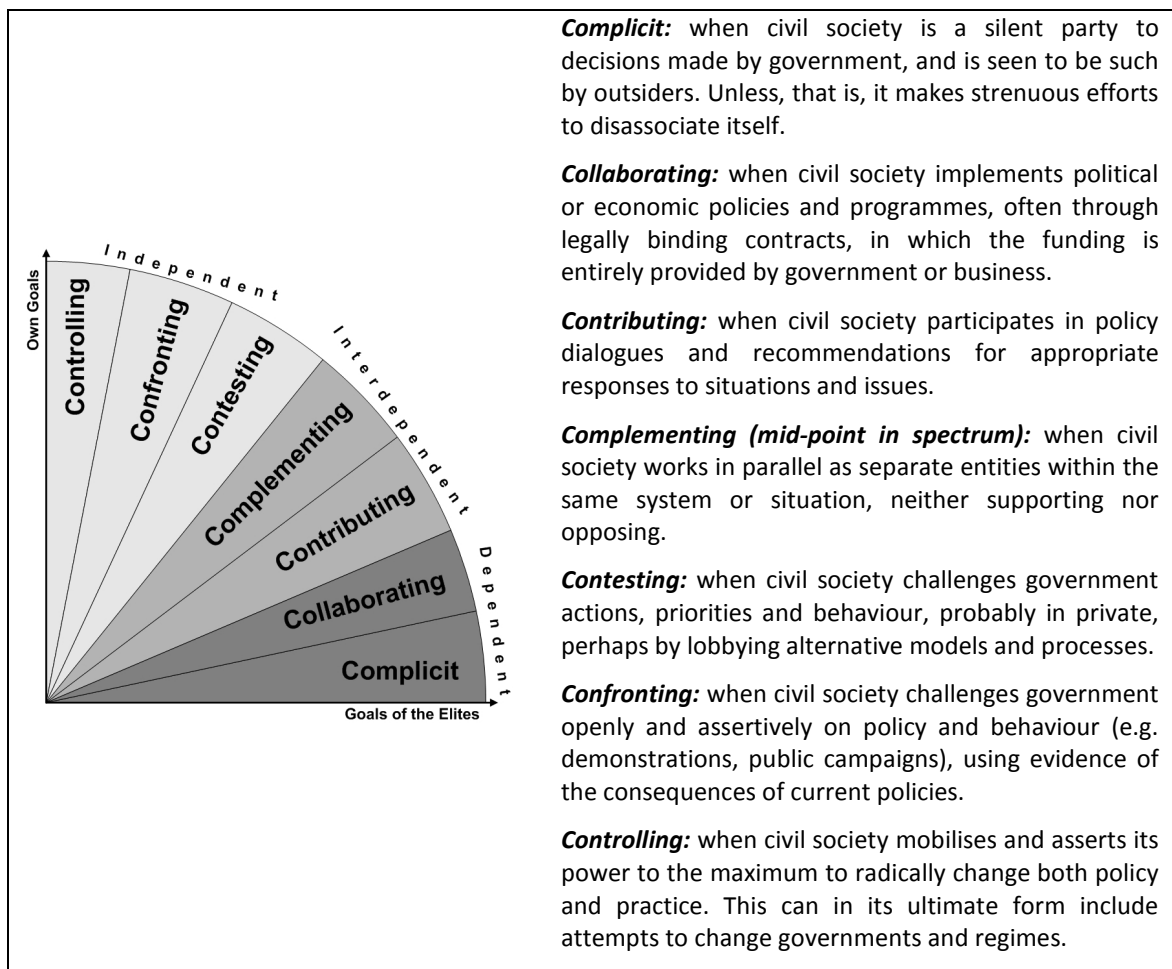
Above all, perhaps, there is the issue of power. With few exceptions, INGOs defer as a matter of course to their governments: they normally do not oppose them, especially in public, or risk disagreements over anything significant. After all, these governments are supposed to be democratic, and so should not be opposed beyond the somewhat genteel limits of democratic dissent, even when they act in blatantly undemocratic ways. 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 in the forefront of any subsequent moves to hold the political leaders publicly responsible.

These contrasting roles of CSOs and INGOs 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 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 below²³ identifies a range of relationships which one can observe that civil society has 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.

²³ Adapted and developed from Barnes, Catherine. Weaving the Web: Civil Society Roles in working with conflict and building peace. In: People Building Peace II: Successful Stories of Civil Society, Lynne Rienner, 2005. The original version of this framework was developed by participants in a workshop in 2003 in which Andy Carl and Simon Fisher took an active role.

Diagram 1. Civil society relations with power elites: a spectrum of options



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, this paper suggests 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. Yet analytically both groups would have similar access to entry points for change and both are 'on the frontline'.

In doing such a mapping one also has to note the gap between appearance and reality. Particularly in oppressive situations, local civil society organisations may adopt, of necessity, a position of apparent external complicity, while covertly adopting a more independent, contesting role. It is an open and valid question how much this applies in less oppressive, more democratic settings, but it may well be present to a degree. It is also worth noting that insiders are always likely to be better informed than outsiders, and to be best placed in any decisions about what leeway there is for adopting a more assertive approach.

3.2.1 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 in the specifically 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 terrorists²⁴, 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.²⁵ There are few prizes for an assertive, principled position.

A further important restraint in this regard can be the national law. In the UK, for example, connections to ‘terrorists’ (i.e. groups on the UK government’s proscribed list) are considered one of the ‘zero-tolerance issues’, by the Charity Commission²⁶, limiting the agencies’ freedom of manoeuvre. This is, however, not a new problem – in the 1970s support to South Africa liberation movement was sometimes seen as support to terrorism, as exemplified by a *Daily Mail*’s article entitled ‘Blood Money’.²⁷ This did not deter them and need not do so now.

In this situation of largely monopoly funding, accountability is increasingly directed to the funder, despite the rhetoric, not to those in the front line of 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. A notable exception in the UK is the system of block grants given by government to large charities, which allow a considerable degree of freedom and encourage reporting on the processes of learning. But the fact that only large charities can benefit from such grants does reduce the impact of this form of funding on smaller agencies, which mostly make up the peace sector at this point. They are no less productive and perhaps have greater need of the flexibility it offers.

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.

²⁴ The list of proscribed terrorist groups currently includes 44 organisations (14 of which in Northern Ireland). The list can be accessed at <http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/legislation/current-legislation/terrorism-act-2000/proscribed-terrorist-groups?version=1>

²⁵ Hearson, Martin. Collateral damage: NGO beneficiaries could be the next casualties of the war on terror. The Networker, BOND, February 2008, Available at <http://www.bond.org.uk/networker/2008/February/Networker78.pdf>

²⁶ The Home Office & HM Treasury’s Review of Safeguards to Protect the Charitable Sector (England and Wales) from Terrorist Abuse: The Charity Commission’s Response to the Consultation, August 2007. Available at <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/supportingcharities/terror.asp>

²⁷ Funding Conflict Transformation: Money, Power and Accountability. Committee for Conflict Transformation Support Review 25, November 2004. Available at http://www.c-r.org/ccts/ccts25/seminar_report.htm

Following from the section above, one might observe that with the rise of government or 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 are by their nature unlikely to favour deep-seated change, then the moral cost of funding to the peacebuilding field as a whole is high indeed.

As for development and related INGOs, there is a number who are larger in size and have a mixed portfolio of funding from the general public and business, in addition to that of government. While government priorities are no doubt still influential here, these INGOs also face a heavy task of cultivating a suitable public image. Public willingness to support more transformative approaches thus becomes one of their constraints in relation to peacebuilding. How can that awareness and support be built? And do these agencies themselves actually wish to do so?

Overall, for many smaller peacebuilding CSOs with less access to a range of income sources, civil society-based peace work often becomes dominated or skewed by their relations with funders, and risks therefore being undermined both in reality and in public perception.

Case study 4. Centre for Nonviolent Action, Balkans – principles and funding

The Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA) is a local peace organisation focussing on cross-border work throughout Balkans. It was founded after the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and started its work in Sarajevo in 1997. In 2001 it opened its second office in Belgrade, Serbia.

CNA's peacebuilding work aims 'to contribute to building fair and just societies'. Its tools include training in nonviolence and conflict transformation, support to peacebuilders, and publishing and film production. In training, it works with those who can multiply the effect (teachers, journalists, activists, social workers, youth workers, and political party activists, with a specific focus on rural areas), but also with those who are sometimes defined as 'spoilors' but in fact can be forces for peace, such as associations of ex-combatants and families of missing persons.

CNA openly acknowledges the tensions and dilemmas associated with support by external donors. Entering a funding relationship should, it believes, be guided by the organisation's values, integrity and independence. Organisations need to be fully aware of the degree of compromise that a particular funding relationship entails, and its own capacity to criticize or challenge a donor (or country) it receives funding from. Failure to do so undermines the standing of the whole peacebuilding field. For example, in expression of the disagreement with US policy, CNA has made a public decision not to accept funding from US government.

Decisions like these, however, are making it more difficult for CNA to deal with some of the key obstacles in its work. As CNA admits, 'the main challenge lies in the stirring of this "local" pro-peace energy into constructive action and attitude and in making it visible'. Sustaining energy and commitment among staff and wider networks has been a constant challenge: people burn out, lose their motivation or get frustrated by lack of support in their personal or professional environment, even when there is sufficient interest in and support for a spin-off idea; inability to secure funding exacerbates this even further.

Adapted from: Vukosavljevic, Nenad. Training for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation. Experiences of the "Centre for Nonviolent Action" in the Western Balkans. Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, 2007. Available at http://www.berghof-handbook.net/uploads/download/vukosavljevic_handbook.pdf

3.3 Jealous autonomy: organisational rivalry restricts joined-up strategies

The third 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 preach, or at least teach, about working together and the virtues of cooperative problem-solving in the delivery of their programmes, but the reality is often markedly different.

As indicated at the start of this paper, 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 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 all get exacerbated. 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.²⁸ Of course there are, but they are almost always round 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.

Globally there is no agreed forum, real or virtual, where agencies meet and mingle around the themes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. As a result, the differences become hardened around loyalties to particular institutions or figures and the synergies are not realised. This may be one reason why peace work has yet to develop its own international codes of conduct and standards, and patchy quality remains acceptable in many places.

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 others. In these cases the interest or intention may often be there, but is simply not followed through due to pressure of events and perhaps organisational agendas.

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 perhaps 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. Many organisations lack an explicit theory of change –

²⁸ Some of the examples of both cooperative initiatives and failures to cooperate in the disarmament field can be found in Atwood, David. NGOs and Multilateral Disarmament Diplomacy: Limits and Possibilities. In: Borrie, J. and V. Martin Randin (eds) Thinking Outside the Box in Multilateral Disarmament and Arms Control Negotiations, UNIDIR, 2006. Available at <http://www.unidir.org/pdf/articles/pdf-art2580.pdf>

an understanding of the way in which their work contributes to change in the broader context – and when they do have this, it is still rare that the vision comes from the people of the area.

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.

Without more joined-up work, 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.

Case study 5. African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes – where are the connections?

The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is a South African organisation established in 1991 and working throughout Africa ‘to bring creative African solutions to the challenges posed by conflict on the continent’. Its activities include training in topics ranging from interpersonal conflict resolution to international peacekeeping; policy and advocacy; exchanges and dialogues; and research and publishing. It produces a wide range of publications, available online, from a quadrennial ‘Conflict Trends Magazine’, to biannual academic ‘African Journal of Conflict Resolution’, to a series of Occasional Papers and books on peacebuilding in the African context.

ACCORD’s website lists an impressive range of innovative activities, implemented in the framework of its own programmes or at the invitation of others. What is more difficult to see is why and how these programmes emerged and were prioritized, how various activities were linked or coordinated, what was their content and what difference they ultimately made.

For example, ACCORD’s ‘Training for Peace in Africa’ programme includes training civilian peacekeeping and peacebuilding personnel, research and publishing, and policy development. Through this and earlier programmes ACCORD has trained 12 thousand people from throughout Africa – civil servants, businesspeople, military, police and civil society. What is less evident is the way in which this training programme contributed to or benefitted from the organisation’s other engagements; what links and alliances were made with other organisations; and ultimately, how this work affected the bigger picture. With this undoubtedly excellent organisation, as with others, a major challenge is to be able to demonstrate such linkages, and spell out publicly the theory of change on which its work is based.

Source: www.accord.org.za

3.4 Depth of expertise: lack of imaginative investment in a competent cadre

A further 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 such people in sufficient numbers often, in our experience, does not allow for genuinely transformative work to be 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. These are naturally variable in quality, but the best offer a

mix of experience-based, practical methods which draw on the best 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 *changemakers* need a range of skills and knowledge which are not met through the current range of 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. Thus it is not surprising that, with donor fatigue setting in, it becomes even harder to fund peacebuilding training.

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*. Peacebuilders surely need more experience-based, participative, practical approaches, to a higher level of complexity, which include theory in all its dimensions, and test it continuously against the reality of the learner-practitioners.

University courses, while they may contain the full range of ideas and theories, including the most radical, tend still to offer a learning process which is largely conservative and hardly adjusted to what we now know about how adults learn best. In particular, the learning is usually not applied in any tangible sense. The task of the learner, at least until the graduate level, often remains to imbibe and investigate what is deemed important by the institution and to present that back in a form which can be readily assessed by university examiners. The creation of knowledge and theory by students below postgraduate degree level is not deemed to be an appropriate or feasible task in many institutions. With notable exceptions, the exploration of change, and the process of bringing that about, is rarely undertaken, and when it is, it tends to be from an abstract point of view, largely unconnected to students' life and work.

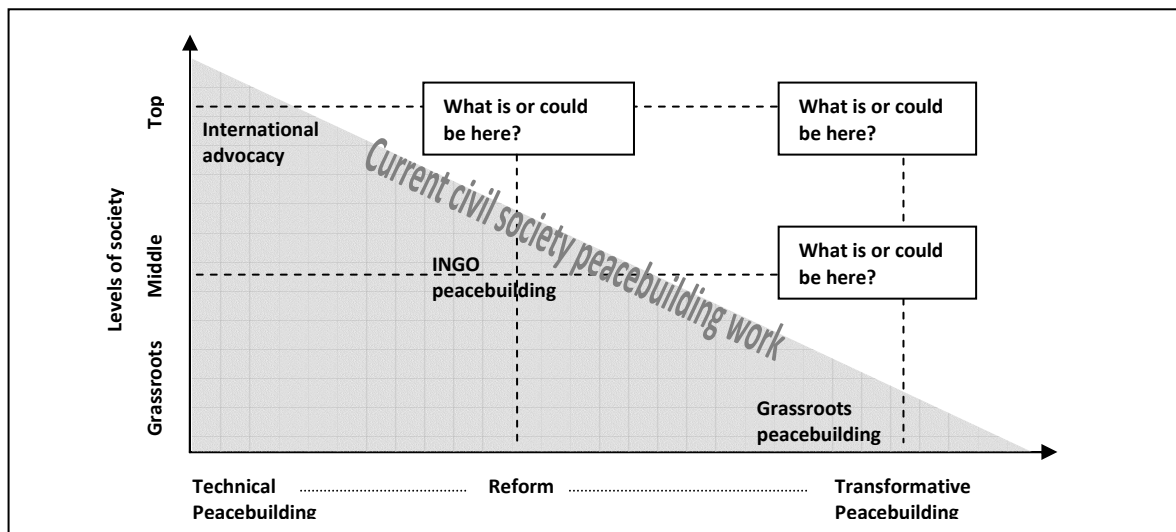
This often has unfortunate effects for activist peacebuilders. Having accepted to take a course in higher education (because it was the only option available, and perhaps because they have been given a scholarship), they find their aspirations not responded to and sometimes undermined. Not infrequently, 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.

It is a critical problem for the peacebuilding community. Civil society needs to invest in second-level, value-based training and capacity-building in creative partnerships with universities and other learning institutions who are willing to explore new methods, and enable their students to engage more proactively with social and political issues. One of the ways to take it forward is likely to be the introduction of an action learning methodology, combining action research and self-reflection with intellectual rigour.

3.5 Mind the gap?

The sum of the four factors described above inevitably curtails real change, both in policy and in practice. Even where our values 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 acknowledge 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 would 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 unsustainable and unjust world order, their banners of ‘sustainable peace’ might amount to little more than a delusion. Those ‘on the front line’ 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.