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

Verkoren, W.M.

Citation for published version (APA):
Verkoren, W. M. (2008). The owl and the dove: knowledge strategies to improve the peacebuilding practice of local non-governmental organisations Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA - Amsterdam University Press

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 4. One way street?
*Structural inequalities in knowledge generation, dissemination and recognition*

Part One has outlined the field of NGO peacebuilding and connected it to trends and developments with regard to knowledge and learning processes. It ended with a figure depicting the various actors and relations that play a role in knowledge processes in and around local peace NGOs. This chapter gives depth to the relations among the peacebuilding players that take part in cross-cultural knowledge exchange and learning processes, bringing into the equation North-South issues, donor regimes and inequality among actors. It shows how such structural factors constrain the possibilities for joint, ‘third-order’ learning.

The interviews held with Southern peacebuilders highlighted the fact that their knowledge flows and learning processes occur in the context of an international set of relationships that are not equal. The majority of interviewees mentioned the role of Northern donors in shaping or even determining the knowledge that goes around and the extent to which learning takes place. The fact that these and other structural issues came to the fore so clearly made it necessary to collect more literature about these issues. As a result, this chapter is based on both interview findings and theory.

The field of peacebuilding is characterised by asymmetric interactions between Northern and Southern actors. These interactions shape not only the form and frequency of knowledge flows, but also the content of the knowledge that is accepted and used. Unequal power relations between Northern and Southern actors mean that some types of knowledge receive more recognition than others. Because peacebuilding activities of NGOs are part of the ‘development aid industry’, they take place in a framework of money and other types of assistance flowing from the developed to the developing world. Knowledge transfer is part of this assistance. Capacity building has become an important catchword that is part of most development and peacebuilding programmes. Northern NGOs work with partner organisations in the South, aiming to capacitate them so that they will ultimately be able to continue the work without foreign assistance. Training is an important part of capacity building, and knowledge is transferred as part of such training programmes.
But there are also other, more subtle ways in which knowledge flows from one actor in the chain to another. Project proposals have to be written in a particular language and jargon in order to be funded. Donor organisations often come to a country with a pre-determined policy and ideas about the types of activities they are willing to support. This influences what is considered peacebuilding and how it is framed in concepts and theory. The policies and ideas of international NGOs that play the role of donor vis-à-vis local organisations are themselves shaped by education and research institutions and by the governments, international organisations, and sometimes private individuals that fund them.

Chapter four draws attention to the fact that the interactions summarised in Figure 3.5 at the end of Part One are not ‘flat’ or ‘neutral’. Power differences among the actors make their relations asymmetric. This has consequences for the content and effectiveness of peace work in the communities which, in the end, the entire chain or network of relations has been set up to support. The chapter therefore focuses on the inequalities among actors playing a role in knowledge generation and dissemination, and elaborates how these result in the recognition and domination of some types of knowledge over others.

Section 4.1 looks at inequalities among the actors when it comes to the production of recognised knowledge. 4.2 analyses research capacities in the South. 4.3 looks at ‘knowledge for development’ policies of donor agencies that try to bridge the North-South knowledge gap. 4.4 focuses on knowledge regimes in the NGO sector, while 4.5 examines how these lead to a particular development discourse that shapes the actions of local actors in peacebuilding. 4.6 looks at the way in which the aid chain often leads to donor-driven programming in peacebuilding. Finally, section 4.7 zooms in on the concept of capacity building that was introduced in the previous chapter, asking how it work out in practice and what this means for the knowledge used in the field.

4.1 Inequalities in knowledge production and recognition

“The realization is dawning upon us that both development and economic growth are based on knowledge. As we grow aware of that, we are faced with a gap between North and South in the ability to tap into the globalizing knowledge economy.” (Hoekema 2006: 3)

“Knowledge asymmetries remain one of the key differences between the developing and industrialised worlds, and the recent language of
the digital divide just serves to reinforce the divisions in access to higher education, and the stark contrasts in research funding, patents, and numbers of scientists that were already well-known” (King 2004: unnumbered).

In section 2.4, I discussed the existence of different knowledge systems in the world. Although we should be careful not to overstate the dichotomy between Western and non-Western systems of knowledge, many NGO employees interviewed perceive a fault line between modern, scientific, Western approaches to knowledge on the one hand and traditional, indigenous ‘knowledges’ on the other hand. These fault lines run within developing countries. This section adds to this picture by drawing attention to the fact that the different ‘knowledges’ do not enjoy equal status in today’s world.

The problem from the perspective of achieving an equal exchange of knowledge is that, at least according to some observers, Southern knowledge systems have been delegitimised by Western colonisation and the ensuing inequality between North and South. The Western knowledge system has gained ground in the Third World through the establishment of Western-style institutions and the education of local elites in the West. Indigenous knowledge institutions are under-resourced. The debt crisis and structural adjustment programmes starting in the 1980s have cut off funding for Southern universities and publication structures (Van Grasdorff 2005: 50-54). The difference can be seen in the number of publications in academic journals. Powell (2006: 528) writes that the “overwhelming majority of internationally published work on development issues and places is produced by Northern researchers” or institutions, as Southern researchers face “multiple barriers to international publication, while locally produced journals are seldom well distributed internationally, or cited by Northern researchers if they are. This means that locally produced research – with its methodologies and research questions potentially […] corresponding to local priorities – is not seen and therefore not used by development practitioners, policy makers, or even many academics, based in the North.” (Powell 2006: 528)

Indeed, in one of the interviews done for this study, an NGO director noted that “There is a gap between North and South in terms of knowledge generation. Most of the well-resourced institutes and well-trained researchers are in the North, making it inevitable that much of the

---

89 In 1995, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries – the developed countries – on average produced 72.9 such publications per 100,000 inhabitants, while the low-income countries produced 0.8 (Sagasti 2004: 59).
discourse is driven by Northern perspectives and perceptions. For example, the majority of the authors of the *People Building Peace II* book [a collection of stories of civil society peacebuilding around the world] come from the North.\(^90\)

The background to these developments is that global inequality and the dominance of particular development models lead to the modernisation and homogenisation of most developing economies and societies. This is also true for formal education, which tends to be largely modelled on the West. At the same time, more traditional channels of oral knowledge transfer have been disrupted by societal transformations that include urbanisation and large-scale migration. With many people travelling to the city each day for school, trade or work, it becomes harder for the older generation to pass its knowledge on to young people.

Through education as well as in other ways, formal, documented, and scientifically tested knowledge has been presented to local actors in developing countries as the definition of ‘legitimate’ knowledge, discarding more traditional types of knowledge. (Mudimbe 1988; Mawdsley et al. 2002: 12-13) In some cases the arrival of such ‘modern’ knowledge leads to tensions with tradition.

“\textit{When our children come back from school, they have been turned into foreigners. They cannot understand why we ask them to kneel before their parents. They cannot understand why we tell them not to go to their parents’ bedrooms. We believe that one week at an initiation ceremony is worth ten years at a primary school as far as the developing of values is concerned}”.\(^91\)

Thus, colonialism, ‘modernisation’, global inequality and the globalisation of knowledge flows have all contributed to an erosion of indigenous knowledge and traditions. Local knowledge has become segmented. It is difficult for people to stay connected to their roots in the face of the arrival of ‘modern’ knowledge:

“\textit{There is a lot of prejudice about white people. Most people have only known them as bosses. Among many people there is an exaggerated reverence for people who are like whites. In Liberian communities people (often children) who can write their own name are considered kwi, civilised. Kwi people do not have to do hard labour or listen to their parents. This upsets a natural balance}”.\(^92\)

---

\(^90\) Telephone interview with Kenyan NGO director, Nairobi, 29 November 2005.

\(^91\) African women interviewed by Malunga (2006: 8)

\(^92\) Interview with staff members of a Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.
“I remember in a recent workshop a lady asking me, ‘why am I a different person at my place of work and at my home – I am an African at home but I feel like I am somebody else at the office?’ What she meant was that she felt more connected to ubuntu values and principles at home and the community in which she lived, but was at a loss for how to apply the same values at her place of work.’’ (Malunga 2006: 7)

The dominance of Western knowledge systems over local ones is not new. Over the years, such knowledge hegemonies have engendered responses – see Box 4.1 below.

Box 4.1: Responses to knowledge hegemony

As a response to hegemony, the concept of popular education came into existence in the 1970s. The most famous proponent of this approach, Paulo Freire (1979) saw a need to counteract the way people in the South had ‘internalised’ the culture of external dominators. In Freire’s view, centuries-long dependencies have impacted people’s psyche. As section 4.5 elaborates, discourse analysis draws attention to the way in which domination is constructed not only in relationships of power but also in ideologies and discourses – in the ways in which people make meaning of situations. In line with this approach Freire saw that subjects of oppression have subconsciously adopted societal outlook of the oppressor. In this way, hegemony is internalised into people’s consciousness.

Popular education is characterised by a commitment to social change in the interests of the marginalised. For example, the organisation ATTAC (Association pour la Taxe Tobin pour l’Aide aux Citoyens), a prominent member of the anti-globalisation movement, sees itself as an “action-oriented movement of popular education” whose function it is to “equip members with the necessary knowledge to deal with the contemporary globalising era” (Novelli 2004, 165). Organisations like ATTAC build on the method developed by Freire (1979). This method is based on the premise that education cannot be neutral or value-free. Instead its aim should be the emancipation of the oppressed. This is done by raising their consciousness of injustice. Freire also rejected what he called ‘depository’ education in which what is taught is seen as the absolute truth, in the possession of the teacher. Instead, education ought to be characterised by a horizontal relation between teachers and students. It should start from students’ reality and use concepts of examples that they understand. This element in particular is one that has inspired many training courses, also in the realm of peacebuilding. Action research approaches – like the one we will analyse in chapter eight – are one example of this.

As most education systems in the developing world have been developed to mirror Northern education systems, the subjects taught in schools and universities are not always relevant to the context. This may contribute to brain drain: “if you are educating someone according to [a] system, which actually addresses the needs of the North, surely these people will be attracted by job opportunities in the North”
Education that does not fit a country’s needs can also lead to conflict. In Cambodia, in the 1960s, graduates trained in subjects like French literature and philosophy were unable to fill the needs of the labour market in a predominantly rural country. They became a largely idle urban elite that was the target of significant resentment on the part of the hard-working rural population. This resentment helps explain the rise of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s that went on to establish a kind of rural ‘utopia’ in which intellectuals were targeted and killed. (Vickery 1984)

There are also more subtle ways in which the gap within Southern societies between tradition and modernity can create fault lines of conflict between modern solutions and traditional ways. Not only Northern researchers tend to regard indigenous knowledge as not ‘scientifically sound’, but “in some countries, official propaganda depicts indigenous cultures and methodologies as backward or out of date and simultaneously promotes one national culture and one language at the expense of minority cultures. Often, formal schooling reinforces this negative attitude.” (Grenier 1997: 8). Local elites sometimes deliberately reinforce ‘Western’ knowledge, and discredit indigenous knowledge, in order to maintain a political system and its elites. These elites are usually Western-educated and their education provides them with a position of power. In order to maintain this position they strive to ensure that only modern, Western knowledge is recognised as legitimate.

The oral tradition of local communities and the corresponding fact that much of local knowledge is not written down are another reason why local knowledge in developing countries appears to be losing ground in the dynamic interaction between different traditions. It contributed to the fact that traditional knowledge was not captured in modern education. The difference between oral and written traditions also plays a role in the work of local NGOs and their relationship with donor agencies. As interviewees in all the countries visited mentioned, people with oral traditions find it difficult to prioritise writing down experiences or reading newsletters and reports. A Liberian saying goes that “if you want to deny Liberians information, write it down and circulate it.”93 But written information is what Northern stakeholders, like donors agencies, base their work on.

Another aspect of the asymmetries in knowledge production and recognition has to do with language. The dominance of English in

---

93 Interview with staff members of a Liberian NGO, Monrovia, Liberia, 14 February 2006.
international interactions is a disadvantage for local groups in developing countries. Powell (2006: 523) writes that “[b]y failing to engage systematically with local languages, the sector limits its understanding of and its ability to communicate with most of its intended beneficiaries.” These beneficiaries face the “practical difficulties of [either] being forced into using a second language or of being excluded from development discourse altogether.” In the cross-cultural interactions that characterise peacebuilding and development interventions, “the issue is not simply one of translating speech but of appreciating the intellectual, ideological, and social understandings upon which speech is based. The use of language encompasses a structure of thought and shared understanding that may not be simply translatable.” (Powell 2006: 522) The dominance of English has practical consequences for NGOs working in developing countries. For example, “[t]he very concept of log-frame analysis [a tool for monitoring and evaluation which I will address in 5.2] is based on Anglo-Nordic perceptions of reality and is arguably untranslatable into most languages and most understandings of reality across the globe.” (Powell 2006: 523)

Although I have emphasised that the rift between Western and indigenous knowledge systems runs within Southern societies, the South has been presented largely as a monolithic whole up until this point. There are, however, important differences and inequalities within the developing world. Of course there are differences between countries and regions of the world. Non-Western knowledge traditions, some of which were discussed briefly in section 2.4, vary enormously across the globe, although they largely seem to have some general aspects, like oral traditions and an emphasis on the observer being part of the reality (s)he analyses, in common. There may also be differences between countries with regard to the way they have dealt with the arrival of ‘modern’ knowledge.

There are also important differences within developing societies with regard to, for example, access to the different knowledges. For example, women tend to play a relatively minor role in the production and legitimisation of knowledge. “Women in general [are often] excluded from the processes of problem analysis, planning, and decisionmaking” due to the fact that in many parts of the world they have lower status, fewer rights and higher illiteracy rates (Grenier 1997: 31-32, citing Durno and Chanyapate 1995). Cultural traditions keep women in the dark. Women also have little access to ICTs. As a result of all this, women in developing countries usually do not share their knowledge and expertise beyond their immediate environment. To make matters worse, training and capacity development programmes often reach
mainly men. (Knabe and Nkoyok 2006: 5 and 12) In order to correct the knowledge imbalance between men and women, a Cambodian woman notes that “learning and knowledge sharing are particularly important for women. Women need to know what happens in the world, not to stay at home. Knowledge is power, also for women in the family. When your children know more than you they will no longer respect you. This happens with the children of the generation that lacked education opportunities under the Khmer Rouge.”

In response, “[i]n many communities across Africa, women have initiated their own projects to assist each other and to improve livelihoods and communities”. In addition, “[w]omen are sharing their local experiences.” (Knabe and Nkoyok 2006: 12-13) This includes the creation of networks for solidarity, joint action and learning. In peacebuilding, and not only in Africa, we also see this trend. In Box 4.2 below, we find an example of such a network.

Box 4.2: The Rural Women Peace Link in Kenya’s North Rift province

The Rural Women Peace Link is a grassroots initiative by women in Kenya’s North Rift Province. This province has a long history of conflict. Its people have been marginalised since colonial times, when the most fertile land in the region was colonised by white farmers. After independence it was redistributed but the local people did not get any share. They have been forced to live in dry areas where their main economic activity is pastoralism. With population growth there has been increasing competition for grazing areas for livestock. Possession of weapons is widespread with arms flowing across the borders with neighbouring countries. Children are socialised from a young age to understand the historical wrongs committed against their people, and a warrior identity is cultivated.

In the Rural Women Peace Link local women have organised themselves into a network. By the time of my visit this network consisted of fourteen local sub-networks, each consisting of various women groups. The aim is to exchange experiences and build the women’s capacities to deal with conflict. In their own localities, their activities include mediation in any conflicts from violence between pastoralist groups to family disputes, educating people about their rights, promoting healthcare, and engaging local government bodies to promote accountability and improve security provision. The women also strive to change gender relations in a region where women have traditionally had subordinate roles and are often abused.

Each sub-network meets once a month and annually there is a conference in which all the members come together to record and share experiences. Here they also receive training from the Nairobi Peace Initiative Africa (NPI-Africa) and other organisations. These trainings deal with mediation, leadership, presentation, and other skills. The women from the Peace Link are also taught how to present information. This includes

94 Interview with former NGO worker. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 22 May 2006.
95 Meeting with staff of SNV and members of the Rural Women Peace Link in Eldoret, Kenya, 1 December 2005.
presentation training but also how to provide proof through pictures and data.

The network is supported by the local branch of the development organisation SNV. Through SNV Kenya North Rift Portfolio the Rural Women Peace Link became a member of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), a global network that is examined in detail in chapter seven. GPPAC for the women represented an important opportunity to gain visibility for the insights and results gained in the North Rift. They consider it crucial that the voices of the Rural Women can be heard more widely, and the Global Partnership made this possible.

GPPAC also provided women of SNV North Rift and the Rural Women Peace Link with new ideas and skills that could be - and are - applied at the local level. For example, tools for early warning and response are being adapted to the local context.

Returning to the general issue of inequalities between North and South in terms of knowledge recognition, it deserves mention that the picture is not a hundred per cent gloomy: it is certainly not the case that all Westerners regard indigenous knowledge as illegitimate. In fact, in recent years external researchers and practitioners have exhibited increasing attention for the potential value of local knowledge. More and more often the view can be heard that local people’s unique knowledge of their own situation represents a pool of knowledge that external agencies pursuing projects in developing countries ought to tap into. Particularly in the fields of agriculture and ecological preservation, there is increasing recognition of this.

“Development efforts that ignore local circumstances, local technologies, and local systems of knowledge have wasted enormous amounts of time and resources. Compared with many modern technologies, traditional techniques have been tried and tested; are effective, inexpensive, locally available, and culturally appropriate; and in many cases are based on preserving and building on the patterns and processes of nature.” (Grenier 1997: 10)

In peacebuilding, as we will see in this chapter and beyond, approaches towards local knowledge vary. In the relationship between donor agencies and their partners in conflict-affected countries, some donors are more open to it than others. Many external stakeholders recognise the value of local knowledge and approaches at least in words – but the structural issues such as the aid chain and global hegemonies in terms of discourse make it difficult to treat it as equal in practice. Before looking at some of these issues in more detail, we will first look at the research capacities that exist in the South.
4.2 Research capacities in the South

In recent years there has been increasing attention for the unequal situation described above. Authors from development studies and practice draw attention to the fact that in order to achieve a better balance, ‘Southern’ knowledge should be mobilised much more. Rather than importing knowledge from the North it is important to invest in research and knowledge generation capacities in developing countries themselves to stimulate indigenous knowledge production and find ‘Southern’ solutions for ‘Southern’ problems. In 2000, the Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council (RAWOO) published a report entitled ‘Mobilizing Knowledge for Post-Conflict Management and Development at the Local Level’. Among other things, it found that

- local actors need to be involved in knowledge generation.
- there is a need of local capacity for generating new knowledge.
- it is important to draw lessons from comparative exchange between knowledge agents in different regions of the world.
- most research is too theoretical. (RAWOO 2000: 200)

Six years later the issue was still on the Council’s agenda: “[i]t is crucial that ‘the missing poor’, ignored by policies, are enabled to do their own research.” The reason is that “[c]ountries without an own and diversified knowledge system are not able to shape their development in accordance with their own wishes and circumstances.” (RAWOO 2006: 1) The Council now emphasised that Southern research capacities should be linked to government policies and institutions as well as other societal actors in developing countries: “[l]inking research to the national systems of innovation is likely to increase its relevance and impact” and “[k]nowledge production that proactively pursues interaction with local stakeholders is likely to make a better contribution to the empowerment of the poor.” (RAWOO 2006: 3)

However, the need to build Southern research capacities contrasts with reality, in which these capacities are not yet increasing. Although research capacity is growing rapidly in India, China, and the East Asian newly industrialised countries (De la Rive Box 2001), in most of the developing world it remains low. Sufficient research skills and resources are lacking in many cases, and often there is no time and money to do field research. Structural adjustment programmes imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have resulted in cuts in public funding of higher education in many developing countries.
Even where research capacity grows, it may be that the wrong kind of research is being conducted – at least from the perspective of finding practical solutions to Southern problems such as war and poverty. Adding to RAWOO’s conclusion that most Southern research is too theoretical, De la Rive Box writes about the perceived irrelevance of traditional sciences, particularly in many African countries. ‘Borrowed’ concepts from Northern scientific traditions dominate, but these concepts are insufficiently sensitive to the specifics of local conditions. Many African intellectuals are often unwilling to be ‘usable’ (De la Rive Box 2001). Abstract science leads to prestige in many countries. Gassama Dia (2006: 14) agrees that the “connection between research and the use of research products does not exist in many institutes, while we keep training researchers in increasingly sophisticated techniques while they do not generate products that are greatly needed by the populations.” This is a global problem, but the situation is probably worse in most Southern countries. Many Southern universities do not consider development studies and conflict studies academic disciplines (Bieckmann 2007: 8). Little academic teaching in the field of peace studies takes place in the countries visited.

Again we are confronted with a gap between research and practice. The 2000 RAWOO report identifies a gap in many developing countries between the academic research community, based mainly in the large cities, and grassroots organisations. (RAWOO 2000: 200) Universities and research institutes in the South do not meet the needs voiced by peace NGOs for more practice-related research of the needs of communities or locally relevant methods for peacebuilding practice. Indeed, out of the 105 NGO staff members interviewed for this study, only a few mentioned local knowledge institutions as potential sources of knowledge for them. What emerges is that initiatives to build Southern research capacity need to focus on researching problems identified by communities in an interdisciplinary way and in interaction with local communities (Mode Two) and to use knowledge networks (Mode Three).

Authors increasingly draw attention to another factor that may affect Southern research capacities, namely new technologies. On the negative

---

96 This is not to say that these problems are easily solved – or that Northern research has significantly contributed to solve similar problems in the North. Still in the North there seems to be more recognition of the importance of linking research with practice – as is for example shown by the fact that research proposals submitted to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) are increasingly judged not only by a scientific committee but also by one with representatives of societal stakeholders.
97 See 2.1.2 and 2.3.2
98 See 2.1.2
side, the high cost of advanced instruments for research, particularly but not exclusively in the exact sciences, puts entire fields of research out of the reach of academic institutions in developing countries. However, “advances in information technologies may be ameliorating some of these trends. […] [A]dvances in microelectronics, information processing and telecommunications now allow researchers from all parts of the world […] to actively participate in joint research projects. There is greater access to libraries and other written information [and] it is possible to interact in real time with peers in distant places […]” (Sagasti 2004: 35) Another potential use for ICTs are “locally oriented analysis and alerting services that aggregate and re-package information for decision makers” in order to deal with the problem that the knowledge generated by the African research and policy world is scattered and, to a large extent, hidden. However, this is made difficult by a shortage of good local content in digital form and a large enough market or audience to justify or recover the costs. (Ballantyne 2001: 4-5)

Although access to computers and internet are still limited in the developing world, and many grassroots peace NGOs do not have their own connection99, people in the peacebuilding field are certainly making use of the potential ICTs have to offer them. Cambodian NGOs with internet connections use digital telephone tools such as Skype for all their local and international phone calls in order to cut costs and circumvent the bad telephone lines of the regular Cambodian network. Sierra Leonean NGO staff members frequent internet cafes in order to maintain e-mail contact with colleagues and donor agencies. More than a year after visiting Liberia and Sierra Leone, I am still in contact with some of the people I interviewed and we exchange information about my research and their activities. Sometimes they ask me to forward project proposals to donor agencies in Europe. Increasingly the internet is also used to download information about peacebuilding approaches and methodologies developed elsewhere. As of yet, less use is made of computers by local NGO staff to document and share their own experiences and lessons. This is something that would be necessary in order to achieve an increased participation of Southern practitioners in research and theory development. Doing so requires overcoming the arrears created by the oral tradition of Southern practitioners. “We need to learn how to document our experiences. […] Western researchers pick our brains, document this information and gain recognition as

99 Approximately a third of the organisations visited do not have an internet connection. Most of these ‘unconnected’ NGOs were in Liberia and Sierra Leone where they made up about half of the NGOs visited.
experts on the basis of this. Why don’t we become experts ourselves instead? This can also help us build our self-esteem.”

4.3 Knowledge policy

The inequalities described in the two previous sections are also recognised by policymakers and attempts are made to address them. This section describes the way knowledge policies of donor agencies have developed, looking first at official donor policy and secondly at the policy of NNGOs. These policies help shape the structure in which SNGOs are able to exercise their agency and carry out learning and sharing activities.

4.3.1 National knowledge for development policies

Until the 1980s the policies of donor governments to promote science and technology for development focused on North-South technology and knowledge transfer. This was followed by a period in which an emphasis on the free play of market forces created a disregard for science and technology policies. A new phase in ‘knowledge for development’ policy began in the second half of the 1990s. This current phase focuses on building the capacity of ‘national innovation systems’. Tying together science, technology and production, it is characterised by intertwined activity of various knowledge agents in a country. (Sagasti 2004: 80-83) Thus, matching De la Rive Box’ second mode of knowledge creation, development policy has adopted a broader systems view that includes various knowledge agents, not only academia. In line with this new perspective, RAWOO developed a new definition of the term ‘research capacity’: “the capacity of a whole research system to set its own priorities, and to design a research policy and programme accordingly. This includes development research carried out in a non-academic setting – such as research NGOs or users’ initiatives.” (Baud 2002: 56)

The new policies emphasise demand-driven capacity building of Southern knowledge actors. Until the early nineties, for example, Dutch policy was characterised by well-intended forms of North-South partnership which led to a situation in which the Northern partners (mostly Dutch research institutes) tended to dominate the research agenda and programme implementation. In response to this, a new

---

100 Interview with director of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 20 February 2006.
policy was adopted, which was characterised by a strong focus on demand orientation and Southern ownership. (Bieckmann 2007: 8) The idea was that development challenges could be met by conducting “user oriented, location specific, trans-disciplinary research. There was a lot of emphasis on Southern research capacity building, including capacity in research management and research funding. The articulation of an authentic Southern research agenda was a prime concern.” (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006: 8)

This led to an exclusion of Dutch researchers from government-funded research programmes and more generally to a disregard for the expertise of Dutch development researchers (Bieckmann 2007: 8). Moreover, “[i]n order to protect the purity of the Southern research agenda, the involvement of other donors was actively discouraged. […] [E]ven Dutch embassies were not allowed to play any meaningful role.” In short, “based on an acknowledgement of unequal power relations in research partnerships or in development cooperation in general, an attempt was made to place ownership entirely in Southern hands. […] In a sense, an attempt was made to erase the donor as a factor in the equation.” (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006: 9) The unintended result, however, was that Dutch-funded development research became isolated from other sectors of development policymaking. Soon Dutch development policy was no longer based on research funded by research unit of the development ministry, which played an increasingly marginal role in strategy development. In addition, a gap developed between Dutch research and policy. On the one hand, Dutch development policy was no longer informed by Dutch development studies, while on the other, the research agenda of Dutch development scholars ceased to be informed by Dutch policy concerns. (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006; Bieckmann 2007)

In response, a new strategy has recently been developed. This new approach takes into account “an important lesson”, namely “that donors are very much an integral part of the social reality they want to change. Existing inequalities in power and resources cannot be denied by standing aloof, but should be acknowledged and taken into account in the practice of development cooperation.” (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006: 11) The new approach entails a shift from a relatively narrow focus on research to a wider focus on knowledge and emphasises actual use of knowledge rather than its production. “In this context, an important realisation was that for knowledge to be used, the production of knowledge needs to be firmly embedded in social processes, in interactions between various stakeholders (such as researchers, policy makers, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and other end-users).” (Wiedenhof and
In other words, the Ministry has adopted more of a network approach: mode three knowledge creation. In this network model, the government itself, as a donor, aims to play an active role. “We cannot be relevant or effective as a donor […] without a constant dialogue with policy makers, researchers and practitioners and without the capacity to learn from this. Did we not implicitly assume that we, as donor, did not have anything to learn?” (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006: 10)

Such multi-stakeholder (mode two or three) knowledge policy makes sense from the perspective of the research-practice gap identified in this study. However, practice appears to lag behind policy. Practical obstacles in developing, conflict-affected countries may be part of the reason for this. The active interplay between scientific community, civil society, the private sector and political society that is required for mode three knowledge generation “may be very difficult to carry out in many countries in the South as a result of longstanding conflicts and high levels of mistrust between the different groups of actors” (Baud 2002: 58). As a result, Northern governments end up setting research agendas for lack of a unified Southern voice. Baud writes that this problem can be prevented through “interactive consultations with a variety of Southern actors” which “can lead to informed policy choices to whose voices to give priority” (ibidem). This may be achieved by adding support to networking to existing programmes that promote North-South cooperation between research institutions (ibidem).

101 Groot and Gerwen 2004: 8
However, even in multi-stakeholder networks the various partners involved do not necessarily have comparable research capacity. The “structural inequality inherent in the donor-recipient relation” makes it “difficult for the donor to question his own preconceptions and to enter into a dialogue on an equal footing” (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006: 13). In other words, inequality inhibits ‘third-order’ learning. As the director of Culture, Research and Education at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs said at a recent seminar, “[i]t is a real challenge to question one’s own images and to profit from others’ visions and views” (Hoekema 2006: 8). This is compounded by the tendency of donors to “stick together and to reconfirm one another’s preconceived ideas” (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006: 14). This tendency may well be strengthened by current efforts to better coordinate and harmonise donor policy. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a case in point. In King’s words, “at the very time […] that donors were allegedly beginning to retreat from ‘their’ projects and move towards policies and programmes ‘owned’ by their partners in the South, the Northern agency discourse was laying down what those policies should consist of” (King 2004: unnumbered).

Building the capacity of weaker network members – Southern knowledge agents – would be a way to address the structural inequalities that inhibit North-South exchange and learning. However, despite talk about research capacity building, development assistance funds to support higher education and research in the South have shrunk in recent years. This is despite the fact that “[t]he few developing countries that have made spectacular economic and social gains during the last few decades are precisely those that have adopted development strategies that envisaged a key role for science and technology.” (Sagasti 2004: 85) The MDGs that set overarching targets for international development have nothing to say about education above the basic level. Indeed, as Ferrier says, “when you talk about education related to development, it is always about basic education. And to have development it is vital that every developing country has an independently thinking intelligentsia. Thus, our focus in development should be much more on science and higher education” (Ferrier 2006)

At the same time, policymakers and civil society actors in developing countries themselves often do not recognise the importance of higher education and research, seeing other needs as more pressing. “[I]n most developing countries there is not as yet widespread awareness and understanding of the importance of science and technology in the
A brain drain of educated minds migrating to the North to find employment (or staying there after being educated in Western universities) further exacerbates the situation.

As part of the solution Wiedenhof and Molenaar present the challenge of creating “learning embassies”. “A learning embassy is fully aware of and interacts with the parties and stakeholders involved in (or left out of) the process of formulating […] strategy and knows about the knowledge base of this strategy. It is also aware of the research institutes and other knowledge institutes that play (or could play) a role on the process and the constraints they face. Wherever possible, it tries to strengthen the national or sectoral knowledge infrastructure and innovation systems.” (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006: 15) In how far this approach is adopted and successful remains to be seen.

4.3.2 Policies of Northern NGOs vis-à-vis their Southern partners

Despite the aim of official policies to stimulate multi-stakeholder knowledge generation that includes practitioners, governmental donors rarely interact directly with SNGOs around policy development and knowledge generation. If the ideas of Wiedenhof and Molenaar become practice, then in future embassies may start filling this gap. As it is, however, the Northern agents with whom SNGOs interact are primarily NNGOs. As these are themselves often funded by official donors, they are links in the aid chain and act as intermediaries between official donors (back donors) and SNGOs. At least in the field of peacebuilding, there is not much evidence that the above-described national ‘knowledge for development’ policies are passed to NNGOs, and through them, to SNGOs. These policies aim mostly at Southern governments, with which Northern governments have a direct aid relation, and at Northern and Southern universities and research institutes. The stated aim of official donors to involve practitioners in knowledge generation is therefore not yet realised in practice.

In their funding relation with NNGOs, however, national donors do emphasise another aspect of knowledge policy – the need to develop learning organisations. To some extent, the trend towards knowledge and learning in international development NGOs described in chapter three is stimulated by government agencies that have made learning part of their requirements for the financing of NNGOs. As a result, the knowledge policies of NNGOs supporting peace organisations in the South relate mostly to organisational learning. We have seen in chapter three that the focus of these policies is more on (mostly internal) storing
and dissemination of existing information than on knowledge generation and accessing the knowledge of Southern actors. This limits the ability of these organisations to learn in exchange with their partners in the South. “The danger for agencies that started with several years of sorting and synthesising their own knowledge resources – in what has been termed internal knowledge sharing – is that when they finally turn their attention to their clients and partners in the South, the agencies might well have decided on what was their priority knowledge for development” (King 2004: unnumbered). Ramalingham (2005: 33) agrees that international development organisations “often argued for improving internal knowledge work prior to addressing external issues” and adds that, problematically, “there was no sense of how the tools might need adaptation in the context of Southern realities.” As a result, “the incorporation of Southern knowledge by these organisations” tends to occur “at the tactical, rather than strategic, level – and then only in an ad hoc manner” (Ramalingham 2005: 27).

The World Bank has led the trend towards knowledge management in development. What is interesting in the light of the above-described limits of this trend is that the Bank has recently started to change its approach – at least in words. It identified a need to “update our view of the Bank’s business and the way we measure and value our outputs and impact – from transferring knowledge and resources, to enabling learning and building capacity […] We need to move beyond the idea of the Bank as the repository of finance and knowledge that is transferred to clients, and towards the idea of the Bank as a facilitator and enabler of client learning – the crux of capacity building, and the best way to create sustainable policy shifts and development.” (World Bank 2001: 33-34, cited in King 2004: unnumbered) Notable in this citation is that learning by the World Bank itself, for example from the experiences and knowledge of its clients, is not mentioned. Still, given the World Bank’s leading role in policy-oriented development research, this turn-around is potentially significant. However, “economists accuse the Bank of having used research to promote pre-conceived policy ideas, rather than to disseminate new knowledge” (Klasen 2007: 87), and this is a view that many working in development informally endorse.
4.4 Knowledge regimes in development and peacebuilding

"[T]he criteria of what constitutes knowledge, what is to be excluded and who is designated as qualified to know involve acts of power" (Foucault 1971, cited in Baumann 1999: 16).

In several places, this study has mentioned the embeddedness of local NGOs in a funding chain that leads from ‘back donors’ (Northern governments and international organisations) via NNGOs to SNGOs. The terms and conditions that this chain prescribes are sometimes referred to as the ‘funding regime’. A regime is a set of “implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge” (Keohane 1991: 108). These norms, rules and procedures prescribe certain actions and imply obligations – even though these obligations are not necessarily legally enforceable. (Keohane 1991: 110) The norms prevalent in funding regimes are created and maintained largely by back donors and influenced by the intermediary NNGOs that pass their funds on to Southern partner organisations.

The most recent major development in international development policy, the MDGs, provide an interesting example of how policy targets are set at the top of the aid chain in spite of rhetoric about participatory development planning. According to King (2004: unnumbered), the MDGs came into existence as a result of mainly Northern research102. In King’s words, “it is not at all clear how this international architecture relates to the much proclaimed importance of national planning, national priorities or country ownership.” […] “What is intriguing is that donors seem able to combine a discourse that suggests their aid policy is to support country priorities with a conviction that the MDGs should be supported” (King 2004: unnumbered). King quotes a policy paper by the Danish development ministry, Danida, to illustrate the contrast between the desire of donor agencies for genuine policy partnership with Southern actors on the one hand, and their top-down policy development on the other:

“[d]evelopment co-operation must support the national policies for poverty reduction on the basis of partnership. Through a series of UN conferences international agreement has been reached on the following major goals for poverty reduction […]. These are ambitious goals and their fulfilment will require a comprehensive international effort.

102 This was at least the case for the goals regarding education, for which “it was agency- commissioned research that played the key initial and subsequent roles in the formulation and monitoring of a part of the world agenda. There is little or no evidence of research from the South having played a part.” (King 2004: unnumbered)
Denmark subscribes to these goals.” (Danida 2000: 22-23, cited by King 2004: unnumbered).

In 1.6.2 we have seen how NNGOs have become increasingly dependent on such official funds, and how SNGOs have increasingly become implementers of policy handed down through the policy chain and how this has led to a reduction in their independent political role. They have become less activist, more ‘professional’, and have come to resemble one another more. This limits possibilities for independent research and reflection on the part of Southern peace NGOs. In a study of NGOs in eight conflict-affected countries103, Goodhand (2006: 144-145) found that

“the introduction of Western managerialism and the consequent demands for […] rational planning techniques undermined the traditional NGO comparative advantages of flexibility, responsiveness and innovation. Donors encouraged NGOs to avoid risk […] and to minimize overhead costs, so that establishing capacities in strategic analysis and research on the causes of conflict are treated as unnecessary luxuries.” (Goodhand 2006: 144)

Another aspect of the funding regime that constrains the learning processes of SNGOs is the increasing emphasis of official donors on direct-impact activities at the expense of NGO performance in areas like institutional development and advocacy (Edwards and Hulme 1996). In the words of a West African peacebuilder, “donors push for ‘deliverables’”104. The trend towards demanding concrete, measurable results makes the work of NGOs engaged in peacebuilding, which is often hard to quantify, more difficult. It requires “quantitative measures of qualitative transformation” (Mendelson 2001, cited in Pishchikova 2006: 80), “encourages NGOs to talk up their results and leads to an understating of the less tangible but possibly more significant impacts of NGO activities on social relations, norms and leadership” (Goodhand 2006: 144-145).

The direct-impact trend also potentially makes learning and knowledge exchange difficult because this type of activity is hard to measure. A related issue, repeatedly mentioned in interviews by the staff of Southern NGOs, is a dependency on short-term funding. Donor funds are often tied to time-bound projects with specific objectives. As a result, fundraising becomes an increasingly time consuming activity for local NGOs. “Securing funding becomes an ever-expanding part of the NGOs’ function, pushing other concerns – such as ethics, project

103 Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Moldova, Nepal and Sri Lanka
104 Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.
efficacy or self-criticism – to the margins.” (Goodhand 2006: 144). Activities like reflection, discussion, networking, and improving organisational capacities for long-term M&E and learning are in most cases not part of the projects so clearly circumscribed by donors. They are considered ‘overhead’ and are often not financed. (Pishchikova 2006: 79)

“Short time frames and a project-based approach discouraged more innovative and high-risk activities. […] This had a range of negative […] effects, including […] discouraging NGOs from thinking long-term about their role in areas such as local institutional development and strengthening civil society; fostering shallow careers that were patched together and involved either moving from one agency to another or from one conflict to another; encouraging aid project monocultures. (Goodhand 2006: 144-145)”

The most frequent points at which SNGOs and their donors interact is, first, when SNGOs submit funding proposals, and after their proposal has been accepted, when they report about their activities and outcomes. Both activities usually have to be done according to pre-set formats prescribed by donors. Donors often have policy frameworks that describe the types of activities they are willing to fund. These frameworks contain particular catchwords that proposals should include. As a result, proposal writing and reporting is done in a jargon-laden vocabulary that has originated largely in the North. Ramalingham (2005: 27) writes that proposals for funding are judged by Northern standards and “reacting to strategic issues within Northern development organisations currently requires the application of forms of knowledge which are largely internal to these organisations.” Similarly, Powell (2006: 525) notes that “[t]he [proposal writing and reporting] tools that have been produced are based on the linear processes of a service industry, rather than the complex interactions of a knowledge industry”. This approach does not usually promote the kind of two-way interaction that Southern peacebuilders desire.

Wallace et al. (2006, cited in Powell 2006: 526) analysed standard methods for planning and reporting that NNGOs require from their Southern partners:

“There is an almost invisible and little analysed bias towards valuing and favouring systems that are developed in the north, with their accompanying detailed explanations, models and practices over the local knowledge, concepts, language and understanding of civil society and staff in the south. They have to learn the new aid paradigms if they want to be included and funded. Donors and international agencies do not have to learn the local language or cultural norms in return; far from it and these universal frameworks are now seen as appropriate
ways to work in contexts of extreme diversity. [...] At the same time staff on the frontline [...] all said that the tools do not work once implementation starts. There were no exceptions in the research and this is a really striking finding. The disjuncture between paper based plans, objectives, activities and indicators and the day to day realities poor people and NGO [...] staff try to grapple with in a wide range of different contexts and cultures is too great to be bridged.”

In this way, two-way interaction and joint ‘third order’ learning is discouraged. Another way in which Goodhand (2006: 144-145) found donors to be limiting learning was by preventing coordination among SNGOs:

“though coordination mechanisms were in place, they rarely led to joined-up policy and practice on the ground. Coordination arrangements were resisted by donors for various reasons: they limited donors’ room for manoeuvre in terms of pursuing commercial and political interests through aid programmes; they were costly in terms of administrative time and expense; and there were genuine disagreements over policies and priorities.”

Such lack of opportunities for coordination among local organisations inhibits joint reflection and learning about how the larger aims of peacebuilding can be achieved. However, the picture painted by Goodhand does not represent all donors. In Liberia, the partner network of the Dutch NGO ICCO was mentioned by several interviewees as a positive example of donor-facilitated coordination and exchange among Southern peace NGOs.

In sum, the embeddedness of SNGOs in international funding regimes not only constrains their political role in addressing wider issues of conflict in peace, as we saw in chapter one, but also their capacity to autonomously and jointly reflect, learn, and generate knowledge.

4.5 Discourse

Discourse plays an important role in knowledge transfer and learning in peacebuilding. “By privileging certain visions of society and discarding others, discourses frame and construct certain possibilities for thought and subsequent action” (Van Grasdorff 2005: 31). Discourse becomes dominant through a combination of coercion (peer pressure, wanting to remain part of a group), conviction (people find the discourse convincing), and seduction (it is attractive for people to be part of the discourse coalition). (Hilhorst 2003: 75) These elements of coercion, conviction and seduction characterise the interaction among researchers,
national donors, multilateral donors, politicians, and NGOs in so-called “discourse coalitions” (Stone 2005: 95-96; Brock et al. 2001; Hajer 1995). This interaction has led to the rise of a particular ‘development’ discourse, the background of which is formed by the idea that “social change occurs according to a pre-established pattern, the logic and direction of which are known”, and that the West is leading the way in this evolutionary process, “exhibiting the most advanced stance of human perfectability” (Van Grasdorff 2005: 34). This discourse has been adopted by donor agencies and become part of funding regimes. As a result of their embeddedness in these funding regimes, SNGOs find themselves forced to adopt it.

The discourse of development hides the political nature of development activities by casting them in a neutral, technical language (Pronk 2007). Development interventions inherently lead to social and political change, both intentionally and unintentionally, particularly in conflict situations. In what Ferguson (1994) calls the “anti-politics machine”, however, this facet of development is obscured by the use of seemingly technical terms. To illustrate this depoliticisation of development, Mitlin et al. (2005: 13) note that where NGO staff in the 1970s and 1980s were well familiar with the radical writers who focused on underlying structures of oppression, today the bookshelves in NGO offices often display more sector-specific, less political and more technical texts.

The fluency of representatives of Southern grassroots organisations in the discourse of development and its ‘technical’ terminology is sometimes striking. This “development speak” (Hilhorst 2003: 57) includes concepts such as “performance”, “outcomes”, and “efficiency”. None of these notions are simple givens, and alternative situations could exist in which NGO activities and organizational forms could be organized, for example, by an alternative discourse of ‘long-term commitment’. (Pishchikova 2006: 48) However, to qualify for funding local actors have to use the dominant discourse in funding proposals, in monitoring reports, and at partner conferences. Staff of SNGOs make a lot of jokes about the vocabulary of donor organisations, which illustrates that they find many of the concepts not really applicable to their situation and are very much aware of the opportunistic use of such language.

Recent trends in these mainstream discourses and approaches include the increasing dominance of the neoliberal agenda, the hegemony of the poverty reduction agenda in international aid, and most recently the prominence of the security agenda and attempts to tie it to the poverty agenda (Mitlin et al. 2005: 8-12). Peacebuilding NGO staff interviewed
for this study identified several discourse trends in their field. First, an increasing emphasis on security was mentioned:

“a trend in the discourse of peacebuilding is an increasing emphasis on security sector reform. Our organisation finds that security sector reform can only be addressed if the underlying issues that cause the insecurity in the first place are dealt with as well – if not, then it can even strengthen authoritarian regimes. The same is true for disarmament: people carry arms because they feel insecure; disarming them doesn’t solve the problem. These arguments are now not usually taken up. The trend is related to an increasing emphasis on security in general, led by US and other donors in the framework of the ‘War on Terror’.”105

This quote indicates that in addition to inequalities in knowledge production and recognition, the dominant discourses also spring from direct political pressure to place particular items high on the agenda. The increasing emphasis by US donors on security issues in the context of the War on Terror was particularly noted in Kenya and the Philippines. Another trend in peacebuilding discourse that was mentioned relates to early warning:

“there is an increasing trend among donors to emphasise early warning activities. Though these are important, they are meaningless without the capacity for early response. Early warning also presupposes that there is a capacity to influence policymakers to act in line with one’s recommendations – but policymakers have their own agendas. So more than a narrow focus on early warning is needed.”106

At the same time, local actors do have a role to play in the use and the shaping of discourse. Discourses get reinterpreted at the local level, at the interface with other discourses that exist locally and internationally, drawing together fragments from both modernity and tradition. Local actors master multiple development notions and use them for their own ends. They “reshuffle, circumvent, and accommodate” discourses (Hilhorst 2003: 81). In section 4.4 I quoted Wallace et al., who wrote about the disjuncture between paper based plans and the daily realities of NGO staff. Their research also illustrated the way in which local NGO staff dealt with this disjuncture:

“[t]he paper based plans are left in the office, while NGO staff try to find ways – many very innovative, others very inappropriate – to work […]. They then revert to the written tools again when it comes to reporting and accounting for donor aid money; often one set of people do the front line development activities, while others complete the

105 Interview with staff member of Kenyan NGO working throughout East and Central Africa. Nairobi, 29 November 2005.
106 Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.
required paperwork. More time, training and focus is given in most aid chains to ensuring that managers and finance staff can complete the documentation to a satisfactory level, than is given to training frontline staff.” (Wallace et al. 2006, cited in Powell 2006: 526)

Discourses, then, are used and reproduced both unintentionally and intentionally. What is important about this is that in both cases they shape reality in a very direct way. Discourses have unintended consequences for “confirming, accelerating or altering social change […] It is through actors’ use of multiple discourses that social patterns are negotiated, power distributed and development shaped”. (Hilhorst 2003: 100-101)

4.6 Donor-driven projects

The discourse that dominates is closely related to the peacebuilding activities that are predominantly carried out. Northern-dominated discourse goes hand in hand with Northern-dominated policymaking and donor-driven projects. In each country visited, the majority of interviewees mentioned donor-driven projects as an issue. According to African and Asian NGO staff interviewed, donors often announce ‘we have money for this and that’, instead of asking ‘what is needed’. “Each donor has its own programme area to which it refers. This ties organisations down. They are in no position to turn down money and thus have to go along.” 107

As a result, it can happen that money is not spent well at all. Interviewees told various stories about money having gone down the drain because donor agencies pushed their own policy priorities without taking local realities into account. For example, an American donor pushed a West African peace network to organise a Muslim-Christian dialogue in Niger and Mali. When the network’s staff noted that those countries have good traditions of inter-faith tolerance (as opposed to another West African country like Nigeria), the donor did not respond. “They were not interested in a conversation about why we feel their proposed activity was irrelevant. We are glad that not all donors act this way.” 108

The imposition of project priorities by NNGOs is seen by locals to reflect a lack of recognition of insider expertise. External experts are

107 Interview with staff member of Sierra Leonean youth organisation. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006.

brought in that do not necessarily understand the situation. Often they miscalculate, assume, generalise, or simply do not know the local context. The analysis of people on the ground is often not taken seriously, in part because they do not have university degrees. When a donor-financed programme is evaluated, donors usually do not look for an expert within the country - even though a local would know the terrain, implications, practices, and (political) obstacles, and as a result might use the right indicators to determine success or failure. In Sierra Leone, “an external evaluator once asked why staff did not commute more between regions, showing a complete lack of understanding of the condition of the infrastructure”.

Not all NNGOs are blind to local knowledge and needs, and most at least make an effort to take them into account. Many donor agencies are themselves tied to the priorities of those that fund them, and they manoeuvre as well as they can within the leeway that they have, trying to take the idea of a two-way partnership seriously. But they do operate within the reality of an unequal relationship due to the structural constraints described in this chapter. Some donor agencies appear more willing or better able than others to use the leeway they have to establish a genuine two-way interaction with Southern partners. “Knowledge interaction with donors is often one-way. However, it varies significantly among donors. Some donors are interested in views from the ground. It is sometimes possible to influence donor policy. This also gives us a better chance of securing funds.”

The Southern NGOs in this study judged some donor agencies are judged outright positively. Actions that are appreciated include when donors appoint a contact person who regularly gets in touch, not to check up but to keep track of processes taking place. It is also appreciated when donor contacts understand that plans are changed due to a changing situation on the ground – something which requires trust in the capacities and intentions of the partner organisation. It is also considered positive that some donors are willing to fund unusual things - like an informal dinner to build relationships. Most importantly, SNGO staff members appreciate NNGOs that take their views seriously. A Liberian NGO worker for example noted that “a two-way knowledge sharing process with our donor takes place; they for example ask us to give inputs into a concept paper”.

---

109 Interview with staff members of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 February 2006.
110 Interview with staff members of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 20 February 2006.
111 Interview with staff member of Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 10 February 2006.
Which donors are seen as more and less open to local knowledge and ideas? The interviews have not systematically addressed this question, but from the donors that were mentioned the following picture arises. American donors, particularly the US Agency for International Development (USAID), are considered relatively uninterested in having a conversation about why their proposed activity is relevant. These donors tend to come with pre-set project ideas in mind. This criticism of American donors can be heard particularly in West Africa. In Mindanao, there is the added complication that many Mindanawans are suspicious of American organisations who they think have a hidden counterterrorism agenda. Two non-American organisations considered to be pushing through project ideas without listening to local advice are the UN mission in Sierra Leone and DfID, also in Sierra Leone.

Northern partners that are seen to be more open to local views, and promoting genuine partnership, are mainly European. They include the Dutch organisations European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP; Kenya)\(^{112}\), Cordaid (Mindanao, West Africa), ICCO (Liberia) and Kerk in Actie (Sierra Leone)\(^{113}\). “Cordaid has made possible institutional survival, creativity, and the bottom-up setting of priorities through untied funding”\(^{114}\) and does not try to impose its own concepts. ICCO regularly asks its Liberian partners for input and feedback (on one occasion through a questionnaire). In addition ICCO’s Liberian partner consortium is considered useful for knowledge sharing. In Sierra Leone, other European organisations seen as treating their Southern partners more as equals are Save the Children Sweden and the Oxfam International Youth Parliament, a network with members all over the world that provides support to members, facilitates open information exchange, and asks for feedback about its own functioning. In Cambodia, positive examples given are the Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst (DED) and the Open Society Initiative (OSI), who “do not act as bosses but as equals”\(^{115}\), and the UK-based Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), which is appreciated for its personal way of keeping in contact and its willingness to fund unusual things. In Mindanao, one American organisation is mentioned in a positive light: the Asia Foundation. The UN organisations United

---

\(^{112}\) See next section.

\(^{113}\) There may be some bias in the findings about ICCO and Cordaid. These organisations co-funded this study, and in a few cases put me into touch with local partners, which I visited for interviews. However, this was only the case for a small number of organisations. Many others were unaware of any connection I had with these Cordaid and ICCO.

\(^{114}\) Interview with director of a West African network, Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

\(^{115}\) Interview with director of a Cambodian NGO, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2006.
Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF; Liberia) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP; Liberia, Philippines) are also considered open to local knowledge.

Such positive exceptions to the rule of unequal ‘partnerships’ and NGOs imposing discourse and policy are characterised by a long-term relationship and trust that has developed over time. This trust makes it possible for Northern partners to leave Southern partners considerable planning and implementing freedom. Another factor enabling genuine partnership is the provision of core institutional funding rather than tied project funding. The latter funding form is predominant but it binds Southern partners to specific activities and objectives. It also helps when flexible arrangements are made regarding timelines and planning, providing for changes to be made along the way as a result of learning or changing circumstances. Another factor playing a role in positive North-South policy exchange is that the governments at the top of the funding chain do not have strong political interests in the country, enabling humanitarian and development criteria to guide policies. (Goodhand 2006: 145). The way an NGO itself is funded may also play a role. If it receives only tied project or programme funding, then the priorities attached by their own donors are in turn imposed on Southern implementing NGOs. But NGOs that receive longer-term, less tied grants have more freedom to engage in a dialogue with SNGOs about the needs in the field.

Another factor that may influence the extent to which Northern partners take local views into account is the degree of specialisation of both the NGO and the SNGO. “Our donors are not very specialised and as a result they leave us [an organisation specialised in arms reduction] considerable autonomy and are interested in our inputs about the way our work should be done. Nonetheless, the donors do determine the broader topics on which we work.”116 NGOs that are less specialised and have developed less precise policy ideas before entering the field may leave their Southern partners more freedom of action: “donors usually do not really question our ideas; they focus more on ways of reporting impact.”117 What also helps SNGOs to be taken seriously is the transparency of their organisation “so that donors can see what it is we are really doing, and where our activities correspond with their priorities.”118 Such transparency contributes to building trust among the partners.

116 Interview with acting director of a Cambodian NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 22 May 2006.
117 Interview with secretary general of a Mindanawan NGO consortium. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006
118 Interview with staff member of a Sierra Leonean NGOs. Bo, Sierra Leone, 21 February 2006.
Until now I have focused mainly on the role played by NNGOs acting as donor agencies vis-à-vis SNGOs. At the other end of the exchange, it is worth taking a closer look at the role played by SNGOs in the interaction with their Northern counterparts. Local peace NGOs are not just passive ‘victims’ of an often unequal policy process. Southern partners recognise that they are often less assertive in the face of donor demands than they might be.

“They sometimes take the easy road of saying what the donors want to hear in the hope of getting their money. Or they simply take donors’ claims for granted and do not study the situation themselves. Sometimes a recipient NGO does not even really understand what his project is supposed to be doing; he merely proposed it because it was what donors were willing to fund. This makes it more difficult for donors to assess the real capacity and needs of their partners. Southern partners should be more assertive in making clear what is wrong with donor’s demands.”

Being more assertive would entail being strong enough to resist donor policy preferences. Interestingly, SNGOs see that a thorough knowledge of the community provides such strength as it makes arguments better-founded and convincing. In some cases being assertive even requires actually refusing a proposed project. This is difficult, however, given the dependency of most SNGOs on project funds for their organisational survival. One reason why many Southern NGOs are not more assertive may be, in the words of Mawdsley et al., “a deep lack of self-confidence within Southern NGOs, inhibiting them from advancing their own agenda more openly and positively.” This may be explained by “older colonial and postcolonial/ developmentalist hierarchies, and the systematic ways in which Northern, ‘formal’ (scientific and management) ideas have been privileged over local ways of seeing and doing things” (Mawdsley et al. 2002: 12-13).

Another problem may be that some NGOs simply have little interest in challenging the accepted wisdom. Fierce competition over funding among local NGOs means they will often rather take the money available than reject funds because the conditions attached to them are not relevant to the situation. In addition, many NGOs were created not out of a particular need or ideology but in response to funds becoming available in the 1980s and 1990s. As a result they do not have a particular agenda to advance, and “acquiesce to working only or mainly

119 Interview with staff members of a Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.
120 Interview with Liberian NGO director. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.
at their paymasters rather than their clients demand” (Mawdsley et al. 2002: 12-13). What then happens is that “Northern NGOs may be committed to listening to their Southern partners, and through them to the voices of the poor, but many of their Southern partners are prepared to tell them whatever they want to hear.” (ibidem: 5)

An additional factor that may play a role in the domination of Northern discourse and priorities is the ‘professionalisation’ of Southern partners: “[a]s Northern NGOs have withdrawn from their previous levels of direct development work, and the number of Southern NGOs has exploded, they have had to find appropriate ways of working together. This has tended to mean that these Southern NGOs have to conform to certain organisational practices” (ibidem: 15). These practices include financial accounting procedures and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, as discussed in the next chapter.

However, at least in some parts of the world, it appears that local NGOs are becoming more critical and assertive. This is, for example, the case among SNGOs in Mindanao, as the following citations from interviews with staff there make clear.

“In recent years funding agencies and NGOs have flooded into communities, which are now in constant interaction with these agencies. This has been quite a culture shock. Now communities are becoming more and more critical of NGOs coming in to implement projects, especially of they have not looked into the needs first. They now start asking questions: who has commissioned you to do this? What is the methodology? What are the expected outputs? Does the project try to change our way of life? People are now able to identify the background of a project and the roles and characters of different players. They demand to be involved in the whole process. Communities are usually willing to accept technical assistance (like water infrastructure) and technical skills (such as the maintenance of such infrastructure) but are suspicious when it comes to more social projects and skills. They are particularly suspicious of American organisations who they think have a hidden agenda (such as

---

121 Interview with staff member of a Mindanawan NGO. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.
intelligence gathering with regard to Muslim organisations in Mindanao).”

“Engaging large international funding NGOs in networking has often led to them imposing priorities on the network. Networks can lose their popular mandate as a result. Our network aims to reverse the situation: rather than having donor organisations tell local NGOs what they should do, we encourage our member NGOs to present a programme to donors and let them choose what parts they want to fund. This is difficult to achieve, however. At present our members do not yet have conscious fundraising strategies. They usually jump in when a donor offers something rather than researching local needs and setting their own priorities.”

Also illustrative are the following aims elaborated by Central Asian peace NGOs in the region’s Action Agenda developed in the framework of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC; see chapter seven). The Central Asian NGOs aim to “[a]dapt the ideas, methods and technologies introduced from outside to local current situations’ peculiarities” and to “[r]eview approaches to in-country implementation of programs and projects in order for the latter to be focused on real issues and not just goals of the donors” (GPPAC 2005: 78).

In conclusion, although the majority of SNGO staff raised the issue of donor-driven projects as an important constraint to their space for action and learning, positive, two-way relations were also noted. In addition, some recognised that SNGOs themselves also have a role to play in changing the partnerships with donors by taking a critical and assertive stance while working on longer-term relations of trust and reciprocal partnership. This resonates with some of the principles of capacity building according to the literature dealt with in chapter three, which stipulated that it should build on existing knowledge and be ‘owned’ by local actors. In the next section, the practice of capacity building is described as it emerged from interviews and from the findings of other authors.

122 Interview with staff member of a Mindanawan NGO. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.
123 Interview with secretary general of a Mindanawan NGO consortium. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006
4.7 Capacity building and partnership

4.7.1 Capacity building in practice

Most of the SNGOs visited have been on the receiving end of some kind of capacity building initiative by NNGOs or international (often UN) organisations. In addition to external actors, many of the stronger SNGOs aim to develop the capacity of weaker SNGOs and grassroots groups. (The role of SNGOs visited as providers of capacity building is discussed in the next chapter.) The previous chapter described how ideally, capacity building consists of knowledge exchange rather than one-way knowledge transfer. In how far does this correspond to the reality of capacity development programmes? More specifically, in how far do the structural inequalities of the international aid system, which have been described in this chapter, make local ownership difficult or even impossible? After all, the examples of donor-driven projects cited in section 4.6 above contradict the ideal of locally owned development practice. A Liberian NGO staff member interviewed illustrated how capacity building, too, can be donor-driven:

"Donors do not trust local counterparts and condition them to say what the donors want to hear. When they talk of capacity building, they first tell you what it is not, according to them: salaries, offices, vehicles. So all you can ask for is training, which is what they are willing to fund. When you bring up the need for a vehicle they treat you as being selfish. They do not understand that it is a basic necessity in a country without reliable public transport."

Indeed, activities under the heading of capacity building for local peace NGOs most often come down to training courses. These courses focus not only on peacebuilding concepts and methods but also on organisational skills such as the monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding programmes, technical and financial management expertise, fundraising, and proposal writing. Research and learning capacity development is rarely supported, but networking sometimes is – although networks find it hard to raise funds due to the intangibility of their results. Training and capacity building programmes by SNGOs tend to emphasise knowledge sharing and networking as important capacity building tools more than NNGOs and IOs.

124 Interview with staff members of a Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.
125 Interview with national coordinator of Liberian NGO network. Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006. Interview with national coordinator of Sierra Leonean NGO network. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006.
The somewhat scattered evidence collected from the interviews suggests that many training courses consist of ready-made content\textsuperscript{126} and does not explicitly build on the knowledge of the participants. Indeed, the UNDP publication cited in section 3.6 recognises that local ownership does not come naturally: “[L]ack of ownership on the recipient side has been a major reason for the failure of many projects, including the structural adjustment programmes supported by international financial institutions” (Lopes and Theisohn 2003: 29). A Sierra Leonean peacebuilder illustrates the importance of local ownership with the following example:

“Intervention strategies should be devised on the views of the beneficiaries. At the beginning of a workshop we ask people to analyse the conflict and say how they would solve it if they had the power to do so. They are asked about the methods they would use. Then, the workshop builds on these, adding its own methods. Workshops should not be subject-centred but learner-centred. A facilitator must endeavour to understand what motivates people. Once a facilitator teaching people maths explained that ‘if a chicken lays one egg in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the evening, she will have laid three eggs.’ An old man said: ‘that is not possible because a chicken can only lay one egg a day!’ The instructor could not get the man to agree. This facilitator’s approach is misleading because his method is not learner-centred and also failed to understand the traditional/cultural values and the level of understanding of the community. You have to build on what people know.”\textsuperscript{127}

That said, some courses (such as the ones described in Box 4.3 below) do make an effort not to use the experiences of the participants but also to match their knowledge demand. Either way, the structural aspect of capacity building is not usually explicitly addressed in these programmes – although one might argue that training organisations in the development of funding proposals is a way to help create a context in which stakeholders can actually exercise their newly developed skills.

\textsuperscript{126} For example, May (2006) describes how peacebuilding modules offered at a Ugandan university were American modules that had been copied without adaptation to the local context.

\textsuperscript{127} Interview with director of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 February 2006.
Catholic Relief Service (CRS) is involved in many training, capacity building and networking initiatives. Its training courses include the annual international Mindanao Peace Institute (MPI, at which about 800 people have graduated until now) and a grassroots training programme in Mindanao. There is also a separate capacity building programme for CRS partners, which includes things like organisational management, strengthening leadership, documentation, and project development. This is preceded by a needs diagnosis: what are the issues the partners face? People who went through the grassroots training have formed networks. They form a trainer’s pool and exchange resources.

The Mindanao Peace Institute is a three-week programme, in which various approaches to peacebuilding are discussed. Indigenous, Islamic and Western approaches are applied to the specific issues of participants and compared as to their usefulness. The third week consists of a field visit in which local grassroots organisations are visited and discussions are held about ways to apply the concepts discussed in the course.

The grassroots training is intended to catalyse peace efforts in the communities. It especially targets key leaders. Not only skills are taught but also commitment to peace -- especially relevant for former combatants. Commitment to peace is stimulated by starting with the participant’s own identity including his faith as a resource, and by working at self-transformation. Not only former fighters need to transform, also people who see themselves primarily as victims are assisted to turn into active peace advocates.

The training courses are part of a larger peacebuilding process. Participants are supported after they go back to their communities. They receive technical support, help with planning, and general mentoring. They are also supported in advocating the model they have learned to other groups.

Thus, the extent to which capacity building initiatives take in local knowledge varies, but it is clear that the majority of them focus on providing individual training to help them become more effective at the implementation of micro-level projects, rather than addressing more structural issues. Such practice does not resonate with the principle that capacity development should build on what is already there and make use of local knowledge and practices – even if these are different from one’s own. In that sense, capacity building for Southern peace NGOs is part of their depoliticisation as promoted by donor agencies. Southern groups are largely supported to fit into the organisational model of an NGO able to implement projects devised by donors and be accountable about their results. In addition, capacity building does not tend to

---

129 Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen (2005: 546-547) found in Southern Sudan that “[i]nstead of supporting existing structures of Sudanese NGOs or churches, most INGOs concentrated their capacity building efforts on creating Community Based Organisations in Sudan. […] Most
include the strengthening of local learning and knowledge generation through enhanced learning and research capacity.

In conflict situations capacity development may be particularly difficult. Goodhand (2003: 153) found that in such circumstances “[i]nternational NGOs were found to be surprisingly weak in the area of local capacity-building […]. Reflective and participatory approaches were often overtaken in emergencies and the imperatives for speed tended to marginalize local actors. [The] INGOs […] cited concerns about neutrality, politization and corruption.” Indeed, these are important concerns. They illustrate the dilemma for donors, touched upon in chapter one, of finding the balance between promoting an independent civil society and maintaining the values on which their development and peacebuilding missions are based.

Coming back to the more structural constraints that result from inequalities between Northern and Southern actors, James and Wrigley note that

“[m]any elements of the aid system act as major disincentives […]. The increasing preoccupation with proving quantifiable results within a short, project-based period obviously makes taking a longer term approach difficult; […] the competitive bidding process requires organisations to prove they already have adequate capacity. There is certainly no room in proposals to identify or admit weaknesses and plan for how these might be addressed.” (James and Wrigley 2006: 6)

James and Wrigley (2006: 26) add that in order to overcome these disincentives, “[c]apacity building providers need to actively see how they can ‘bend the aid rules’”.

4.7.2 Partnership and capacity building

Positive examples of genuinely participatory and interactive capacity development appear to be the result of long-term, trust-based partnerships between local and external actors (Goodhand 2003: 154). In section 4.6 I already discussed some of the characteristics of such partnerships. In the words of Fowler (2000, cited in Partos 2006), “[a]uthentic partnership implies […] a joint commitment to long-term interaction, shared responsibility for achievement, reciprocal obligation, equality, mutuality and balance of power”. It “goes far beyond a

organisations shy away from supporting existing organisations because of anecdotal evidence suggesting these do not fit into preconceived conditions about ‘civil society’ and ‘local organisations’.”

209
functional, project-based approach, to emphasise the development of long-term relationships as an end in itself, based around solidarity and strengthening civil society organisations” (BOND and Exchange 2004: 7). In such a model, the donor merely plays a catalyst role in supporting locally-driven developments. Such an equal partnership however does not entail completely factoring the NNGO out of the equation, as happened in the Dutch knowledge for development policy described in section 4.3.1; after all, they also have relevant knowledge and networks to contribute.

As Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen (2005: 561) note, long-term partnership is even more important in conflict-affected countries: “[i]nternational organisations have to realise that capacity building of local organisations is a long-term process that needs serious commitment. This is especially the case in conflict and post-conflict situations, where civil society tends to break down. The depletion of local resources, a lack of organisational capacities, and the environment of suspicion in which civil society organisations have to grow, makes organisation building in such situations complicated.”

Indeed, the term partnership is used by most NNGOs when describing their cooperation with SNGOs. However, although the notion of partnership seems to carry a sense of equality and reciprocity, in reality the use of the term covers a whole spectrum of relationships. Aid partnerships are not necessarily long-term, trust-based and reciprocal. In fact, many Southern partners feel that Northern NGOs do not meet these ideals of partnership. The NNGOs are considered paternalistic, inflexible and, in some cases, unreliable. The majority of interaction between partners is not about policy but about financing and accountability. (Partos 2006: 8) It is telling that Northern NGO staff members often call their Southern counterparts ‘partners’ but refer to themselves as ‘donors’. One NNGO, the Dutch organisation Oxfam-Novib, actually does not use the term ‘partner’ in reference to the SNGOs it works with. Instead Oxfam-Novib prefers the term ‘counterpart’, which is considered more realistic and comes with fewer expectations of equality. Novib sees the donor-recipient relationship as unequal by definition. The organisation chooses an active policymaking role and looks for counterparts that match its policy; counterparts have to comply with the quality standards of Novib to be eligible for funding. (Partos 2006: 11 and 22)

Indeed, most SNGOs interviewed tend to regard the NNGOs that support them as donors rather than partners. A study done by the Dutch development umbrella organisation Partos (2006) even concluded that
SNGOs are often not interested in genuine partnership. According to Partos, this has two reasons. First, SNGOs find that NNGOs do not have much useful knowledge to contribute to the exchange. NNGOs have decreasingly specialised knowledge and SNGOs have increasing confidence in their own knowledge. They see dialogue more as a requirement for funding. A possible way to deal with this according to Partos could be to broaden such dialogues, including other stakeholders and embedding them in Southern networks. A second reason noted by Partos is the tension between learning and accountability. Policy dialogue requires openness and trust, but in order to secure future funding, SNGOs may paint a rosier picture of their activities than reality would support. A possible way to deal with this is to separate the roles of donor accountability and partner dialogue. For example, the Dutch NNGO Oxfam-Novib has ensured that financial negotiations are done by a different staff member than policy dialogue. (Partos 2006)

My own findings do not readily support Partos’ conclusion that SNGOs are less interested in genuine partnership with NNGOs. SNGOs may be interested primarily in money that enables them to maintain their organisation and carry out their activities. But they are also frustrated when they cannot carry out the activities they consider most relevant because of the priorities imposed by funding regimes. SNGO staff members interviewed almost unanimously stress the need for a two-way knowledge exchange and policy dialogue. My interviewees generally value the knowledge brought by Northern counterparts; they just emphasised that this knowledge needed to be combined with local knowledge in order to be applied. On the other hand, Partos’ reference to the tension between accountability and learning does ring many bells. It is mentioned by many interviewees as a constraint on learning and two-way knowledge exchange. Although the separation of roles within NNGOs may help minimise this tension, what appears even more crucial is that trust is built among partners. Long-term relations are a way towards trust-building. NNGO representatives could strengthen their relationship with Southern partners by being present in the region more often.

In addition, it is important that NNGOs show flexibility regarding planning and budgeting, thereby creating the space for learning on the part of Southern partners as well as themselves and providing the possibility that such learning (or changing circumstances) could help adapt programmes. In addition, allowing for failure or incomplete success without immediately cutting funding would create space for honest reflection and interactive learning. Clarity of communication and cutting the jargon might also help. Most fundamentally, a way to build
trust and ensure a two-way exchange around knowledge and policy is to involve partner representatives in the policy making structures of NNGOs. Some NNGOs already have an advisory council on policy issues in which partners are represented. (Partos 2006: 19)

Building local capacity and developing the prerequisites for interactive learning and equal knowledge exchange would also entail supporting SNGOs in their learning and local knowledge generation. The problem is that SNGOs often have difficulty obtaining funds for knowledge and learning activities. Interviewees do note however that there are some donors that recognise and support the importance of learning and knowledge sharing. In fact, “donors sometimes play a role in harmonising methods and combining the best elements of different approaches.”130 There appears to be some difference among the regions when it comes to the ability of SNGOs to secure donor support for learning and knowledge exchange. Compared to their counterparts in West Africa, NGO staff members in Southeast Asia consider donor agencies to be relatively conducive to such activities. Donor agencies generally stimulate knowledge sharing and even carry out ‘learning experiences’ studies among their Southern partners131. Having said this, donor agencies do frame the field of peacebuilding and determine the broader topics on which local NGOs work. Thereby they also influence the knowledge that is shared and the lessons that are learned.

4.7.3 Ownership and partnership different in peacebuilding?

In 2005-2006 I was involved in an evaluation of Dutch and British peacebuilding NGOs132 financed through a special, theme-based Dutch official development cooperation budget (Barakat et al. 2006). During this evaluation, the peacebuilding NNGOs made the following point about partnership. They worked with local partners, but there was no clear-cut chain of decision-making or policy input in either direction. In most cases there was money flowing down the chain, but field activities were also carried out directly by the NNGOs. Many other activities were difficult to fit into the North-South chain model, being network activities, advocacy and lobbying activities in the North, or lobbying

---

130 Interview with staff members of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Kenema, Sierra Leone, 22 February 2006.
131 The UNDP did this in 2004. Interview with director of a Philippine NGO. Quezon City, Philippines, 19 May 2006.
132 Pax Christi Netherlands, Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad (IKV), War Child Netherlands, the European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP), International Alert, and Saferworld UK. Partners were interviewed in Central and Eastern Africa.
activities in the South by the NNGOs themselves rather than their partners (or in collaboration with their partners). The NNGOs argued that as a result, the strategies of capacity building and the slow transfer of responsibilities to Southern partners that the Dutch ministry (their back-donor) expected of them did not really apply to the nature of their work.

In contrast with ‘regular’ development work, the Dutch NNGOs argued, prolonged Northern involvement is a necessity in peacebuilding. Local partner organisations might be prosecuted, harassed or discriminated against by local authorities, and the impact of direct interaction between them and NNGOs can be much larger than any lobby activity by local organisations alone. In other cases, the success of an intervention in conflict situations depends very much on being recognised as impartial. Working through local partners would, in such cases, not be very productive.

The field visits carried out in the context of the evaluation largely confirmed what the NNGOs had indicated about the different nature of partnerships in peacebuilding. In many cases, organisations’ local partners were not the weaker party that needed to be supported and developed, with the eventual objective of a gradual transfer of responsibilities. In the case of networking activities, the partners were equal partners in a relationship in which both sides have something to offer. Partners were selected based on their unique position, experience or strength. In the case of lobby and advocacy work partners were often local activists who needed their NNGO partner to help them gain a voice at Northern policy platforms as well as Southern ones. Conversely, the NNGOs needed the local voice and experiences of their partners in order to have a stronger message for advocacy and lobbying. The organisation of peace dialogues requires an outside third party and often could not be carried out by local partners themselves. Thus, in many cases the peace NNGOs acted not so much as donors (though money did flow from them to their partners), but as facilitators and international conduits for joint lobby and advocacy activities. They saw partnership as part of a network of equal partners, rather than a hierarchical policy chain.

Such partnerships, that do not revolve mainly around money and in which each partner has a clear added value, have more potential to achieve an equitable and two-way knowledge exchange and policy process than partnerships that are firmly embedded in the aid chain and in which Southern partners are mostly implementers of Northern policy. Indeed, the aforementioned Partos study notes that NNGOs that do not have a financial relationship with their partners tend to be more positive
Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen (2005: 550-551) describe how entering into a financial arrangement thoroughly changed the relationship between a Southern Sudanese NGO and a Dutch organisation. The Dutch NGO became a donor rather than an equal partner and began demanding compliance of its partner with various funding conditions. A lot of mutual mistrust finally led to an end of the relationship.

This might suggest that in the field of peacebuilding there are more possibilities for North-South partnership and exchange than in the field of development more generally. However, some qualifying remarks need to be made. First of all, with regard to the Dutch and British peace NGOs the picture painted above is incomplete. The picture was in fact very diverse with the NNGOs having strong partners with whom genuine partnership was possible, but also weaker partners with whom they had more ‘classically’ financial relations. Most Dutch and British peace organisations also engaged in capacity building initiatives. In some cases these were aimed at building the capacity of weaker partners. In other cases they worked in cooperation with partners to build the capacity of other groups.

In any case, the Dutch and British NGOs evaluated make up only a limited part of the NNGOs that support peacebuilding organisations in the South. These were the purely peace-oriented organisations\footnote{The organisations evaluated were: the Inter-Church Peace Council (IKV), Pax Christi Netherlands (later merged with IKV), the European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP), War Child Netherlands, Saferworld and International Alert (the last two are UK-based organisations).}, considered by the Ministry to fall somewhat outside the category of development organisations supported from its regular budget – which is why they were sponsored through a special theme-based funding programme. However, most of the SNGOs I visited for this study are financed from regular development cooperation budgets and their NNGO partners are aid organisations\footnote{Such as Cordaid and ICCO in the Netherlands or USAID in the United States} that see peacebuilding as one part of their wider spectrum of development activities. As the interview findings cited in this chapter show, these SNGOs and their relations with Northern counterparts\footnote{Even for the ‘special’ peace NNGOs evaluated in the above-mentioned study, things may be changing. The Dutch government has abolished the theme-based grant programme and now requires these organisations to apply for regular development aid financing. As a result the Northern peace organisations may increasingly become implementers of Dutch development policy. But this still remains to be seen.} largely fit the aid chain description.\footnote{The only organisation in the evaluation a number of whose partners I have visited is the European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP), a network organisation that facilitates the Global Partnership for the}
Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC; see chapter seven). Its relationship with its partners indeed does not fit the chain model as all are treated as equal participants in the network, as the following citation from its Kenyan partner Nairobi Peace Initiative Africa (NPI-Africa) illustrates.

“There has been a free flow of information going back and forth. The relationship is considered healthy and equal. NPI-Africa has retained autonomy in determining how activities are carried out. The relationship with ECCP is the type of partnership sought by NPI-Africa because it brings added value to its own activities by extending the reach of its message and creating visibility of its work. Being a partner of ECCP and a member of GPPAC has enabled NPI-Africa to make important contacts worldwide. In this way it has increased the organisation’s ability to carry out its objectives. In terms of accountability, NPI-Africa submits regular financial reports to ECCP. Being accountable for content is always a little more complicated. But because there is a lot of interaction it is quite clear what ECCP and NPI-Africa are doing and both parties are able to hold the other accountable for delivering on agreements that were made. Because ECCP has the financial power, the fear of it dictating the process easily arises. However, this never happened because of the governance structure of GPPAC. NPI-Africa has a seat in the International Steering Group in which ECCP is only one actor.”

It is good to realise that different kinds of partnerships do exist, perhaps particularly in the field of peacebuilding, and that my sample of SNGOs may not be entirely representative. I seem to have visited mostly weaker NGOs, which in any case make up the majority of NGOs in the countries that were part of the study. Nonetheless I have also visited a number of stronger organisations – such as the Nairobi Peace Initiative Africa (NPI-Africa) in Kenya, the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Ghana, and Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) in Mindanao. Although these organisations, too, complain that Northern actors do not sufficiently recognise and stimulate local knowledge and its generation, they can and do strike up more genuine partnerships with NNGOs. In addition, these stronger SNGOs engage in their own capacity building and knowledge transfer, providing training courses to other organisations and coordinating knowledge sharing networks. In the next chapter I will discuss these activities in more detail, and continue to distinguish between stronger and weaker SNGOs.


137 Weaker in terms of staff capacity and numbers, resources, and networks.
4.8 Concluding remarks

In chapter two a need to stimulate knowledge generation and dissemination by Southern partners was identified in order to capitalise on (often tacit) local knowledge. However, the possibilities for achieving this are constrained by a number of structural aspects. Chapter four has looked at these aspects. It has illuminated the dynamic interaction and competition among different kinds of knowledge, and the important role played by (a lack of) money and donors in every aspect of these processes. Knowledge transfer is conditioned by differences in the extent to which Northern and Southern knowledge are recognised as legitimate, by discourse dominance, and by the position of local NGOs vis-à-vis donor agencies. The chapter has analysed the way in which these factors set the framework for the learning and knowledge activities of Southern peace NGOs. Thus, in relation to “the challenges and opportunities Southern peace NGOs are confronted with in accumulating, mobilising and disseminating the knowledge that is needed to make optimal policy decisions, carry out activities in an effective way and adjust to continuously changing circumstances”, as the research question of this study puts it, this chapter has mapped the structural framework in which the learning activities of local NGOs take place. In doing so, it zoomed in on the following sub-question, posed at the end of Part One: how do power differences, donor relations and North-South dynamics influence the knowledge that is used and the learning that occurs? In looking at this question, chapter four also paid attention to the more general sub-question what factors constrain and support the learning of Southern peace NGOs?

The structural framework outlined in this chapter constrains the opportunities Southern peace NGOs have for learning and knowledge exchange in a number of ways. First, indigenous knowledge in developing countries is often seen as less rational and scientific and therefore less legitimate than knowledge that fits into ‘modern’ knowledge systems. This lack of recognition of the potential value of different knowledge systems has at the same time been reinforced by and contributed to the erosion of traditional knowledge systems in the face of the ‘modernisation’ of the social, economic and political systems of developing countries. Formal education in the developing world is largely modelled after Western education systems and as such contributes to the devaluation of traditional knowledge. These developments also lead to the development of fault lines within countries between those who have been educated in ‘modern’ systems and those who have not. Difference in access to ‘modern’ knowledge – seen increasingly as the key to social mobility and progress – often lead
to ridges between rural and urban groups, generations, and men and women. In some cases this leads to conflict.

Second, there is an enormous inequality between the developed and developing worlds when it comes to scientific research outputs. This means that development and peacebuilding programmes in the South are most often based on Northern research findings and ideas. Despite policies of donors to develop it, Southern research capacity is not growing significantly in most countries. This may be because it is not sufficiently prioritised by donors (who in the Millennium Development Goals have only included primary education) and developing country governments alike. To complicate matters further, the Southern research that does take place is often very abstract and theoretical and does not immediately lend itself to application. As a result, there is little interaction between NGOs and research institutes in the countries visited for this study.

Third, initiatives by donors to stimulate Southern knowledge generation are not linked to policymaking, which remains top-down. Therefore Southern knowledge does not find its way into development policies. In addition, ‘knowledge for development’ policies tend to be aimed at Southern governments and universities, and do not include practitioners such as NGO staff. The knowledge management policies of NGOs are mostly internally oriented and do not explicitly include partner organisations in the South. Fourth, the sections on knowledge regimes and development discourse mapped the aid regime (or chain) in which the NGOs studied are embedded, and looked at what this embeddedness means for their operating space when it comes to learning in interaction with other - Northern and Southern – stakeholders. One of the conclusions is that the aid regime and dominant discourse forces Southern NGOs to speak the language of NGOs and back-donors. They need to do this in order to get funding proposals and progress reports approved. This limits the scope for local concepts and visions to trickle through into policy and practice.

Fifth, the aid regime is increasingly characterised by short-term funding and an emphasis on ‘deliverables’. These characteristics clash with the requirements for learning and two-way knowledge exchange among stakeholders, namely flexible funding that is not tied exclusively to projects and measurable outcomes so as to create space for research and learning; and long-term partnerships based on trust and mutual dependence. Sixth, the aid regime has led to an increasing professionalisation of Northern and Southern NGOs which have moved from social movements that play a political role towards service
providers or sub-contractors implementing official development policy. This ‘anti-politics machine’ is reinforced by the dominant discourse which casts development as a neutral, value-free activity. As a result less attention may be paid to social, political or cultural peculiarities – and local knowledge – while a universal, technical language and toolkit are promoted.

Seventh, often despite good intentions, the aid regime leads to donor-driven projects and top-down policy making. In spite of policies stimulating Southern research, this structural situation constrains the ability of Southern NGO actors to produce knowledge and contribute to international policy debates. Whereas needs-driven programming would stimulate local research into the circumstances of communities, donor-driven projects do not. Even well-intended capacity building programmes often reflect the inequalities inherent in the regime and have difficulty realising Southern ‘ownership’.

However, these structural aspects are not set in stone. This chapter has also pointed towards possible ways to change them when it comes to the relationship between Northern and Southern NGOs. After all, in addition to structural constraints, the chapter has noted positive examples in the exchange between NNGOs and SNGOs that have the potential of increasing the agency of the latter. Truly reciprocal partnerships do exist, perhaps even more in peacebuilding than in other development sectors, because of the nature of peace work in which much depends on things other than money. Some NNGOs and SNGOs have established relatively equitable partnerships and policy dialogues. Things that have made this possible include the following.

- A long-term relationship and trust between partners, in order to allow for honest reflection and ‘third-order’ learning
- Flexible arrangements regarding timelines and planning, with NNGOs leaving their Southern partners considerable planning and implementing freedom
- Core institutional funding rather than tied project funding
- NNGOs being willing to think out of the box and fund unusual things
- NNGOs respecting indigenous notions, processes and time frames for organisational development, while SNGOs are open to external ideas and suggestions. An equal relationship does not mean factoring the knowledge and preferences of donors out of the equation. To maintain the values on which their development and peacebuilding missions are based, donors
cannot be expected to come into the field without any preconceived principles.

- NGOs allowing for failure or incomplete success without immediately cutting funding. This creates space for honest reflection and interactive learning.

- Self-confidence within Southern NGOs also plays a role. As we have seen, indigenous knowledge has been discredited in many developing countries for quite some time, and being familiar with modern or Western notions is considered to be an advantage. When Southern NGO staff recognise the value of the knowledge possessed by themselves, their colleagues and the communities, they may claim a stronger position in the exchange with external actors. Indeed, as mentioned in 4.6, my field research has generated some anecdotal evidence that Southern peace NGOs are beginning to be more assertive.

- Networks in which SNGOs come together may help strengthen the voice of these organisations vis-à-vis donors and other powerful external actors. Chapters six, seven and eight pay more attention to this.

These factors only come into play in a structural climate that allows for the development of such long-term partnerships beyond concrete, output-oriented projects. The way an NGO itself is funded plays an important role in this regard. If the NGO is dependent on project funding that is tied to specific objectives, then it has little choice but to pass these objectives on to SNGOs, which leaves little space for exchange over content and direction. Other structural factors that may play a role are:

- The degree of specialisation of both the NGO and the SNGO. NGOs that are less specialised and have developed less precise policy ideas before entering the field may leave their Southern partners more freedom of action.

- Transparency and trustworthiness on the part of the NGO increases mutual trust and good relations and makes it possible for an NGO to be flexible and leave the SNGO with some discretion in policy development.

- When the governments at the top of the funding chain have a strong political interest in the developing country in which projects are carried out, then they are likely to leave NGOs and SNGOs with little policymaking leeway. For example, American donors’ emphasis on the security agenda and counter-terrorism activities is strongly felt by many SNGOs. Based on
the limited information available to me, it appears that such direct political pressure is less of an issue with European donors.

- The capacity of SNGOs also plays an important role. It appears that genuine two-way exchange is easiest between relatively equal partners – in other words, with strong SNGOs. It is also the stronger NGOs that tend to be able to do research into the needs of communities and that feel secure enough to turn down programmes that they feel do not meet these needs. Still, even these stronger NGOs would like even more time, space and capacity for research and reflection than they have at present.

As the majority of Southern peace NGOs does not fall into this ‘strong’ category, capacity building is an important activity – as long as it tries to take into account the principles of ownership and partnership. This is a bit of a ‘catch 22’ because these principles are most difficult to realise with weak organisations who may not be so certain of what they know and want and due to their strong dependency on donor funds may be more than willing to say whatever they think NNGOs want to hear. Thinking about possible ways out of this ‘catch’, our attention is drawn back to the importance of research, reflection, and organisational learning capacities. Capacitating SNGOs to research local conditions and to record and disseminate lessons would strengthen their position in exchanges over policy and practice and help lead to more relevant and effective activities. In this way, the potential significance of learning and knowledge exchange for local peacebuilders becomes very clear. “The value of knowledge sharing is in closing the African-modern knowledge gap. Thereby it contributes to transforming conflicts.”

Capacity building should therefore focus much more on building capacities for learning, reflection and knowledge generation. This involves helping develop skills for reflection, documentation, analysis and dissemination of knowledge –by peacebuilding practitioners as well as local research institutions, which could play a role in the future in developing new strategies for peacebuilding, carrying out baseline studies and monitoring of the work of local NGOs. Action research can be a helpful tool for NGO staff to reflect on their work, extract lessons, and document these. The Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) that I will analyse in chapter eight provides an interesting example. Another way to start building a bridge between different bodies of knowledge lies in the assessment of the impact of programmes. A number of larger Southern peacebuilding

---

138 Interview with the director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.
organizations\textsuperscript{139} have begun to develop new ways of impact measurement that include both ‘Western’, formalised and measurable information and more process-oriented, qualitative data. I will return to this in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{139} Such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and the Nairobi Peace Initiative Africa (NPI-Africa)