



Towards Another World

Voices from both sides of the Atlantic



This collaboration shows the work of the global network ACTION for Conflict Transformation in two separate but interconnected parts of the world. The ACTION global strategy is to allow the regions of ACTION to lead the growth of the global movement. In different regional centres ACTION will grow in accordance with the conditions it faces and the local strategies it uses.

Part of this will include:

- Linking to and helping to develop globally informed opportunities for sharing and learning
- Amplifying the needs and concerns of people from within the regions, and
- Adding strategic opportunities for transforming local conflicts.

In this way the global aspect of ACTION has the potential to grow stronger than if we had a single institution responsible for maintaining a global presence. Two of these centres are based in Guatemala and South Africa. They have led the way in the production of this book – a collaborative effort between peacebuilders in Latin America and Africa.

Editorial team: Lucy Collins, Luis Davila, Richard Smith, Sandisiwe Qweni, Sylvia Aguilera Garcia, and everybody involved in our collective efforts to make another world possible.

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Stories from Africa

Introduction

The post-colonial history of Africa tells a true tale of a war-torn continent where attempts at self-governance have been largely unable to manage a legacy of dispossession and selfish interests without plunging into conflict. Many African states have been hampered by instability, corruption, resource exploitation and authoritarian forms of control and misrule.

The vast majority of African nations are republics but few have been able to sustain democratic governments, many falling prey to military coups, extreme violence and even genocide.

The source of these protracted conflicts is often rooted in the exclusion or marginalisation of groups of people. This is created by an uneven distribution of wealth, divisive territorial and colonial boundaries, prejudicial treatment of indigenous people, the privileging of some groups or tribes at the expense of others, poor performance by local governmental infrastructures and the formation of non-democratic or non-participatory governmental systems. Amidst all the chaos there have been people and organisations that have worked tirelessly for sustainable peace, development and good governance.

They are often undervalued and not recognised by governments or any regional or continental body, but their presence on the ground is known by communities. These are grassroots workers who have dedicated their lives to bringing about change on the continent of Africa.

These are some of their stories, in which grassroots workers and social activists have played active roles in bringing change to their communities. Using conflict transformation strategies to bridge the gaps between peacebuilding and development their contribution is motivated by the belief that another world is possible.

The stories illustrate some of the key challenges faced by peacebuilding practitioners and development workers throughout the continent. They highlight the importance of the information sharing networks that work within this field. The ACTION Support Centre, the African regional hub of the global network ACTION for Conflict Transformation, has played a central role in encouraging the processes outlined in many of these stories. Through its solidarity work during conflicts in places like Zimbabwe, its advocacy work through the Peace and Development Platform and through its training and capacity building programmes, the Support Centre has assisted hundreds of grassroots communities in their quest for solutions to the debilitating effects of violence.

Though no two stories are the same, the challenges faced by peacebuilders are often very similar: a fragmented or polarized community; disempowered traditional leaders and dysfunctional indigenous systems; a fundamental breakdown in intra-community communication; and a culture of empathy and solidarity that has served as the foundation for positive change. The divisions may be religious, ethnic, intergenerational, or a combination of all of these factors.

Most interventions have needed to work across many levels and in various ways in order to include the entire community and all those who have an effect on them.

One organisation that has recognised this is the Kibera Initiative. Aziz Abdul of the Kibera Youth Programme for Peace and Development tells a story of ongoing work in the slums of Kibera, in Kenya.



Kenya

The Kibera Initiative: A local capacity for peace

Aziz Abdul - The Kibera Youth Programme for Peace and Development (KYPPEDE), Kenya

Kibera is the largest, most populous and most condensed slum in East and Central Africa, with a population of about 1.2 million people. The Kibera Youth Programme for Peace and Development (KYPPEDE) is a local inter-religious network of youth organisations based in the Kibera slums of Nairobi. The organisation was founded in 2000, when Kibera was characterised by ethnic and religious violence. Over the years, it has initiated a number of activities that have led to enhancing many peacebuilding structures in Kibera. Among these are the Kibera Inter-Religious Forum for Peace, the Kibera Youth Development Programme, the Nairobi Youth Network for Peace, and many others.

Aziz Abdul, a Peace and Development Platform (PAD) member and a peacebuilder with KYPPEDE, explains: "We reach the entire Kibera community through the abovestated means. We also are able to reach out to the wider Nairobi area, and other parts of Kenya, through networking with partners such as the Kenya Action Network on Small Arms. As a result of this, our work has been relevant and effective, and this can be judged from the successes and impact felt in all aspects of our work, including peacebuilding, community policing and small arms control."

KYPPEDE's ultimate objective is inculcating a culture of peaceful coexistence among the ethnically and religiously diverse community of Kibera; to this end it carries out several activities:

- Capacity building in peacebuilding and conflict transformation (trainings, workshops and seminars);
- Advocacy and lobbying (organising campaigns, rallies, outreach through IEA materials and organising major sporting activities); and
- Research and documentation (Documenting our work periodically through our semi-annual newsletter).

The objective is long term, and non-conflict specific. However, there are many peacebuilders working in small communities all over Africa who are focused on specific instances of conflict.



Zimbabwe

Gomoza: A small miracle

Dumisani Ngwenya – Grace to Heal, Zimbabwe

Dumisani Ngwenya of Grace to Heal Church in Zimbabwe tells a story of the community of Gomoza, a small rural village that has felt the effects of the country's political crisis. His words illustrate how individuals, families and communities can be affected by politics and how peacebuilders have intervened to bring about a change for the better. This example highlights in particular the unique role an impartial third party civil society organisation or a non-governmental organisation can play in building peace within a community, particularly in a reconciliatory role, provided they understand the full context of the conflict and the extent of its impact.

While the use of violence as a political and campaign tool has become entrenched in the Zimbabwean social psyche, its aftereffects on communal relations is often ignored or overlooked. However, the damage done by such violence, especially where it pits a community against itself, should never be underestimated. Neighbours, long-time friends, relatives and even family members no longer speak to each other, let alone participate in family activities.

One community that has recently experienced this is Gomoza, in Lupane District in the Matabeleland North Province. On 20 June 2008, supporters of the Zimbabwe African Nation Unity Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) went on the rampage, beating up supporters of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in preparation for a rally that was to be held the following day. They had, in fact, established a "base" just outside the primary school in a dilapidated building from where people were sent out to targeted individuals, visiting them at their homesteads and beating them up.

MDC supporters decided enough was enough. On the day of the rally they ambushed ZANU PF supporters coming from the rally by a bridge. As it was dark, people were beaten up indiscriminately and dogs set upon them; schoolchildren and the elderly were also on the receiving end of the revenge attack. After that they went to the "base" and destroyed cooking utensils. In retribution, ZANU PF sent its youths to all known MDC supporters' homes and forcibly took plates and pots to replace those that had been destroyed. Several MDC youths were arrested yet no ZANU PF supporter was arrested.



One of the top MDC officials had to flee his home and live in the bush for a while for fear for his life. Traditional leaders were also harassed and the headman was made to jog from his homestead to the “base”, a significant distance.

While the violence eventually died down, it left a much-polarised community. People no longer trusted each other; at gatherings, they sat according to their affiliations. One could only drink beer with people from one's party for fear of being poisoned. These fractured relationships extended into families. In one, a ZANU PF leader, who had sent people to beat up his own sister simply because she belonged to the opposition, is now ostracized from his family; when he lost a child, his family members refused to visit him or assist him in his time of need. He is also unable to attend family funerals.

The polarisation even crept into the church. This community was at such a knife edge that it was no longer possible for community meetings and development programmes to continue. The simple procedure of convening the community became impossible as attendance now depended on who called the meeting. Neither the councillor nor the headman could call one and get the whole community to attend; people would come or stay away depending on whether the person who called the meeting was perceived to be for or against them.

An unforeseen consequence of this whole incident was that the violence spilled into neighbouring South Africa, where the children of affected MDC members were reported to have assaulted the children of the ZANU PF supporters. It was feared that when these children came home, violence would flare up in a big way and it would affect ZANU PF more. One young man is said to have written to his mother, a councillor and at the forefront of the violence, to stop forthwith as his life was in danger.



The intervention

When a staff member heard about the violence he visited the area and met the wounded from both parties. In early October we went back into the community to help with a conflict resolution workshop attended by church, traditional and political leaders from the two parties - 35 people in all. Since then we have been working in the community, visiting individual leaders - church, political and traditional - trying to understand their perspectives on the violence and its impact on their community. Follow up meetings for the traditional leaders and the politicians were held separately in an effort to empower the traditional leaders who had been overpowered and manipulated to further the interests of one political party. They pointed out that their people wanted the political leaders, as the instigators of the violence, to apologise publicly to the people.

After further work, particularly with the local politicians, it was eventually agreed that Grace to Hope would facilitate a church service that could be used as a platform to express this public apology, to seek forgiveness and to try to work towards reconciliation.

Working with the churches in Lupane, 4 December was agreed on as the day for this service. On the day, pastors from Bulawayo and Tsholotsho, the headman from the neighbouring area and a colleague from Harare travelled to Gomoza. The meeting was well attended with 500 to 600 villagers present, including a significant number of young people. The political parties were represented at both local and district levels.

After words encouraging the community to return to what it had been before the violence, party representatives for both sides stood up and offered apologies on behalf on their organisations. The highlight of the day was the frank and sincere admission by the vice-chairman of ZANU PF that his group indeed was the originators of the senseless violence.

The service was the beginning of the communal healing. Though there are still two or so high-ranking officials who remain unrepentant and unable to offer an apology, these individuals have become isolated, with little, if any, support from their party members. They are no longer respected within the community.



More work awaits us in the new year as we visit individual victims to offer psychosocial support. The issue of restitution has been brought up by several people at several meetings. Working through this will pose a challenge as both sides lost property, including things like watches and party regalia. There is a question about who will compensate whom for what. Should both sides call it square? If they do, what about those people who are now struggling to cook because of the losses incurred? When does compensation stop? What happens to those who had limbs broken and maybe incurred medical costs? It is clear though that some sort of communal consensus satisfactory to all must be found before people can continue with the journey towards reconciliation and forgiveness.

The senselessness of the Gomoza violence is clearly illustrated by the fact that it is one of the three places in which ZANU PF won local council elections. Why they decided to use violence for the presidential rerun remains a mystery even to some of the level-headed within the party. One thing for sure is that just about the whole community has passed a vote of no confidence in not just the councillor but the party as well.

We believe that the deconstruction of a culture of violence and the construction of peaceful and nonviolent conflict resolution is a long-term objective that goes beyond a generation. So while we may celebrate the miracle of Gomoza, we are under no illusion about the work that still remains to help create a nonviolent community. But we believe that this goal is attainable in every society.

“We thank you for intervening in this conflict and for bringing us together so that we can resolve our conflict. I for one was at a loss as to how to bring the whole community together to deal with this.” (Joseph Moyo, ZANU PF vice-chairman)



Uganda

Making a breakthrough in Kitgum: A local mediation initiative

Jackson Omona - National Peace Building Initiative in Uganda, Uganda

The recognition in Gomoza that a key power structure - that of the local traditional leaders - had been undermined, was key to understanding the complexities of the conflict and to finding solutions. In a similar vein, this case study from Uganda speaks of intervention that placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of relevant traditional rituals in the reconciliation process. Jackson Omona of the National Peace Building Initiative in Uganda tells a story that illustrates just how limited resources and tribal divisions can play a role in causing conflicts on the continent, and how peacebuilders have intervened to bring about change.

The Pajong and Pubec clans had a conflict over land boundaries in the early 1990s that led to the arrest and detention of Obonyo Alfred of Pajong, who died of pneumonia on 29 August 1992 after being subjected to harsh conditions in the police cells. This marked the beginning of a rift between the two clans, which had previously lived in harmony in the same village for many years.

The conflict was exacerbated by the massacre of 56 civilians by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) on 24 July 2002, which is alleged to have been triggered by Otim, a member of Pubec clan who had escaped from the captivity of the LRA with a gun. It also led to the massive displacement of the community from the whole of Mucwini Sub County into a camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP).



The intervention

In December 2007, I talked to several Pubec and Pajong elders and later analysed the conflict to identify the parties and the power relationships, the context, and the root causes of the problem, as well as the gaps in previous attempts to resolve the crisis. It was clear that the conflict was complex. After several unsuccessful attempts by cultural leaders and civil society organisations to seek a settlement, I recommended the district authorities appoint an impartial mediation team. A 10-man team was appointed, led by the retired Bishop of Kitgum, Macleod Baker Ochola II, and they began their work in March 2008. World Vision Uganda played an important role in facilitating the mediation through the Kitgum Peace Building project.

The mediation team has made a breakthrough in resolving the conflict. As a social responsibility, Pubec clan has agreed to pay reparations for the late Obonyo to Pajong clan. The two clans have also agreed to hold a reconciliation ceremony – *mato oput* – after paying the reparations in full in February 2009. It was also agreed that protecting the 56 civilians from the LRA was an obligation of the government of Uganda, and therefore Pubec clan would not take responsibility.

As a result of these initiatives, the two clans are now able to interact at social functions such as funerals, traditional marriages and markets. Local community capacity to resolve conflicts has also increased. One of the main reasons behind the success of this intervention has been attributed to impartiality and the focus of the mediation team.

The experience in Kitgum highlights one of the key challenges faced by peacebuilding practitioners: the need to not only ensure a successful resolution of the conflict, but also to ensure that the community is left with a greater capacity to resolve conflicts in the future. The following case study illustrates how in Sierra Leone, in a conflict transformation intervention, peacebuilders used a number of different methods and tools to ensure that the changes introduced were sustainable and that the potential threat of future conflict was mitigated. The in-depth documentation of the experience in Sierra Leone serves as a source of action-based learnings and insights that may be of assistance to others working in similar situations.



Sierra Leone

Transforming conflicts, transforming lives

Richard Smith – ACTION for Conflict Transformation in collaboration with Partners in Conflict Transformation, Sierra Leone

This case study highlights the initiatives of conflict transformation practitioners in Sierra Leone. It documents the innovations that emerged following a Christian Aid (CAID) impact assessment of a series of peacebuilding projects across the country. As a cluster of CAID partners, the Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), Sulima Fishing Community Development Project (SFCDP) and the Methodist Church of Sierra Leone (MCSL) identified and implemented a range of creative engagements that served to strengthen and give fresh direction to efforts aimed at consolidating and giving practical meaning to the then emerging peace in Sierra Leone.

The conflict in Sierra Leone was not ethnically based; it could probably be better described as intergenerational. The strongest demands for change came from the youth, and were related largely to disenchantment with past government practices and the need for viable employment opportunities.

During the war, the civilian population was brutally abused to further the aims of each conflicting party, and the scars left by 10 years of civil war ran extremely deep. Eyewitnesses and survivors who fled RUF-controlled areas gave detailed accounts of widespread looting, rape, abduction, killings and mutilations by RUF forces. About 2.5 million people, nearly half the population, were made refugees or were internally displaced. An estimated 27 000 children were enlisted as soldiers, about 75 000 people were killed and 20 000 were maimed through violent amputation.

Sulima, on the coastal border with Liberia, was a vibrant community of over 600 households, with a thriving fishing economy and regular trade with neighbouring Liberia. Families lived in solid structures, attended school, were supported by a local clinic and engaged in building the future. The war reduced Sulima to a dense tangle of jungle, left untamed to overrun the stone foundations, the remains of structures burned and bombed to nothing.

This devastation was discovered by exiles returning tentatively to Sulima after an absence of several years. Finding nothing, they set up thatch shelters, lit the first fires to cook the first simple meals and slowly began enticing people back to begin again. This is only one example of what happened in so many villages across much of the east and north of the country. While an end to active hostilities and much of the intense violence that characterised the war was a huge relief, it did bring the kinds of changes people needed to live securely.



In many places basic living conditions were worse than they were before the war began.

The reasons behind the conflict can be seen at several levels. At village level, power was maintained by the elderly men and the local chiefs. This was a source of tension for the youth, exacerbated by the role the local chiefs played within the traditional justice system. The local chief was the final arbiter of justice, along with a clerk and his advisers, with the power to pass sentence and impose punishments, often in the form of fines. High levels of corruption and misuse of power have been reported by youths as a key factor in the frustration and disaffection that led to their involvement in armed movements. Another key element that contributed to violence was the over-centralisation of the government, and the perception that it was out of touch with the needs of communities. Ordinary people had little sense of involvement and virtually no means to participate in decisions that were being taken. Unequal patterns of development between urban and rural areas increased this sense of isolation.

While a massive initial interest from the international community resulted in several relief and development initiatives, these were seldom driven by community members and often ignored the local capacities that already existed. Many projects also moved to areas more in the limelight and presumably more in need of assistance. In many cases, the flow of resources into communities increased tensions and further marginalised some groups of people.



It was mostly men who fought the war in Sierra Leone but women and children were directly affected by violence and the impact of forced displacement



The intervention

Much of the work done by MCSL and NMJD and the work of SFCDP in Sulima was focused on areas worst affected by the war. The hope was that the combined strength of a number of different organisations would create a richer pool of experience and learning, and a more effective tool to influence policy makers at national, regional and continental levels. This was an important part of developing an integrated strategy that could combine community-level peacebuilding and development initiatives, with a strong justice- and rights-focused lobbying and advocacy strategy.

At community level

At village level this was about facilitating peace sessions or dialogue forums that allowed community members an opportunity to share their perceptions and for leadership to be held accountable. The formation of village development committees and regular community peace sessions also created a platform that allowed groups to express themselves publicly. Later, this grew into the establishment of paralegal advice centres with a strong focus on human rights and local-level dispute resolution, often without the need to involve local chiefs - thus circumventing a major source of tension.

At national level

National formations like the NCPSL and the Civil Society Alternative Process combined civil society strategies into united advocacy. Lobbying forums were strengthened and the capacity of member organisations was built in an effort to strengthen their peace and development initiatives across the country.

At regional level

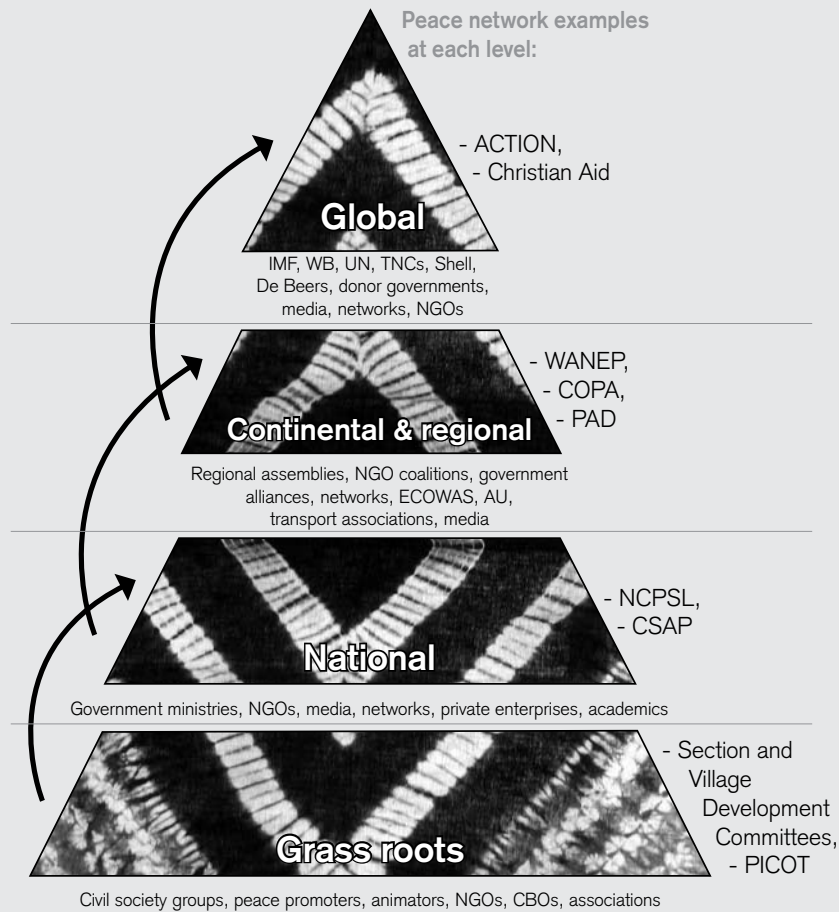
Linking community initiatives to regional bodies like the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), ensured that the peace and development of Sierra Leone was not isolated from the needs facing the broader region. It also allowed information to flow back to the programme, enabling practitioners to locate their initiatives within a broader context, and to develop a vision that acknowledged the challenges and the solutions generated in West Africa.



At continental level

At the same time the partners in conflict transformation maintained links with the Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA), a continental peacebuilding network with specialist experience in capacity building, also engaged with the Peace and Development Platform (PAD). Through its links to PAD, partners were able to access policy makers within the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union. As a platform for peace and development practitioners from across the continent, PAD strengthens and amplifies the voices of community workers in Sierra Leone and creates opportunities for community concerns to be heard.

Multi-level Triangle Building and promoting peace networks



Design by Ellen Papciak-Rose 2008. © ACTION for Conflict Transformation



The method used was to identify and implement an internal and external conflict transformation intervention.

Internally the strategy used for the training is to develop a common language around peace, conflict, violence and development. It has also introduced a set of analytical tools that enable facilitators to focus group discussions on finding solutions to situations of conflict and tension. These tools provide a guided framework for taking people through a process of sharing perceptions of a particular situation, and of thinking of ways to change things, through to developing sets of strategies and a clear sense of what action is expected from each role player. The training strategy provides a model that practitioners can then replicate internally within the organisation, as well as in villages across the country.

By introducing these skills and approaches in several chiefdoms across the country, and then bringing practitioners together to share experiences and reflect on both the process and content of their activities, a rich body of knowledge was developed that helped to sharpen and enhance the unfolding interventions. This was amplified by a series of exchange visits and cross-programme learning that enabled both staff and community members to gain valuable perspectives on other strategies that opened up opportunities in their own situations.

The existence of an internal learning culture, based on a conscious cycle of action and reflection, provides an avenue for feeding in relevant and useful insights that extend the training processes way beyond the participants themselves. By focusing on engagement rather than formal training, the learning process shifts into the realm of empowerment and consciousness-raising. It builds a culture of learning and relationships that are sustainable, and that in themselves become a part of living the vision.

It recognises that the formal aspect of bringing people together into a workshop is completely connected to everything that has happened before the workshop and everything that will happen after it. This emphasis on making the workshop part of the context in which it is taking place is in keeping both with an integrated understanding of ourselves and the world around us and an understanding that building peace is a long-term process that begins now, and with ourselves.

At village level the approach has tapped into a deep awareness of the nature of the problems faced by people but has allowed discussions to shift beyond a sense of hopelessness and entitlement to a focused programme of action planning. This empowers participants to realise that they are the key players in any attempt to bring about positive



change. The conflict transformation approach has also informed an engagement by civil society organisations, with newly formed tentative governance structures at section, ward and chiefdom levels and with traditional chiefs, women and youth in villages across the country. While this process is still tentative, and stronger in some areas than in others, significant changes have been reported, and observed, in the depth of analysis and the culture of discussion that now characterise village forums.

This aspect of the conflict transformation intervention is about creating space for the articulation of alternative ideas and for the amplification of voices that are usually marginalised. Platforms are created at different levels that are then linked in order to ensure a flow of ideas and influence from the grassroots up.

Based on an understanding that human relationships are both at the root of conflict and the key to finding alternatives to violence, intervention explored the attitudes, behaviours, systems and structures that define people's perceptions of each other. It then used solution-focused dialogue to analyse, strategise and develop short-term, medium-term and long-term goals. These goals aim to transform the root causes of conflict and begin to build a shared future that reflects a set of values that have been collectively developed.

By making the links between levels, from the self, to the family, the community, and broader society, a consciousness is created of how decisions are made that affect individuals. This awareness, combined with strategies that mobilise and organise people, provide opportunities for influencing and changing policies that affect people collectively.

If conflict transformation training is more about engagement than the simple transfer of skills, then it is the range of additional learning processes (that emerge from training) that give meaning to this engagement.

These learning processes employed are:

- *Exchange and exposure visits*

Practitioners from one area are invited to another to explore any local innovations that may be contextually transferable.

- *The Advanced Continental Conflict Transformation course*

Organised by the Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA), with the support of the ACTION Support Centre, this intensive training course is held once or twice a year.

It brings together practitioners who are working in Africa and provides an opportunity to reflect in some depth on the challenges and issues facing peacebuilders across the continent.



- *Community peace sessions*

These took place at village level. As forums for dialogue that were centred on key peace values, they provided an opportunity for youth and women to engage with elders and chiefs in a non-threatening environment. In community peace sessions, areas of need were discussed; existing conditions were analysed and locally owned strategies aimed at finding solutions to the challenges faced by the community were developed.

- *Information and experience sharing*

Regular meetings of practitioners from different programme areas allowed practitioners and officers to update each other on changes and insights that had emerged. As a key aspect of the learning culture that is founded on a process of action and reflection these sessions developed the conceptual and strategising skills of practitioners.

- *Cross-programme monitoring visits*

The learning culture had built in monitoring mechanisms that used peer review to sharpen the approach of community workers. Monitoring visits analysed relationships between stakeholders and explored the impact that interventions were having on local dynamics and conditions. Strategies were then developed collectively that were implemented by the local team.

- *Mapping exercises*

Field workers and their local support teams conducted these exercises regularly. They explored the sources of power within the community and how this power was distributed. By mapping all stakeholders, practitioners were able to uncover forces within and outside the community that influenced local conditions. The relationships between stakeholders were also analysed and strategies were developed to reduce levels of tension and strengthen the links between these stakeholders.

- *Documentation and dissemination*

By writing down the outcomes of activities that were undertaken organisations were able to keep a record of the intervention and the impact it had on conflict and development in the area. The ability to articulate clearly what was being done and the purpose of the intervention was one of the key challenges facing organisations. While it was clear that a great deal of work was being done, unless this work was documented it would pass unnoticed. The dissemination of what was documented also allowed learning from interventions to be shared across the programme.

The combination of these various learning initiatives has created a culture that has ensured that training processes have become catalysts for action and further learning and not an end in themselves.



Achievements, challenges and lessons learned

Perhaps one of the key achievements of the whole approach was the creation of a heightened awareness of the purpose and implications of interventions. A greater consciousness around what exactly the interventions were trying to achieve helped to focus future implementation and planning efforts and to enhance an analysis of the intended and unintended impact the interventions were having on the context. This approach was used to discuss the problems between chiefs and peace promoters in several workshops and exchange visits. By sharing the learning across organisations and programmes several useful strategies were developed to reduce the tensions.

One of the major focus areas across the programmes related to the judicial system at village level. Traditionally, the formal dispute resolution system had been in the hands of the chiefs and their advisers. Chiefs were able to levy fines and arbitrate in disputes brought to the local courts. This system was characterised by corruption and was often cited as a major cause of friction between authority figures, youths and elders as well as between chiefs and the broader community. It was also one of the few ways in which chiefs were able to gain financial benefit from their positions of power. In most of the project areas the establishment of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, through the work of peace promoters, peace monitors or peace animators, led to some tensions over the resultant loss of income to chiefs. This tension threatened to undermine the positive impact of the local dispute resolution practitioners.

By clarifying exactly what the intervention was trying to achieve, in terms of the challenges to the existing justice system as well as the conflict resolution focus, it became clearer how to approach the chiefs and alleviate their fears, while at the same time bring about the required shifts in power.

Many court officials became involved in training processes, and skills workshops were held for local chiefs. Reported and observed changes reflecting a decrease in tensions and a greater involvement and engagement between chiefs and organisational staff were seen. A greater focus on lobbying and advocacy strategies that build relationships with local governance structures also helped. By introducing conflict transformation tools into dialogue forums, youth, women and chiefs were able to articulate tensions and concerns that had previously been hidden or unaddressed.

The process through which these tensions surfaced enabled participants to focus attention on finding ways of resolving them. This enabled communities to sit together and begin to make collective plans on how better to live together, instead of following the traditional development process - that of the classic needs assessment, which involves listing an increasingly depressing set of needs, usually outside of the mandate of the development agency anyway.



The community-level experience should inform and influence policy at regional, national and international levels. In some instances, an intervention carried out on a regional basis is a more appropriate approach than a community-led one. The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum case study that follows is an example of such an instance.

The Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum (ZSF) is a coalition of South African organisations that has embarked on advocating for change in Zimbabwe, and to policies that affect Zimbabweans in South Africa following the rapid deterioration of the Zimbabwean socio-economic and political landscape and the subsequent massive migration. It also offers practical support for Zimbabweans both in Zimbabwe, and for those who are now refugees in South Africa. The direction of the ZSF is informed by the community-level experiences of Zimbabweans, but it makes an effort to carry out activities and encourage interventions at all levels across SADC.



Community animator and PICOT member, Cecilia Gayya, pictured here with the team of field workers who put the grassroots peacebuilding process into practice



South Africa

Building a regional culture of solidarity: The story of the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum

Philani Ndebele - Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum, South Africa

In the late 1990s, the socio-economic and political landscape in Zimbabwe started to change dramatically. The period was characterised by student and worker demonstrations, and strikes against declining standards of living and Zimbabwe's involvement in the war in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), among other things. The response of the Zimbabwe African Nation Unity Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the government to these movements was, in many respects, suicidal. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Military Police brutally assaulted students, workers and other activists, and a lot of innocent people died. As a result, the ZANU PF-led state started to craft draconian pieces of legislation that tampered with people's freedoms and liberties.

Individuals and elements within South Africa's tripartite alliance, especially the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), as well as the broader spectrum of the South African civil society and social movements like the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), started to talk about the repressive nature of ZANU PF and the Zimbabwean government. An increasing number of Zimbabweans were fleeing to neighbouring and overseas countries, more especially to South Africa, as result of the political persecution. The need for open and collective platforms to share information and create awareness of the repressive regime in Zimbabwe became increasingly necessary and the seeds for people-to-people solidarity were planted.

In 1997, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), a coalition of over 200 of non-governmental organisations and close to 15 000 individuals, started to stimulate debate about the need for constitutional reforms in Zimbabwe. Subsequently, President Robert Mugabe appointed a Constitutional Commission to draw up a new constitution. This culminated in a referendum on 12 and 13 February 2000, which was vehemently rejected by Zimbabweans. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which was formed on 11 September 1999, and broader civil society interpreted the rejection of the referendum as a vote of no confidence in ZANU PF and Mugabe.

The 2002 elections were highly contested. Other than by South Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU), the elections were declared not free and fair. Following this election and events in Zimbabwe and in South Africa, the ground



in which the seeds of solidarity had been planted became more and more fertile, creating conditions for solidarity to shoot up and respond as need arose.

Zimbabwe's economy deteriorated further, especially after the government started the chaotic fast-track land reform and redistribution. The crisis was exacerbated when war veterans were rewarded with taxpayers' money for their services during the liberation struggle; the noise that followed thereafter from former detainees claiming similar compensation was deafening.

Quiet diplomacy emerged as the only real strategy at policy level to address these issues and the South African government became more involved. Civil society organisations became more vocal, speaking out about what was happening in Zimbabwe. The need for information-sharing and situational-analysis platforms was re-energised. IDASA, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, responded by organising a Zimbabwe Consultation Forum. It met four times before Zimbabwe's 2006 elections to analyse and share information.

However, this series ended and people saw the sense in taking the initiative further. Various groups and individuals became involved, and began both to criticise and attempt to strengthen the quiet diplomacy approach of the South African government. The South African Liaison Office, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and later the ACTION Support Centre played major roles in co-ordinating these efforts under the banner of the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum (ZSF).

At the core of this was the need to come up with strategies to influence South African foreign policy and domestic policy on refugees and migrants. A bottom-up approach was adopted to involve organisations such as COSATU, student- and youth-aligned African National Congress structures, the SACP, the Congress of SA Students, the South African Council Of Churches, the Progressive Youth Alliance and many others. The strategy was to influence change or shift South African policies through running an education and awareness campaign and mobilising people behind key demands.

The ZSF, whose visibility and relationships with South African civil society movements dates back to 2000, became a network of progressive South African civil society organisations, including youth, women, labour, faith-based, human rights and student groups that are engaged in the promotion of solidarity for sustainable peace, democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe. The ZSF condemned the unlawful assaults and brutal beatings of Zimbabweans. It drew attention to the harsh economic conditions that it claimed were the direct result of ZANU PF policies and the social marginalisation and exclusion of anybody who did not support Mugabe's handpicked elite.

In media produced by the ZSF, it called on civil society directly to take action. "Where this space to respond is absent, the progressive opposition in Zimbabwe and its allies within the ZSF and civil society across the region have a responsibility to organise vociferously to express their concerns. Until democracy provides for the will of the majority to make their choices heard, and for the mass of people to hold political elites accountable, Africa will not be free."



Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum peace strategies

Mobilising and organising

As part of its continuing campaign for democracy, the forum has developed new and built strongly on existing strategies for a broader solidarity movement. Mobilising and organising takes centre stage in much of ZSF's work. Through this strategy, it engages with as many people as possible. Activities include, but are not restricted to, pamphleteering and door-to-door visits, as well as meetings with South African and Zimbabwean civil society organisations and with people who wish to become involved in the solidarity movement.

Working with sectors

For almost a decade, ZSF has derived its strength from engaging with diverse sectors, including grassroots communities. In line with this, it organises groups and forms alliances with organisations in the trade union movement, the youth and student sectors, faith-based organisations, social movements, research think tanks, policy advocacy initiatives and NGOs, to form a solidarity movement.

The complex dynamics of South African civil society and the critical role that the tripartite alliance partners play in policy formulation and wider public opinion, inform the strategies ZSF has used to build a broad umbrella body.

It also focuses specifically on women and youth groups, in recognition of the important role they play in contributing to real change, and focus groups meetings are held with these sectors.

The forum's interaction with Zimbabwean diaspora organisations as well as with South African branches of established organisations in Zimbabwe, is of value to the solidarity movement. As talks seem to be collapsing and are taking more time than was anticipated, and as the situation on the ground remains the same, more and more of ZSF's work is carried out together with these groupings.

Learning and awareness raising

ZSF has organised several learning and awareness seminars in the past years. They have been reported back to structures and ZSF has arranged speakers at several local events. Material produced by organisations within ZSF is also distributed at these seminars, including reports, publications, cassettes and DVDs. People are encouraged to form discussion groups and to distribute the media as widely as possible.



Marches and campaigns

In 2008, ZSF participated in four marches and a picketing process. Demands focused on creating conditions and space for civilian rule to take centre stage on issues of governance, including creating conditions for free and fair elections as benchmarks for democracy and for dialogue-based solutions to the deepening crisis that respected the right of people to choose their leaders.

Rallies and festivals

Also in 2008, ZSF organised two large events, each attended by over a thousand people. These had significant media coverage.

Media events

ZSF interacts with South African and international media. It released regular press statements throughout 2008 and three press conferences were held at critical points before and after the Zimbabwean elections in March 2008.



Building the awareness of South African youth about the reality of Zimbabwean life is a key aspect of the ZSF strategy



Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum initiatives

Engage SADC and the African Union

Through its partner and member initiative, the Peace and Development Platform (PAD), ZSF has been part of lobbying and advocacy efforts led by Zimbabweans at AU, SADC and United Nations (UN) events. A workshop was arranged alongside the AU Summit in Egypt in July 2008, aimed at putting international, African-led pressure on Mugabe's government and at influencing key African leaders and policy makers to take stronger action against violations of regional and international laws, agreements and guidelines.

Migration and refugees

Working with Lawyers for Human Rights and the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, and through its past links to groups like Wits Migration Studies, ZSF includes a domestic focus in its work that engages South Africa's Home Affairs Ministry and police service in a long-term programme to respond to several recommendations aimed at reducing the vulnerability of Zimbabweans in South Africa and recognising the obligation of the state to afford them the same rights as everybody living in South Africa. This is an ongoing campaign.

Xenophobia and criminal violence

The xenophobic attacks on foreigners in South Africa in May 2008 prompted urgent action by ZSF and its partners to work with a cluster of Zimbabwean and South Africa groups to assist displaced people and facilitate dialogue in communities from which people had been displaced. This work is only really beginning and will form much of ZSF's future focus as it attempts to get to the root causes of the violence and build homegrown peace committees. Exposing and challenging xenophobia in the media forms part of this work.

Direct lobbying and advocacy

In recognition of the paramount role South Africa plays in the region, and in facilitating solutions to the crisis in Zimbabwe, the South African Liaison Office, SALO, a key member of ZSF, uses its strong relationships with South African policy makers to provide information, promote informed discussion and analysis, and link key, high-level



politicians and policy makers. It also facilitates access to these structures for ZSF and other key stakeholders in the international community.

International policy dialogue

SALO also organises private and public functions at which representatives of the diplomatic community, the South African government and civil society groups share ideas, discuss and look for areas of commonality and consensus on how best to move forward, while recognising the diverse contributions of different actors.

Policy documentary media production

SALO produces DVD documentaries of its events and of the issues that arise in an attempt to take the discussions further and to help ensure that over time these discussions build on each other as people begin to better understand each other's positions, needs and interests.

Research

This aspect of ZSF's agenda involves teams of researchers who work collaboratively to produce policy briefs and analytical papers that feed into and inform the other areas of its work.

The way forward

Although the signing of the Global Political Agreement in Zimbabwe on 15 September 2008 has provided some respite from the heavy levels of violence, the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the unlikelihood of the impasse being resolved quickly or cleanly, seem to indicate that ZSF's work will need to continue for the foreseeable future. Even when the inevitable breakthroughs are made, and the crisis begins to be resolved there will be much work still to be done. The long-term intention of ZSF - to build democracy and people-to-people solidarity among civil society groups across the region - remains a distant goal.

An ongoing process of monitoring the difference we are making, learning from our experiences and developing adaptive strategic responses as the external context shifts and changes will inform how we move forward. Within this process, the ongoing work of building a broad umbrella that can facilitate, co-ordinate and support solidarity initiatives will form the core of our business.



Angola

The story of Felizardo Epalanga: From child soldier to continental peacebuilder

Felizardo Epalanga – Peacebuilder, Angola

A personal story

Having explored stories of change from across the continent, from grassroots, community-based interventions to those organisations operating at regional and international levels, it seems appropriate to finish with one man's story of his own experience of conflict, both as a victim, as a participant and, finally, as a peacebuilder. Felizardo Epalanga is a peacebuilder, community activist and practitioner in Angola. His story illustrates the impact of conflict transformation initiatives on his personal journey and work, and provides thought-provoking insight into the challenges of conflict resolution and reconciliation.

I would like, before sharing with you my experiences as a peacebuilder and activist, to give a short introduction to my life until the time that I involved myself in the promotion of peace in Angola, so that you have an idea of the reason beyond my decision to follow this noble mission.

I was born in 1976, one year after independence and, as my parents told me, around the time that the MPLA was pushing UNITA out of the towns, especially in my city. At that time I never realised what the conflict was about – until 1980 that is, when a bomb exploded in our house while my family was sitting around the table having dinner. The bomb seriously damaged our house and everything in it, and my mother and sister were wounded, but with God's help most of us came out without injury. After that, we had to look for shelter at the Town Council.

The war and the damages in my life

On 3 September 1982, UNITA attacked a convoy of vehicles that was transporting basic necessities from the provincial capital to our town. It was then that tragedy started to affect my family: I lost my eldest brother. However, not only my family was affected, but also our Town Council – more than 20 families lost loved ones.



On 23 August 1983, UNITA again attacked and took over our Town Council; once again my family was a victim. They took my aunt and her seven children to the forest. In the morning, people came back from their hiding places to their homes, all looking for their family members, crying and screaming. Once again the entire town was in mourning. By this time my parents decided to go back to our house that had been destroyed by a bomb.

By now all our ways and habits had changed; we could no longer sit together at the table to have a meal. To prevent the consequences of another bomb, and to avoid being injured, it was a daily routine, every night at six in the evening, to leave the house, and seek refuge in the forest; we would return in the morning. This way, when UNITA soldiers came to ransack selected houses, they would find them empty.

On 4 April 1984, early in the morning, our town was again under attack; both of my eldest brothers had already left for school. On that cold morning we heard the first bombs; they were attacking again. We had to seek refuge in my grandfather's house in another village, where we stayed for seven days, the time UNITA spent in our town. Throughout this time we watched many bombs being dropped by the MPLA air force on UNITA.

There were more attacks on our town: on 10 November 1985 the fighting only lasted a few hours; in the same month on the 17th day, the worst attack ever took place, although it was short. I lost another brother, an older brother, but like many other families that lost loved ones – I cannot calculate or try to guess how many people each family lost – I could only share their pain. For example, on the day of my brother's funeral, there were 14 more dead people at the church awaiting their last blessings to be performed by the church minister. It was the worst tragedy ever.

There were other attacks, but none as violent as previous ones. Many people died in an attack in August 1988; there were many more, but I had already left, on 5 November 1989, on foot because of the poor transport systems between our town and the city. A year later, during another big attack, UNITA seized our town for 45 days, taking with them all the young men of the town (some of them were my cousins and friends, kidnapped) to serve in the UNITA army.

Involvement in the conflict

During the Civil War, from 1986 to 1990, the communist MPLA government instructed all schools at 2^o and 3^o level – fifth and eighth grades – to select those students considered more intelligent and involve them in extra activities and military units, such as Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola - FAPLA, Força Aérea Popular de Angola (air force), Defesa Anti Aérea- FAPA DEA (anti-air defence) and Segurança do Estado (state security).



It was during this period that I was also recruited to learn, specifically arms handling, dynamite, bombs, military manoeuvres, investigating techniques using torture, as well as first aid.

In 1992, after the elections but still in the war, without any alternatives, I prepared myself and joined many other young men and together with the Defence Force of Angola we fought; over three months we resisted the Forças Armadas de Libertação de Angola - FALA and UNITA (Armed Forces of Unita), which eventually took over the province, forcing us to retreat to the neighbouring province of Bengela on foot, a distance that took 11 days, marked by attacks and death.

Community activism

Arriving in Bengela, already displaced, I was chosen to manage a group of 40 people; the responsibility was to represent the group at the Centre for the Displaced, with the principal duty of collecting meals and then distributing them to the group.

When the non-governmental organisation, Save the Children UK, took responsibility for the internally displaced in Huambo Province in its emergency programme, I was again selected to integrate the commission and the co-ordination of the Centre for the Displaced. That's when my work began as a social worker.

During my time working for this commission, I began negotiations with the Ministry of Education of the Lobito Municipality to open a primary school, using teachers at the centre who were also displaced, as well as to facilitate the documentation of displaced people with a higher education level (2^o or 3^o grades and intermediary school), so that we could integrate them in the municipal schools.

At this time I also became involved in protests about the forced recruitment of displaced young men into the army that was being organised to take over our province. It had a large impact; the government of Huambo Province, with provisional installations in the province of Bengela, ordered my arrest, and I was imprisoned for three days.

My involvement with this organisation ended with the repatriation of the war displaced to their places of origin, co-ordinating the Save the Children UK team, which worked side by side with the Unidade Técnica de Coordenação das Ajudas Humanitárias, UTCAH (Co-ordination of Technical Unit of Humanitarian Help), linked to the Ministry of Assistance and Social Reintegration.

From 1996 to October 1997, I worked in quartering UNITA army forces, first as an assistant to the movement and later as the team leader of assistance to the movement. It was then that I realised how much we were victims and actors at the same time, being manipulated



with distorted messages on both sides, playing one against the other. During this time, when we were demobilizing UNITA troops, and because my work put me in direct contact with UNITA troops, we talked and exchanged opinions and experiences. All of that changed my mind and my perceptions about UNITA, and helped me to create my own interpretation of events, especially about the messages that we had received during the Civil War. And I concluded that all of us, UNITA and MPLA, were used by the leaders of these two movements.

In 1997, I became involved in the International Red Cross. My work in this organisation was more of a field official, but of emergencies, distributing basic necessities to communities affected by the conflict, especially the zones considered yellow and red, where other organisations could not extend their interventions.

After terminating my contract with the Red Cross and tired of having short-term jobs in areas where I was sensitive to people's suffering, I decided to write about a project to support the elderly and those physically disabled in the war, who walked through the streets of the city of Huambo begging for help. I contacted government authorities, who advised me to join a church organisation, the Baptist Convention of Angola. I had made friends at the Red Cross, and the expatriates who had left the country found ways of keeping in contact with me.

This is how I met a German missionary who had worked with the Red Cross. Hearing about my proposals, she accepted my initiative with a condition that I should co-ordinate the project. We made some changes to the initial proposal, which only kept the principal objective: physiological reintegration of the disabled from war into the social economy and their families. This project, named Elavoko (which in Portuguese means hope), supported 100 families, all of them disabled in the war, over a two-year period.

It was in the Baptist Convention that my course as a peace activist began, through the German missionary. She proposed to her representative a project of peace and reconciliation, which she asked me to co-ordinate given that we had worked together on the project for people disabled during the war. My first request was to have the proposal translated from German to Portuguese, so that I could understand better its objectives. As the language used in the proposal was sort of violent, I suggested some changes and proposed naming it Prepare for Peace, Forgiveness and Reconciliation (Preparar a Paz, Perdão e Reconciliação).

Although I was inexperienced, I accepted the challenge, and began participating in meetings of the Peace Net in Luanda. I was invited for peace training through the peacebuilding Project and Development workshop, which was co-financed by Elavoko. Through this organisation, I integrated the first group of peace promoters trained in Angola.



Still experiencing difficulty in Angola, immediately after the death of the UNITA leader, from 7 to 9 March 2003, we held a conference on the church and civil society searching for peace. I consider this an embryo of democratic debate in the central highlands, being the first activity of its kind, and with the dimensional results that we later replicated in Luanda.

As time went on, I became more and more sensitive to the work carried out for peace in the territory, first because my personal life was affected by conflict and secondly because all the work that I performed was linked to people who were victims of the conflict, and lastly because I felt I was both an actor and victim in the conflict. Through this, I started to do something different from what the conflict had forced us to do.

I underwent training in the Programme for Peacebuilding (PCP) for civil society, having been invited by the Development Workshop, a national NGO which co-ordinated these initiatives, to join it. I became a staff member in the Development Workshop, as the assistant to the PCP project, and a member of the national team of trainers. I travelled to Huambo, integrating a team of four to train and to create an organisation of peacebuilding. Later, I became the programme's financial controller.

As I have said before, we only do something well when we do what we really enjoy. Peacebuilding turned my life around, and even though I am responsible for the financing of the programme, I have not given up certain other activities, such as the training, evaluation, and control of partners' actions and trainers.

Through the partners with which the programme was established, including the ACTION Support Centre and the Coalition for Peace in Africa, I was trained in different areas concerning resources and capacity and had to transfer knowledge to communities, such as alternatives to violence, human rights, project management and finances, law, and conflict transformation.

It was through the project of building peace that I came into contact with the Coalition for Peace in Africa, of which I am a member and trainer today. In the coalition, we started a programme for ex-combatants concerning peacebuilding – the AVP programme – Alternative to Violence Project, of which I am a trainer of trainers, focal point in Angola; and through the PAD programme of the ACTION Support Centre, where I am a member of the continental team.

During this period, I facilitated various training sessions in Angola at community and regional level, in the areas of conflict transformation, alternatives to violence and reconciliation; it's very rewarding when we see that we are changing people.



A short example: still as a beginner, I went to Huambo on my first mission. After a day of talking about reconciliation, with no conviction for what I was saying because it was the first time I was facilitating a training session, a youngster returned the following day and shared a story. "Mr Trainer, after you talked about reconciliation and one of its pillars - forgiveness - I went home and told my mother, Mother let's go to the neighbour's house, the one that caused my father's death, to ask for forgiveness. My mother looked at me and asked: how are we as victims supposed to ask for forgiveness from the woman who caused your father's death? I answered: after the lesson we had the previous day at the seminary about reconciliation, I believe that we should take the initiative to ask for forgiveness to show that we have forgiven, as she does not ask for forgiveness for the pain and suffering she has caused us."

Another testimony came from a military police captain, towards the end of a training session on alternatives to violence, who said: "Yesterday on my way to visit my sister, a car driver smashed into my car. When I went to speak with him, I thought of the power of transformation and I said to the man, Go, don't worry; tomorrow we will talk."

As he said, before we attended and learned about these techniques, he would have not reacted that way. "I would have taken my gun and resolved the matter with a violent action."

These testimonies begin to show the impact of our work on changing people's perspectives, as individuals, as members of families and as whole communities. When you put them together they go much deeper and much further.

This base as a peacebuilder prepared me for further work with the United Nations' High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights in Angola. Needing to be involved always with peace programmes, I looked for a job in an agency where I could talk about conflict, and that is how I came to work in ACNUDH-Angola, where I was an assistant and later responsible for the training of police agents in human rights. In this regard, I have facilitated many sessions in different police units.

Today, although more involved in office work, I try to contribute as much as possible in a positive way to the promotion of peace, distributing news to partners and promoting peace around the world about matters regarding human rights, peace and conflict, for which I can say I created a solid contact network.

I also continue to pass on my experiences and knowledge to different associations in Angola and the rest of Africa when I am asked to do so, execute my functions from a focal point of view and train trainers on the alternatives to violence.

I could share much more; there is so much to say.



Stories from Latin America

Introduction

The second half of the twentieth century was of paramount importance to the American continent, especially in the region known as Latin America. On the one hand we had the existence of authoritarian regimes and military bases and on the other a responsibility to rebuild the social and political life of the region.

Moreover, we found that at the end of the century these schemes tended to disappear; however, the long-awaited democracy has been an ideal that the people of the region have not fully experienced. We found significant progress in democratic institutions; however, economic and social inequality, discrimination, impunity, corruption, irrational exploitation of natural resources and the criminalisation of social protest, are some of the prevailing practices in the Latin American reality.

Amid all these situations, we found significant examples of strategies of social participation and advocacy as a key to the transformation of conflicts in the region.

In this section we find stories of six individuals and organisations that give us a sample of the many actions and strategies that are being used in different countries to transform our reality for a more just and democratic society. These stories show how the strategies of social change have diversified, and are not only focusing on changes to the state, but have now extended to other areas that are also key to political transformation.

In the pursuit and defence of the dignity of individuals and peoples a number of strategies were employed, such as internal dialogue efforts of indigenous communities, experiences of dialogue between organisations and legislators, and sharing of experiences in reconciliation.

This is the result of a collective effort of individuals and organisations in Latin America. Through the network ACTION America, we are looking for ways to share experiences and strengthen strategies for conflict transformation through the recovery of lessons learned. This time we present from the south to the north.

CHILE: The case of the collectors of wild fruits describes how a multi-dialogue process that “was started by the people ... who sit and play in the whole of everyday life ... that appeals to the potential of the people” becomes a tool of potentiation of the social and economic structure of the region, but especially in a process of empowerment of women collectors who become active subjects of their reality and the social transformation of their environment. Now, they know that change is possible only with others.

COLOMBIA: Nellys Palomo shares with us her invaluable experience as a Colombian who works in Mexico and Central America. These experiences make us think about the role of facilitators to promote reconciliation processes. She expresses the importance of awareness about the impact of our actions even seven generations later, and also considers that what we resolve properly now will have repercussions in the future.

This case is about the need to tackle conflict from different disciplines, through “an exploration into the work of action: participate, learn from and resolve conflict, from the transformation and creativity”. While editing this publication, Nellys Palomo died, leaving her contribution as a living testimony to the work done from different locations for the positive transformation of conflicts, especially for indigenous women.

GUATEMALA: The case of the Indian reserve Visis CABA, in Quiché, is a perfect example of one of the most mundane situations in Latin America today: the tension between conservation and development, and protection of indigenous communities, and how not taking into account the latter as subjects of law and therefore as actors in processes of decision-making, can turn into violent conflicts that do not resolve any of the concerns of the actors and that aggravate the situation of direct and structural violence in communities.

MEXICO: Three cases exemplify some of the Mexican reality. Chiapas: In the context of armed conflict in Chiapas, we know the experience of intra-community dialogue, which for seven years has accompanied a process of reconciliation that has not ended but has significant benefits for the democratic transformation of the community. The importance of not losing sight of the fact that “changes affect personal and collective political processes and vice versa”, is underlined.”

Conflicts over land and territory: We share the learning gained in the intervention in conflicts where territory and access to natural resources is the key. It highlights how undemocratic processes in decision-making cause acute resistance movements. We share the observation of how movements inspired by the rejection of a project turn on objectors of the whole development public policy; a conflict that started as a procedural issue becomes a conflict about the different visions about development, where it is difficult to find margin for political dialogue.

Multi-stakeholder dialogue: A dialogue between civil society organisations and the Federal Legislative Branch in Mexico on the topic of Climate Change and National Security. Among the lessons learned, we share the importance of not losing sight of the various dialogues that take place inside a macro process of dialogue and the tensions that may be presented herein.



Chile

The collectors of wild fruits: An experience of social transformation, founded in dialogue

Mauricio Laborde

Introduction

There are many ways of approaching social development. The experience related here is that of a group of peasant women from the south of Chile. These women, dedicated to the wild harvesting of fruits¹, accepted the invitation of the NGO Taller de Acción Cultural (Workshop of Cultural Action, TAC), and decided to assume the challenges of development. They took into their own hands the responsibility to transform – which previously had been a labour and social reality – for a life of dignity for themselves, their families and their communities.

Lacking other resources, the strategy has been based on harnessing the associational and constructive aspects of dialogue. It was one of the few resources at their disposable² and from where they could reconstruct themselves as workers and social actors.

In order to reach their aims, two types of dialogues were developed:

A dialogue and association established among themselves: the necessity of the basic organisation allowed the consciousness of shared needs, and the construction of confidences that were later triggered. Multiple local committees were created and later a Coordinadora Regional de Comités de Recolectoras (Regional Co-ordinator of Committees of Collectors); a dialogue with other actors, very different from themselves, but with whom the bond of participating as “forest world non-carpenters”³ was a common point. The Mesa Articuladora (Articulating Table) was created, which incorporated the collectors’ organisations, the TAC, forest, municipalities, universities, companies, and institutional representatives of the state involved in this sector. This is unusual in the productive and/or social work areas (where there is rarely a connection between the public sector, the deprived and civil society). That is why, after several years of regular operation, they can show important results and public recognitions that have changed the image and reality of harvesting in Chile.



1. The development in the world of the collectors of wild fruits:

1.1 The “before” of poverty, social invisibility and conflict (initial state)

- A sector that historically has been marked by geographic and social isolation and extreme poverty.
- A work that was considered as marginal, even by their own farmer families; a work of the season and resorted to only for complementing the low, regular income that was gained in other activities.
- Physical labour that was developed in a way that was vulnerable to the increasing sanitary and commercial requirements of the state and the market.
- A type of work that developed in constant tension and conflict with the forest companies.
- In short, a work and a social existence marked by shame, isolation and low self-esteem.

1.2 The “now” that demonstrates important labour, economic and social achievements

- Hand-powered system that today has incorporated good practices of harvesting as a result of specialised qualifications. A harvesting centred on fungus and that opens itself to a wide diversity of wild grass.
- More community-based and industrialised process of production (e.g. construction and implementation of dehydration plants).
- Improved processing and packing of products, which results in greater added value.
- Improved commercialisation that has opened many restricted markets and exports. The bulk sales from the committees to commercialised producers.
- A work that passes from being sporadic and marginal to one that is an increasingly full-time for many farm women. A house and individual work that turns out to be community work.
- A work that has developed with the contribution of multiple actors and forms part of a communal process that is far from the marginalisation and conflicts of the past.

2. The dialogue as a social and economic transformation:

2.1 The vision of possible change

The initial trigger of the change was in the vision that the TAC presented to the collectors that they took as their own. It was a vision that raised the possibility of reversing the history that was present for so long; which stated that “the work of harvesting in Chile could be established in the future as a labour axis for the farming sector”.



This vision was based on the recognition of: the opening up of the market through an international demand for these products by such diverse industries as pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and gastronomical; the natural potential of more than 15 million hectares of forest with wild fruits of highest quality; the social potential of thousands of women and men who had experience, strength and a disposition to change the dynamics of the past.

2.2 The strategy of dialogue

2.2.1 The dialogue within the world of harvesting

Three elements mark this strategy of dialogue as “belonging to the communities” that are creating the collective dynamic that has allowed this development.

It is a social process **that begins with and is located in people**, before any form of development. That is why this experience arises from their own recollections that tell their stories of life and work. These stories were picked up and shared within the communities, and allowed the legitimate sharing of life-experiences as part of the popular voice. In this interchange, a shared narrative emerged and gave a collective sense to their labour and social realities.

It is a social process **that touches on and is based in these collectors’ daily lives**. There is an acknowledgment of the diverse dimensions that shape their life and a discovery of the intimate interrelations existing among them. It arises naturally, working simultaneously for material improvement, personal development and communitarian development as parts of an interdependent reality.

It is a social process that appeals to people's potential, more than to their deficiencies. The social process is proposed, not as a scope for the needs of “the needed ones”, but rather as a scope for everyone, and especially the poor, to contribute from their experiences and culture to the required social transformations.

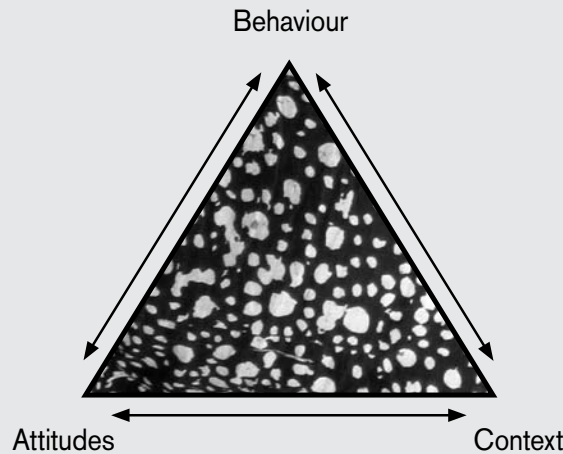
It was in this process that the collectors soon began to formalise their communitarian dialogue spaces and create local Committees of Collectors that soon gave origin to the Coordinadora Regional de Comités de Recolectores. It was the emerging of a new collective subject and, in this way, a new way of being and belonging to society.



2.2.2 The dialogue with other actors tied to the world of non-timber forest products

An important criterion of the work has been the recognition of the necessity to count on all possible contributions, and therefore, to develop a work that allows for diversity. This dimension is not considered from an instrumental perspective. On the contrary, in this fragmented world, gathering the different social voices is considered to be a form of recognising and unifying divergent thoughts and world views.

At the beginning, these spaces of “dialogues in the differences” arose as bilateral initiatives, and were based on specific problems.⁴ However, they soon led to action (the Articulating Table) that has assisted the productive and social work of the collectors⁵.



ABC Triangle

What is it?

An analysis of factors related to attitude, behaviour and context for each of the major parties.

Purpose:

- ▲ To identify these three sets of factors for each of the major parties;
- ▲ To analyse how these influence each other;
- ▲ To relate these to the needs and fears of each party;
- ▲ To identify a starting point for intervention in the situation.

When to use it:

- ▲ Early in the process to gain a greater insight into what motivates the different parties;
- ▲ Later to identify what factors might be addressed by an intervention;
- ▲ To reveal how a change in one aspect might affect another.

Variations in use:

After listing issues for each of the three components, indicate a key need or fear of that party in the middle of the triangle.

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Three interesting teachings from this process are:

1. The importance of discovering and specifying, clearly, the common interests to the different actors, and detecting and designing, with the same clarity, ways to boost the scopes of complementation.
In this space of diversity of actors and diversity of interests, it cannot be one which rules and conditions the behaviour of the actors, rather as their own participants, those who mould the scope of encounter and joint work.
2. To construct personal and institutional confidence within the participants.
The scope of encounter was necessary to establish it, not only as a useful space, but as a space of social and human recognition of the different members.
It is for this reason that what began between a few, grew little by little through the agendas of work (as moments of coexistence), and were planned with enough rigor, so that there could be a confident floor from which talking and working out differences was possible.
3. To establish **clear definitions as far as levels and roles** of the actions undertaken.
It is not only important to specify the common interests, but also the construction of confidences in order to approach them suitably. Furthermore, someone should be nominated to define the roles and levels of the actors in the summoned spaces.

It was in the middle of this frame, where clear procedures and processes were conjugated in the construction of confidences, that a dynamic, mutually valid appropriation of the process by the distinct actors was allowed, within the consciousness of differences regarding objectives and emphasis in work approaches.

Thus, the Mesa Articuladora of non-timber forest producers, along with the impact on the public – the rare spaces where the public and the private sectors, the university and civil society work together – has allowed a great social and economic advancement of the women dedicated to the harvesting of wild fruits.

¹ These are 220 000 people, who cross the rural periphery of fields and rural towns, gathering and commercialising fungus, musk rose, medicinal grass and other products that naturally germinate in the field.

² Through their life experiences, they certainly knew that designing a centered and dependant strategy was the main available resource to begin the reversion of social exclusion and its accompanying fatalism.

³ Non-timber forest products is the generic name that occurs in some cases to refer to wild fruits.

⁴ From 2000, these included consultations with a university about dehydrating fruits and the use and handling of medicinal grass; with public organisations on access to information; with municipalities that opened spaces and recognised them as social actors; with companies that opened their offices (not only with the park ranger); and with mass media that supported their processes of commercialisation. The Table arose from a proposal emanating in a seminar on forest non-carpenter products that took place in the middle of 2005, at the University of Concepción.

⁵ The Table emerges from an emanated proposal in a seminar about non-timber forest products, which took place in 2005, at the University of Concepción.



Colombia

Challenges and uncertainties in reconciliatory processes

Nellys Palomo

This text is in acknowledgment of the force of my ancestors, great-grandparents, black and indigenous women and men who illuminated my childhood, and in day-to-day life taught me what dignity was, the pride of their roots and the value of being the person I am.

As humans, every conflict we live through places us at a crossroad. If the conflict is collective, the dimension of when, how and why the conflict began, is lost. For some people, the only valid option is to continue the conflict at the expense of human lives and the loss of material, social, cultural and natural resources. Such solutions entail many confrontations, discussions, wars, death and, if they are solved with one prevailing over the other and excluding the loser, they persist throughout generations. They become "transgenerational" conflicts.

My experience has taught me that nobody wins when somebody loses. What was gained in a generation will be lost in what is to come: the dominated will take revenge and act with the same treachery as the dominating.

This has been my experience as a Colombian and as part of a conflict that has lasted for more than 50 years. We no longer know what caused it, but we live with the challenges and uncertainties; facing what is to come.

Immersed in social, political and personal conflicts, my paradigms have been changing, and I have had to approach these conflicts from different perspectives:

- *In therapeutic and personal work;*
- *In the militancy and the task of political incidences;*
- *In the feminist spaces and women's movements; and*
- *With the Indian people.*

The most recent has been fighting with the devastations of nature: hurricanes, earthquakes, and cold fronts in Central America and Chiapas.



Maintained in each of these spaces - which I state is a deep pain - are the resentments, angers, everyone with their truth and their reason to stay sensible, and latent denial of the other.

All these years have confirmed for me the urgent necessity to construct new and imaginative ways for people to become agents of change and reconciliation in their countries, in their communities and in their personal lives. This implies arduous learning, but also opportunities for personal and spiritual growth when travelling along this hard road.

Being born in a country like Colombia, with its long history of denial of citizen's rights and repression, I grew up with a deep conviction and commitment to fight for that which is necessary to move forward in the social and political aspects, and in the recognition of the specific rights of certain sectors that have been historically refused: the rights of women and the Indian people.

My transgenerational story is defined by my belonging to the black and indigenous communities. This has been the constituent matrix of my social and human experience. I grew up in a matriarchal world where ancestral women broke norms and practices that oppressed and maintained them in submission, and whose emergent voices sang me to sleep in my childhood. They also taught me that we are worth the same as men, even though we are different.

I can say that personal, community, social, or spiritual experience has led me to conclude that in order to resolve the conflicts and to be that channel of mediation and reconciliation, what is required is:

- 1. Being open to approach each problematic event with a fresh attitude; that is to say, each conflict is different, there are no prescriptions. To enter the conflict with an open attitude and not believe we have "the solution"; there is no one solution, but multiple ones, where all the involved parts in the dispute must be recognised, as everyone assumes the responsibility of the damage caused.*
- 2. An approach and reflection from different forms of knowledge. Having an education based on different theories has given me a wider knowledge of the realities.*
- 3. To always maintain a systematic view that allows you to see that the sum of the different solutions conforms to the solution as a whole. Perhaps if everyone is committed to looking for alternatives from their familiar, social and personal conflicts, we would probably have a healthier whole.*
- 4. Approaching and working in reconciliation processes entails developing lucidity, understanding and mobilisation of all our human aptitudes to create strategies.*



Integration of a reconciliation model: Before new conflicts, conjunction of ideas

All this accumulation of experience and practice in the different processes of conflict in which I have been called on to participate, has allowed me to generate a proposal based on the following dimensions:

- 1. The psychology oriented to processes (process work);*
- 2. The familiar constellations of Bert Hellinger, who created the Familiar Constellations technique;*
- 3. The work of healing the body (corporal work);*
- 4. The principle of uncertainty of the sociologist Edgar Morin; and*
- 5. The dimension of spiritual work (our deepest respect to our internal being).*

An exploration in the task and the action: to participate, to learn and to solve the conflicts from the transformation and the creativity: EVEN.

To be EVEN means to go on at the same level, to be accomplice, equivalent, parallel, similar, even. From the participation and the commitment of many of my teachers and other people with whom I have journeyed the footpaths of the conflicts, our proposal has tried to advance from a trans-disciplinary vision to forming an open system in permanent construction.

This proposal of EVEN has been a proposal of co-participation, where the connection between those who teach and those who learn is co-operative, with an expressed rejection of all forms of authoritarianism or hierarchy. We are not in possession of "the truth".

Our criterion is based on the search for identity and bonds created by lived social stories, for being women and men with a deep will for change, for being indigenous or Afro descendants, or Colombians, or Central American, knowing clearly that our identities are not fixed, but vary through our lives.

Spaces where I have been applying this proposal of EVEN reconciliation

Spaces of conflictive participation

- 1. Fight for women: recognition of sexual and reproductive rights;*
- 2. Specific rights of indigenous women;*
- 3. The social fights: the Zapatista deed and the process of democratisation in Mexico; student movements in Colombia in the eighties; fights for land in Mexico in the nineties;*



4. *Processes of reconciliation and therapeutic work with different actors from the Colombian conflict (paramilitary, guerrilla, displaced, exiled);*
5. *Confrontations between police and citizens: New Divine, death of young people by police brutality (Mexico, DF, 2008);*
6. *Support of relatives of the tragedy of the New Divine;*
7. *Sensitisation of civic judges in the city of Mexico to the benefit of citizens; and*
8. *Sensitisation of the police and assisting in qualifications of tools to work in conflict zones.*

What guides me, what sustains me and maintains me on this path

My greatest motivation has been my own route, as I have been integrating in my life my social being, harmonizing my familiar and labour relations and my reconciliation with those who are different from me.

The aim is to work towards the future generations, to commit myself to the future of our country, contributing in order for it to germinate a generic democracy with fairness, social justice and harmony with our natural surroundings, to disassemble this culture of opprobrium and to live with a human sense, with the seal of multiple and colourful identities.

After every step I make, I know that I can continue advancing towards the next one when I have a group, a community behind me. And look for the horizon as a guide for life, the Principle of the Seven Generations: All decision is realised, taking into account the impact of our actions in the wellbeing of the seventh coming generation.

The reconciliation implies: to order what it was in disorder, to recognise that the adversary has the same conditions and to accept that we are not better than he is. Those who were placed over others and considered them of minor value or as enemies can now recognise themselves as equals¹. One reveals through peace what begins in the soul of oneself, and has its continuity in the family.

Peace does not avoid conflict, as Bert Hellinger says. Thanks to the conflicts, people show what is important for them and what they feel as threats. In conflict they express and defend their interests, until the moment in which they must admit where and to what extent the interest of the others acts as a limit on their interests. Only then can a balance and an interchange among them be possible.

¹ Bert Hellinger: *Después del conflicto*, La Paz. Editorial Herder, page 5.



Guatemala

The case of Visis Cabá Indigenous Reserve in Quiché

Nicolás Alfredo Pelico Caballeros¹

The Ixil area is located in the Republic of Guatemala, in Central America. When the Spaniards arrived in this land of trees (Guatemala), the Ixil people resisted invasion and subjugation; however in 1529, they were finally subdued and conquered.

Today, the Ixil people are settled in the northwestern area of the Cuchumatanes of La Sierra (mountain range), a territory of 2 340 square kilometres, with heights that range between 700 and 3 000 metres above sea level. Physically and politically, it is composed of three municipalities of the Quiché department: San Juan Cotzal, Santa María Nebaj and Chajul.

The Visis Cabá Ixil Biosphere Reserve is in the northeastern part of Guatemala in the municipality of Chajul, department of Quiché. It is 45 000 hectares in size. Chajul is 1 523 square kilometres big. Most of the population is of Mayan origin, and speaks Ixil.

Background

In the Biosphere Reserve, property is owned in three ways: communal property, possession-right property and private property. At the beginning of the 1900s, parts of the communal lands were occupied by the Communities of People in Resistance (CPR de la Sierra)², who came from two communities outside Chajul municipality. With the signing of the peace treaties at the end of 1996, the CPR was relocated because of pressure from the Chajul community; these people demanded the return of their communal lands, which they had protected since time immemorial. Moreover, the land is considered sacred because of its worship hills and sites.

The movement supporting the CPR relocation was motivated by the mayor, Manuel Asicona (a member of Frente Republicano Guatemalteco, FRG³), and managed by the municipality, former civil self-defence patrols (known as EXPAC⁴) and municipality neighbours.

It is important to note that the effects remain of the Chajul Ixil people's resistance to the Guatemala government's repression during the armed conflict⁵.

The economy primarily comprises maize and bean farming, coffee production, and the extraction of timber resources from woodlands.



The communal organisation is composed of the assistant mayors, the development committees, the principals, the elders, the midwives and the spiritual guides. It is considered to be the real power, rather than the municipal mayor, whose primary functions are administrative and political.

There are several non-governmental organisations that implement projects in the area. Among those related to the conflict are the Chajul Association and La Defensoría Maya (The Office for the Protection of the Mayans).

La Defensoría Maya considered that the Decree Law 40-97, which created the reserve, should be abolished, whereas the Chajul Association argued that the reserve administration must be responsible for the community leaders.

Main topic of conflict

In 1997, through the Decree Law 40-97, the Visis Cabá Ixil Biosphere Reserve was declared a protected area. This declaration was seen as the trigger for the conflict between the communities and the authorities, which was manifested in violence against people and facilities in the Municipality of Chajul. Because of these events, Decree Law 40-97 was modified by Decree Law 128-97, which opened direct participation in the area's administration and required the creation of a Local Technical Council⁶. This would be composed of:

- The Chajul municipal mayor (the chair);
- The departmental governor of El Quiché;
- A representative of Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (National Protected Areas Counsel, CONAP);
- Three representatives elected by the settled communities in the Visis Cabá Ixil Biosphere Reserve;
- Three representatives of the neighbours from the Municipality of Chajul, elected by the neighbours themselves at a community meeting;
- A representative of the Val vaq quyol Chajul Association;
- A representative of La Defensoría Maya; and
- A representative of Condeg.

However, the modifications of Decree 40-97 did not resolve the important issues so the community was given notice to appeal to the Constitutional Court, which resolved to keep the validity of the Decree and its respective modifications. This result was rejected by the Chajul inhabitants.

By January 1999, the executive secretary of CONAP, members of the Chajul municipality and the Chajul Association had appointed officials and opened the Office of Visis Cabá Technical Unit (the managing entity of the reserve). This institutional presence was rejected and led to increased enmity and violence.



In July 1999, Visis Cabá Technical Unit of CONAP started a poll in the Visis Cabá Biosphere Reserve, where 12 villages are located (despite threats against CONAP staff). The poll served to corroborate the inhabitants' approval of the declaration of the area as protected (at the time there were more than 25 000 inhabitants). The objection towards the declaration can be explained by the lack of research by the state of Guatemala prior to the declaration of Decree 40-97 and its subsequent modification by Decree 128-97.

In the first months of 2000, the inhabitants started talking to the Chajul mayor, Antonio Laynes Cabá,⁷ to find a solution to the problem. The talks began in April 2000, with the Commissioner of the Environment Presidency; the architect Jorge Cabrera Hidalgo, Instituto Nacional de Bosque (National Institute of Woodland, INAB); the departmental government of El Quiché; the municipal mayor of Chajul; and the SEGEPLAN, CONAP and Environmental secretariats. It relied on the presence of MINUGUA⁸ staff as honour witnesses.



ACTION supporters gathered in Guatemala in 2008 to share experiences on dialogue as an effective tool for social transformation



A 90 degree turn

On 3 May 2000, the municipal mayor of Chajul called for a meeting at the Chajul Municipality Square. This brought together the assistant mayors, evangelical and Catholic church representatives, a high level representation of CONAP, and communities in general. The community and religious representatives voiced their rejection of the Visis Cabá Ixil Biosphere Reserve. CONAP suggested that the community representatives address their proposal to the Republic of Guatemala Congress, as CONAP did not have the power to modify or derogate the Decree. However, this has not yet been possible.

In 2004, the Centro de Acción Legal-Ambiental y Social de Guatemala (Legal-Environmental and Social Action Centre of Guatemala, CALAS), along with the community authorities, took up the documentation of Ixil Mayan indigenous norms about water usage, woodlands and wild life; an inventory of major and medium mammals; and supported the deliberations of a local management model of the Visis Cabá Wild area, which considers the worldview of the Ixil people of Chajul.

So far, despite the work done by CALAS, Decree 40-97 and its reforms have not been accepted. However, the actors have expressed themselves without attacking external agents, the community or the formal authority.

In order to transform the conflict in the Ixil area of Chajul, it is vital that non-governmental organisations and the government consider the following:

1. It is essential that the Ixil community of Chajul be included in the formation of the bill which modifies Decree 40-97 and its reforms;
2. A participative study should be done showing the property situation in Chajul;
3. The protection and conservation regulations of biodiversity that the law establishes, should consider the Ixil people's principles, authorities and rules for water usage, woodlands and wildlife; and
4. The creation, in a participative and inclusive manner, of a legal figure to direct the local administration of natural resources.

¹ Co-ordinator of the CALAS' Indigenous People Environmental Collective Rights Area and former director of CONAP's Visis Cabá Technical Unit (1999-2000): nicopelico@gmail.com.

² Communities that ran away from the repression of the Guatemala National Army.

³ Led by General José Efraín Ríos Mont, former Gobierno de Facto.

⁴ Groups related to the National Army of Guatemala.

⁵ A period, approximately, from 1979 to 1995.

⁶ According to Article 5 of Decree Law 128-97.

⁷ Democratically elected candidate and member of Nueva Guatemala Frente Democrático.

⁸ Mission of Human Rights Verification and Fulfillment of Performance of Global Agreement about Human Rights in Guatemala.



Mexico

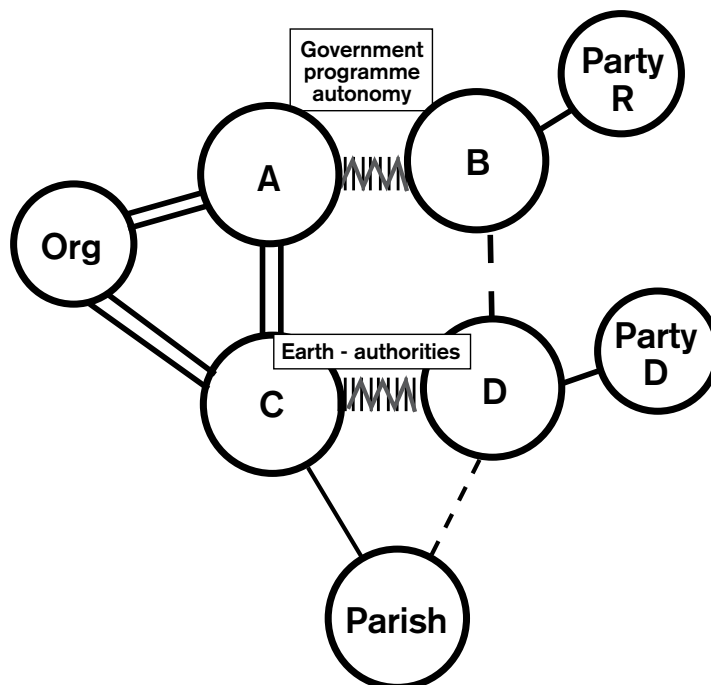
Fortification of the Heart: Emotional and individual experience of the personal changes that affect collective and political processes

Felipe de Jesús Toussaint Loera

Comisión de Apoyo a la Unidad y Reconciliación Comunitaria, A.C.

We are a non-governmental organisation, founded on 8 July 1996. We collaborate in the positive transformation of communitarian conflicts and in the construction of La Paz in Chiapas, Mexico.

The cause that motivates our project is the town: The suffering of the town was the departure point that made us reflect on the necessity of creating a mediation space that looks for unity and reconciliation, and that makes it possible for dialogue and fraternal encounters, finding paths that will lead us to the establishment of new relations of coexistence in a perspective of respect, tolerance and common work." (Coreco's original letter, 8 July 1996)



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La Paz, for us men and women, is constructed through creating spaces for peace and political, social, economic, communitarian and pacific religious alternatives to the reality of poor and marginalised people, and when our way can be crossed by all people.

The experience of reconciliation in a community has taught us a peaceful way in the positive transformation of conflicts. We consider it a contribution that we can offer to other people and organisations that work for peace with justice, dignity and respect for others. Respecting differences and proportionality, we consider that the teachings of this process can open our imagination to initiatives that are integrated in political conflicts and cultural, spiritual and relational dimensions of the people involved.

The conflict of San Juan (pseudonym)

“San Juan” is a community considered a model in the region for its consciousness and its internal organisation. In a complex process of political polarisation and division, four groups were formed: two groups on reclaimed land that formed two centres of population and disputed the property of the land, groups C and D; and two groups in the original town, groups A and B. Groups A and C were allies and members of the same organisation. Group B was a member of the organisation but did not accept the radical proposal of resistance to the government and of the autonomy of A and C. Group D decided to transact the land possession before the government, whereas C did not accept this legal route.

In 1997, at the request of the local Catholic parish, we - members of Coreco - began our service by supporting reconciliation. When the groups accepted our intervention, meetings between them were set up. We explained from the beginning that it had to be between the parts in conflict that the solutions to the conflict should be constructed. These are the key moments:

- 1. First process of dialogue, 1997:** We approached the legitimacy problems concerning the authorities, those expelled from the organisation and the reclaimed land, on the property of lots in the community and on the reception of government projects. At first, it was not possible to advance the dialogue.
- 2. Dialogue with local mediation:** Between 1998 and 2000 the Catholic parish wanted to help find a solution to the conflict (all were Catholic) and suspended the administration of sacraments as they would not reconcile. This pressure helped obtain common actions: reconstruction of the community school, appointment of a principal for each group, distribution of classrooms for the official and the independent school. Nevertheless, the conflict persisted. Group B considered that the parish favoured groups A and C because the suspension of sacraments was still held for group B.
- 3. In 2001:** Group B asked for the intervention of Coreco again. We had separate meetings with representatives of each party, assemblies and workshops to reconstruct through partner-dramas the experience and story of the conflict. The conflict remained latent; the confrontations were suspended for a while but an agreement was not obtained.



4. The ascent of the conflict, 2002: Concerning the proposal for the temple's adjustment and the reconstruction of the highway, Group A considered that the work should be done with materials and workers from the region, while group B believed that it should be done with governmental aid. The conflict escalated, the environment was irritating and the exit that group B had planned was the division of the temple and to not let those who did not accept governmental support and collaboration circulate on the streets. The daily tensions and problems increased.

5. Preparing to obtain an agreement: For four Sundays we visited the community and we reflected together to smooth out positions in order to negotiate. The effort was useless, however, as there was resistance from members of both groups, and the leaders observed but did not participate in the reflections: this was the conclusion arrived at by the parish and the elders of the community.

6. Proposal of decided rupture: At the beginning of 2003, in a meeting to review the previous process, the parish priest mentioned a Bible text (Genesis 13: 8) in which Abraham and Lot, to avoid outrage between the shepherds of their clans, decided to go their separate ways: Lot went to the low part of Jordan and Abraham to Canaan. This passage touched the groups deeply. There was a great wearing down in the community and between the people who promoted dialogue. The attitude of the leaders was to win - to compete and to defeat the other, each one from their own perception of the conflict. Resentment existed; there was non-conformity and annoyance on both sides. But the desire to not break definitively remained.

7. Encounter of Fortification of the Heart: The conflict had already lasted seven years with resolutions and reactivations. Fatigue on both sides was notable, all aspects of communitarian life were in conflict: three political groups, a new population centre was divided, conflict by land, division of the temple, two schools, two authorities, families divided, and broken relations. We proposed, as a last initiative, a Fortification of the Heart encounter over three days, directed to leaders of both groups, men, women and servants of the community church.

In proposing this option, we looked forward to helping the people find themselves through their own experience of life, pain, spirituality, tradition, history, foundation of relegation and deep desire to live in harmony.

The subjects approached were:

1. To recognise and to heal the wounds caused by the conflict (work with the dreams).
2. To drink of our spring. To recognise our own spring when thinking about the personal element that has saved us in the most difficult moments: the spring is the source that produces the pit.
3. The desire of the Heart of God Father and Mother to look for strength from the word that is sacred for us.
4. Option and commitment by the justice and the kingdom of God.



5. Flowery heart: to pick up the found positive experiences in the workshop.

When finalising the workshop, the leader of party (group B) said: "I take back these proposals that I brought in writing ... I want to follow another process, first to share what I lived these days with my wife and my family, to share with my group, and later if they agree between both groups..."

The final agreement of the workshop was that each group would initiate a reflection and would reframe the way to approach the dialogue between the groups. Later, the organisations agreed to continue the dialogue alone; only if it became complicated would they again call on Coreco.

The agreements they reached were:

- a) To recognise the right of the members of groups B and D to seed in reclaimed land from 1994, maintaining the criteria that this was collective land that could be used individually, but that property could not be adjudged on used land;
- b) To respect the schools (both independent and official);
- c) To respect those who sought government support; those of the party were free to use government resources and group A would not prevent this, but asked to not be forced to work on these projects; and
- d) The restoration of the temple would be done with community resources.

Later, the agrarian proceedings were achieved to certify the estates. They achieved this in dialogue and with the agrarian consultant's office of Coreco.

A neutral member of the community was appointed the promoter of peace and reconciliation. Since then, he has been a local collaborator to help solve differences by means of dialogue.

Some learning to share:

- The possibility of approaching the emotional and personal experience of conflict and to recognise others and their suffering (compassion);
- The personal and social processes are complementary. The cause of the conflict is political with social, communitarian, personal, emotional and religious consequences;
- To perceive that the organisation is a social means and that no one is the owner of truth. A single heart does not mean a single organisation;
- To be part of a group that fights for justice does not prevent one from committing injustices - to abuse power, to manipulate, to impose; that is to say, to reproduce the dominating system;
- A new form of relating, in which political differences are recognised and respected and, the contributions of both parts are valued;



- A new way to understand how differences, unity and conflict was constructed; and
- On recognising the qualities and contributions of each person, the capacity of the groups was harnessed and enabled them to find alternatives to conflict and history. Solutions have to consider personal and organisational perspectives; personal changes affect the collective and political processes, and vice versa.

The results did not remove power from the groups; they maintained their own militancy but in a new context of co-operation and alliance.

The results are understood in the work for La Paz: since they generate new social relations they prepare for new conflict situations; make more complex the democratic life of a town, respecting the collective identities; separate from the structural tendency to generate contradiction, polarisation and stereotypes between different political groups; and allow cultural modifications when distinguishing the cultural identity of the political unification.

This first encounter of Fortification of the Heart was the base on which to build other dialogues and communitarian negotiations, and to strengthen communitarian leaders who commit themselves to initiatives of social transformation.



Women power - making another world possible



Mexico

*Earth, land and natural resources:
Are they non-negotiable conflicts?*

*Peace's service and consultancy,
SERAPAZ-Mexico*

César Enrique Pineda Ramírez
Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz (SERAPAZ-México)

SERAPAZ's strategic vision is positive conflict conversion through direct intervention by consultancy, training, dialogue, facilitation, or in this case, co-adjudication and intermediation between the warring parties. Our team has intervened, between 2005 and 2008, in 28 intra-organisational, inter-organisational conflicts and, especially, in social civil and communal movements that face the state. Conflicts about use of land, natural resources, possessions and property have been an increasing concern in our work. These kinds of conflict raise a number of questions and lessons about their beginning, development and potential transformation.

We have intervened until now with a variety of services, strengths and processes in two sectors, one over the exploitation of forest resources (Guerrero's ecologists 2005; San Isidro Aloapam, Oaxaca 2007); three other conflicts relating to attempted landfill or confinements building (Calpulli del Valle, state of Mexico, 2005; Loma de Mejía, Morelos, 2008; Zimapán, Hidalgo, 2007 to 2008) - one of them has toxic connotations, another is closely related to land possession (community lands condemnation, Chiapas, 2007); and real estate property development and the use of community water (Xoxocotla, Morelos, 2007). This is an outstanding case because of its local and national impact: the conflict is over the construction of a hydroelectric project on the Papagayo River, in the state of Guerrero, which would directly infringe on 25 000 peasants and indirectly on 75 000 more.

This has produced a combined answer by the movement in Consejo de Ejidos (Ejidos Council) and Comunidades Opositoras a la Presa la Parota (CECOP). Since 2003, the council has faced local and national governments in their drive for the project. In all these cases, conflict is over land and natural resources; despite their great differences, we have found parallels, similarities, and lessons that we will summarise in this short text.



- There are immense parallels in the procedures for the approval of development or exploitation projects that affect communities. It is important to note that antidemocratic procedure results in spontaneous resistance from communities and people who have been excluded from an essential decision that affects their lives, environment and territory. Furthermore, these state procedures generally have a number of irregularities and are unlawful. A dimension of these conflicts is the legal process that is as questioned for its methods and mechanisms, as it is for its actors. Emerging movements, in reaction to these developments and exploitation projects, question how the decision is made and who made it.
- On the other hand, community, aboriginal or peasant movements that emerge in opposition to the designated development, often emerge as a spontaneous reaction of non-organised, not necessarily politicised, struggles or protests, which give them a very specific identity of traditional social movements. They are movements that emerge in the first phase of action as a response of those affected, as opposition movements, and as “NO” movements. Understanding these features is essential to understand their later strategies in the conflict, since they often lack the formal organisational structures, which are so pronounced in traditional social movements, that tend to dissolve leadership control of assembly mechanisms. This affects the strategic decision-making in the conflict and, especially, potential dialogue with the counterpart. Also, it conditions their ways of protesting and exposes them to a high degree of repression due to their lack of collective self-regulation when facing policing bodies.
- However, these “NO” movements not only question the decision-making procedure and exclusion, but also the “why” and “what for” of these development and resource exploitation projects. Here, there is a breaking point in the transformation. It is possible that if the conflicts could sustain their scope procedurally, they could seek political or legal tools that could create a less polarised and less stressful process. But the community movements look for answers to their main questions, which are urgent, because of the aggressive drive of these projects, decisions from the state, and economic power. Movements ask themselves, “who are the beneficiaries of these projects; what is the impact upon the land and ecosystem; and what is the projects’ collective and popular usefulness?”. They conclude with questioning the whole systemic development patterns, bases, speeches, forms, beneficiaries and impacts, which make their strategies, attitudes and actions so extreme.
- This is how two projects face each other, based on diametrically opposite premises. Movements value community culture and traditions tied to land and work, which are derived as a town identity; they value the usufruct resources only for reproduction, instead of collecting; they also value what they refer to as “dignity”, which identifies several collective feelings about non-subjugation, community identity, respect and self-determination, in spite of evident imbalance of forces in favour of the state and companies; and, especially, there is a deep collective feeling of justice. In short, they give priority to values and non-trading positions, which may be considered as subjective in its identity, history and ecosystems.



- That is why the state appears as the principal promoter of the project's development and running. The third party in the conflict is the companies and investors, sometimes less visible, but they can, in several stages of the conflict, influence and exert power upon the approval and decision procedures. The state, unlike the movements, attends to national or regional necessities as principal interest points in the project's development drive, along with economic growth, investment and job creation. This is where the projects' collision can be appreciated. The state gives priority to the economic rationalities that, in turn, give priority to maximum profit and to development understood as "market development". The movements give priority to their communities and ecosystems. There are important elements about the dialogue that are present in the conflict's second dimensions. The open conflict's dispute appears in the procedural scope, but the development's projects and visions are faced mostly in a polarised way. The interest in economic development becomes a matter of state urgency, which is pressed by "national" and "transnational" accumulation and investment interests (which imply a great political, media, repressive and, in many occasions, judicial power). The local interest of the preservation of the people and the ecosystem is, in comparison, a smaller power; however, it supports a resistance that is anchored in the people's mobilisation and participation, which can be overflowing and, sometimes, inexplicable. For some, dignity is non-negotiable and represents not being crushed by the strength of the state and its economic power. For others, the investment interest and economic needs are non-negotiable.
- Finally, the governmental strategy of criminalising the movements results in an escalation of conflict and the closing of lines of communication. The current approach of democratically elected governments towards social movements implies that the governments cannot face them from institutional democratic processes, since the Rule of Law would privilege, at least formally, the ones who are not sufficiently protected. That is why the chosen way to face the movements is often to denaturalise them, to not consider them as duly authorised persons, citizens, or communities with needs and legal interests, but rather as delinquents who can be addressed as criminals. The state finds a way to overcome formal democratic processes and apply authoritarian measures, and reorient repressive state functions towards the social movements, among them, the communitarian movements, peasants and indigenous people that defend their people and ecosystems.

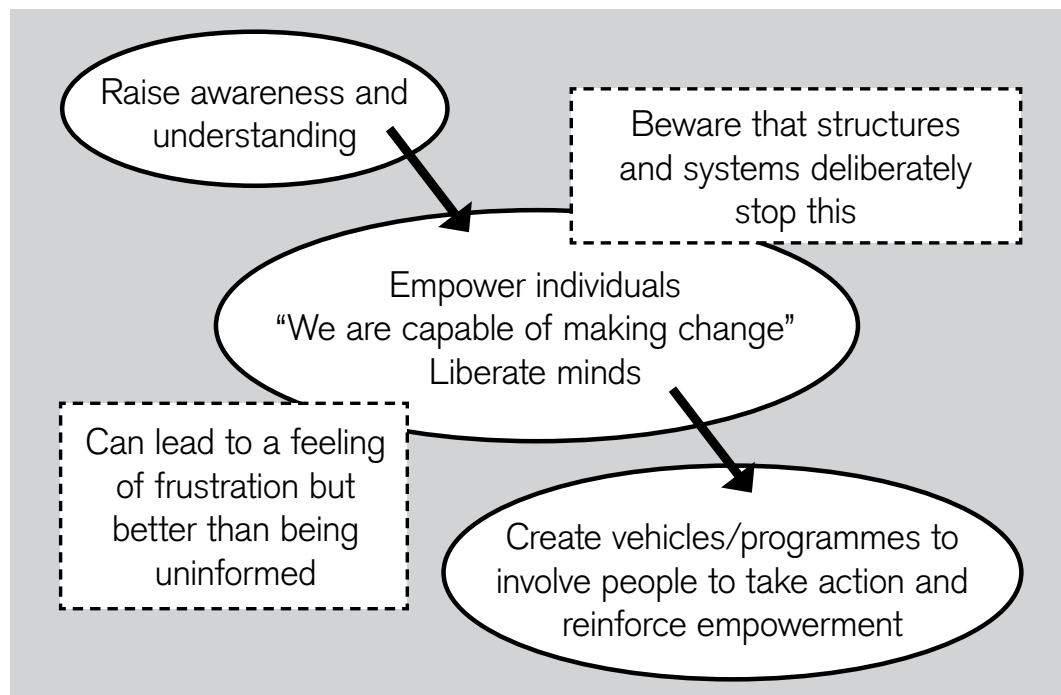
This is a very complicated situation, where it is difficult to find the dialogue's margins. In view of this, how do we act? Of course, there are more questions than answers, but some strategies we have used are the strengthening of people's and communities' strategic and organisational capacities as a way of promoting non-violence; political and organisational strategies that allow repression do not disarticulate the basic processes that strengthen the skills, capacities and knowledge for collective decision-making, the internal organisation and the general vision of facing conflict. Also, in the case of La Parota, we were able to apply political, physical and moral barriers that impeded the violence and repression.



Peace belt and human rights' observers visited the conflict territories as a presence that aimed to limit violence and repression. Finally, in the case of CECOP, we were able to build a strategy that balanced juridical defence, media, human rights, national and international involvement, conflict articulation, local and global visibility, lobbying, people and community mobilisation and participation, and kept the conflict peaceful, even without a definitive or lasting solution.

The conflicts for land, territory and natural resources are a challenge that must be faced; we must be open to rethinking the structural dimension and imagine ways to peacefully effect and work towards solutions without violence. It is a challenge we must think about and discuss with the people, with communities, and among all who look for fair solutions to build peace and find conflict transformation processes.

Mobilisation



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Mexico

The legislative powers and the collaborative processes Lessons of the Dialogue Program and Construction of Agreements: Climate change and national security

Fabrico Brodziak

Centro de Colaboración Cívica, A.C.

Consensus construction and collaborative processes for the construction of agreements are crucial tools in the transformation of social conflicts. Through these measures, spaces are constructed which open up the possibility of dissolving controversies by means of political dialogue, instead of violence. One of the most challenging places to use these tools, particularly in young democracies like Mexico, are the legislative powers because different perspectives, interests, needs, concerns and desires are frequently in contradiction and conflict, making it difficult to establish equitable relations and coherent and effective policies.

In Mexico, the legislative power is a plural space where, in spite of the deficiencies with which it fights, agreements (of a provided legitimacy by the same plurality) can be constructed. Why the unique plural and legitimate space? At the moment, the legitimacy of the federal executive authority is strongly questioned by a significant segment of the left-wing party, for which the presidential elections of 2006 were fraudulently run. This fact has exacerbated the differences between the political parties in the country.

On the other hand, from its beginning more than two years ago, the current executive power has established climate change as one of its priorities; and it has presented a national strategy to attend to the issue. However, from the legislators' point of view, the executive has not considered the fundamental role that the legislative power can play.

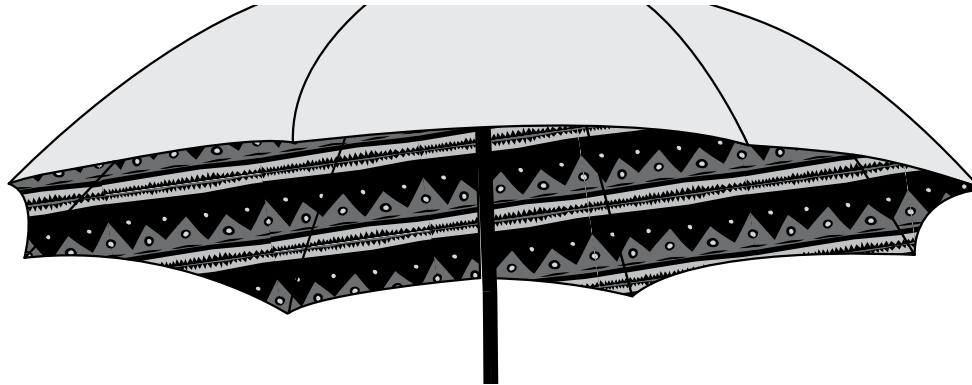
In that context, a dialogue experience was carried out: Programa de Diálogo y Construcción de acuerdos: Cambio Climático y Seguridad Nacional (Program of Dialogue and Construction of Agreements: Climate change and national security). Its primary target was "to contribute to the construction of legitimate, stable and effective agreements that, from the legislative power, take care of the risks to national security, as well as the opportunities and needs of adaptation, mitigation of emissions and economic growth in relation to climate change in Mexico".¹



Until now the process activities, in which a little more than 160 decision-makers from different sectors - legislators, academia, the three orders of government, civil society, unions and industrialists - have participated, have consisted of two dialogue sessions. The first one aimed to deepen knowledge of the matter and the second one sought to agree on priorities that served as part of the legislative process.

The Conflict Transformation Umbrella

Aims to bring **positive change** to human lives



Relationships

Within and between individuals, organisations, communities and nations.

Attitudes and behaviours

Including physical violence, discrimination, prejudice, humiliation, subordination and domination.

Structures and systems

Including economic, social, political, cultural and religious.



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Diverse learning processes have emanated from this method, but we will focus on two of them:

1. The processes of multiple actors must be summoned by a group able to represent the principles that their process of dialogue wants to reflect in society.

In relation to this case, we recommended shaping a coalition of organisations that could call for dialogue with the legislature, and that these organisations form an advisory group of representatives of the legislature. The advisory group should reflect the universe of actors and sectors that took part in the exercise. In addition, the advisory group would itself be a multi-actor dialogue process and, therefore, it had to be an example for the summoned group.

The first aspect that will influence the spirit of the legislators and other actors to participate in a collaborative process are the characteristics of the convening organisations. Who summons the dialogue? What interest or groups of society do they represent? What history do the convening organisations have in their sector?

It would be ideal for all the convening organisations to be important in their respective sectors (i.e. academic, social, enterprise, union, et cetera). It influences the actors' perception of the seriousness with which the subject will be dealt and symbolises the capacity of the conveners. Indeed, it summons different groups, some of which are often reluctant to collaborate with the legislators in other circumstances. Moreover, the technical capability and knowledge that organisations count on can contribute, in a considerable way, to the legislators' perception of potential effective support with updated information.

The second aspect is that, given the diversity of the legislative power, a group of organisations builds confidence in the legislators since it represents different sectors and perspectives with which different parties can agree. At the same time, this contributes to the impartiality and representativeness that is sought in the process. In addition, a coalition of organisations with different perspectives on the same question, speaks of the urgency of the subject. That is to say, if the social sector finds common ground with the enterprise sector, the legislators may see the importance of the subject, for which its attention is necessary; this can incentivise their political capital.

In the present matter, the convening organisations were the Program of the United Nations for Development; the Centre Mario Molina, an organisation led by a Nobel Prize winner on the topic; the Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental (Mexican Centre of the Environmental Right), recognised for its contribution to the environmentalist sphere; La Comisión de Estudios del Sector Privado (Commission of Studies of the Private Sector) for the Desarrollo Sustentable (Viable Development), the main research centre of the deprived sector of environmental subjects; and the CCC, which had already worked in the construction of capacities of dialogue in the legislative power.



2. It is necessary to consider in the design of the process and the adjustments that are being done to it, mechanisms to approach the tensions that appear within the principles that sustain a collaborative activity.

A process of this nature needs to be founded on democratic principles. In the example we used the following: non-violence; attendance of impartial facilitators; movement towards a concrete and practical change; inclusion and participation; deliberation with information; effective communication between the actors; building confident relationships that permit the augmentation of efforts; the capacity to influence the formal processes of the decision-making; a high level of transparency; and finally, a safe space for the deliberation.

As an example, we will take two principles (or values) - inclusion and participation, and influence. First, inclusion and participation suggest that the process must "assure the presence of the perspective of the supporter, voices and positions at the dialogue table", whereas influence talks about "the capacity of the process to influence the policies or processes of formal decision-making".²

In this case, the inclusion of CESPEDS on the one hand, and of CEMDA on the other - organisations that at times have been perceived as antagonistic in other forums - stimulated the participation of the two most represented political forces in the Congress: El Partido Acción Nacional (National Party Action, PAN), which is nearest to the Christian businessmen and democrats, and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PDR), which is near to the left.

Nevertheless, the inclusion had a limit. If it had been invited to participate in Greenpeace in the advisory group, the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (Green Ecologist Mexican Party, PVEM) would have blocked the process. This would happen since Greenpeace has protested, on several occasions, against the leaderships of some parties, especially at the municipal and state level. In relation to this actor, who could put at risk the participation of other key actors, the advisory group decided that CEMDA should contact Greenpeace to inform it of the process and to successfully obtain its opinions. It was also agreed, that for the elaboration of the document of actor mappings, Greenpeace would be interviewed to assure the inclusion of its perspective. In addition, an actor was sought that Greenpeace could trust to participate in the dialogue sessions.

Another example of the tension between inclusion and participation and the principle of influence appeared when deciding what entity (legislative commission or commissions) would take the process to the legislative power. Should it be the parliamentary leaders, any specific commission, or a set of them?

The parliamentary co-ordinators must pay attention to numerous subjects and therefore their time is extremely limited, although they have the most influence on decision-making and they would give major political relevance to the process.



They were the first contacted and the ones who decided who would take the leadership and chose the Comisión de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Commission of Environment and Natural Resources).

If it had been decided that there would be a set of commissions to assure the inclusion principle, especially given the necessity of cross-sectional work in a subject like climate change, there would have been a risk of being ineffective because of the time required to co-ordinate several commissions and to build political will. In our example, the Comisión de Medio Ambiente (Commission of Environment) took the leadership and worked very well because of the participation of legislators most interested in the subject.

Now, even if the leadership of this commission was effective for the decision-making process, the less active participation of other commissions resulted in a slight bias of the process towards the environmental perspective, to the detriment of other high-priority subjects such as health, hydro resources, energy, agriculture, natural disasters, and economic development. In order to mitigate this bias, the deputies of the natural resources committee lobbied in block, i.e. in a cohesive way, with other commissions, the proposals that arose from the process.

Finally, it is necessary to mention that the dialogue processes can be an effective tool to transform relations between the legislative power and other actors in society. Moreover, it can complement and assist the legislative process, but cannot replace it. In that sense, tension can be limited if a way is found in which the legislative actors take control of the process, but not to the detriment of the process values. Otherwise, the legislators could impose the inertia of traditional practices on decision-making, leaving aside the interests and concerns of the social actors, and so decreasing the legitimacy of the process.

This article has shown some examples and recommendations of how consensus and collaboration towards the construction of agreements can contribute to transforming relations between different social sectors and legislative actors. This transformation produces understandings that lead to coherent and effective laws. To get to this point, it is advisable to shape a plural convening group that, besides being representative, takes into account and is able to solve the tensions that may appear in practice between the principles on which the process will be based.

¹ www.cambioclimaticoysseguridadnacional.org

² Murdock, Janet L.; Rodríguez, Mery; Hernández, Mara; Brodziak, Fabricio; Herrin, Delia; Ordway, Jared y Guerrero, Luisa. Diálogo Multi-actor y Construcción de Consensos en el Proceso Legislativo: Mejores Prácticas Internacionales en Diseño y Facilitación, in process of publication.

PAZCI

Association Center for Peace and Action for Conflict Transformation

Asociación Centro para la Paz y la Acción para la Transformación de Conflictos

Email: asociacionpazci@gmail.com
centropazci@gmail.com

Website: www.pazci.org

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala.

Telephone: (502) 5208 8014

Action for Conflict Transformation (ACTION Support Centre)

Postnet Suite #204,

PO Box 2226

Johannesburg, 2001

Telephone: 011 331 6438

Fax: 011 331 6136

Email: enquiries@actionsupport.co.za

Website: www.actionsupportcentre.co.za



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