The owl and the dove: knowledge strategies to improve the peacebuilding practice of local non-governmental organisations

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PART II. STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN THE KNOWLEDGE STRATEGIES OF SOUTHERN PEACE NGOS
Addressing the questions posed at the end of Part One (see page 155), Part Two looks at the structure (chapter four) and agency (chapters five and six) shaping the knowledge and learning processes of Southern peace NGOs. By ‘structure’ I mean the larger framework within which local organisations operate and which they cannot easily change. It includes power structures and international realities. By ‘agency’ I mean the abilities organisations have to give shape to their own work and, perhaps, help change the structure in which this work takes place. The structure in which this actor learns constrains and directs his room for action, or agency. Both structure and agency are needed for a proper understanding of learning-for-action or strategic learning.

Chapter four addresses the factors that constrain and support the learning of these NGOs, particularly in relation to power differences, donor relations and North-South dynamics. In this way, the chapter clarifies the structural, contextual elements that constrain and give shape to the learning and knowledge sharing of Southern peacebuilders. Next, the fifth and sixth chapters examine the knowledge strategies and experiences of local peace NGOs as they navigate within this structural context. In this way, Part Two aims to further elaborate the picture of actors and relationships that was painted in Figure 3.5 at the end of Part One. While that figure looked ‘flat’, Part Two gives depth to it by adding the element of structure, power and inequality. In addition, Part Two concretises the discussion of the knowledge processes of peace NGOs by introducing the reality of Southern peacebuilding NGOs and the constraints and opportunities they face as they try to give shape to their learning.