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UvA Dissertation

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Willemijn Verkoren is a historian and political scientist. She did her PhD research at the Amsterdam institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDSt). Currently she works as assistant professor at the Centre for International Conflict Analysis and Management (CICAM) of the Radboud University Nijmegen.

Local non-governmental organisations in conflict-torn countries find themselves in rapidly changing circumstances. This calls for flexibility and the capacity to learn. Locally appropriate ways to deal with conflict are needed but difficult to find. Peacebuilders (symbolised by the dove in the title) face various constraints as they develop and share their knowledge (symbolised by the owl). Based on research carried out mainly in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, and the Philippines, *The Owl and the Dove* maps these elements in order to find out how peace workers can become more effective learners. It pays attention to exchanges with donor organisations, knowledge institutions and networks. The book makes concrete recommendations for capacity building, organisational learning, research, and networking, so that these activities may help overcome structural inequalities and constraints, strengthen the learning capacity of peacebuilders, and improve the global knowledge base for better peace policy and practice.

The Owl and the Dove

Knowledge Strategies to Improve the Peacebuilding Practice of Local Non-Governmental Organisations

Willemijn Verkoren

**THE OWL
AND THE DOVE**

This research was co-funded by the Amsterdam institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDSt) of the Universiteit van Amsterdam, the Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid (Cordaid) and the Interkerkelijke organisatie voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking (ICCO). Part of the field work was made possible by a travel grant provided by the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO).

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THE OWL AND THE DOVE

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List of abbreviations

ACTS	Applied Conflict Transformation Studies
AI	Appreciative Inquiry
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BOND	British Overseas NGOs for Development
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CMES	Community-based Monitoring and Evaluation System
Cordaid	Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid
CRIES	Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales
CRS	Catholic Relief Service
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DC-Cam	Documentation Center of Cambodia
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Rehabilitation
DED	Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst
DfID	Department for International Development (of the Government of the United Kingdom)
ECCP	European Centre for Conflict Prevention
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EMU	Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisburg, Virginia, USA)
ENDA	Environmental Development Action in the Third World
GDNet	Global Development Network
GPPAC	Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
Hivos	Humanistic Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries
IANSA	International Action Network on Small Arms
ICCO	Interkerkelijke organisatie voor ontwikkelings-samenwerking (Inter-Church Development Organisation)
IDS	Institute for Development Studies (University of Sussex, United Kingdom)
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IKV-Pax Christi	InterKerkelijk Vredesberaad (Inter Church Peace Council) - Pax Christi Netherlands
IO	International organisation
ISG	International Steering Group (of GPPAC)
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
KM	Knowledge Management
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MILF	Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Mindanao National Liberation Front
MPC	Mindanao People's Caucus
NCCCK-CPBD Project	National Council of Churches of Kenya Community Peace Building and Development Project
NCP-SL	Network for Collaborative Peacebuilding - Sierra Leone
NDF	National Democratic Front (Philippines)
NFP	National Focal Point (of GPPAC)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	Northern Non-Governmental Organisation
Novib	Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Bijstand (Netherlands Organisation for International Assistance), now part of Oxfam International and called Oxfam-Novib
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPI-Africa	Nairobi Peace Initiative Africa
OM	Outcome Mapping
OSI	Open Society Initiative
Oxfam	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
Oxfam-Novib	See above under Novib
PCIA	Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment
PSO	Branch organisation of Dutch development organisations focusing on capacity building
RAWOO	Raad voor het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek in het kader van Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council)
RSG	Regional Steering Group (of GPPAC)
RTC	Responding To Conflict (UK-based NGO)
RUF	Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SNGO	Southern Non-Governmental Organisation
TMF	Thematische MedeFinanciering (Thematic Co-Financing; funding programme of the Dutch government)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
US(A)	United States (of America)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WAPI	West Africa Peacebuilding Institute
WIPNET	Women in Peacebuilding Network (a WANEP programme)

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Introduction

“Am I doing this thing right?” and, more fundamentally, “am I doing the right thing?” are questions most people ask themselves from time to time. And, indeed, they should: asking such questions leads to learning and improvement. In peacebuilding, they are particularly important, as the potential price of doing the wrong thing is high and renewed fighting could ultimately be the result. However, these questions are not easy to answer. Doing so entails an open mind and a willingness to question previous decisions and ideas and even admit mistakes – something which in a context affected by conflict is particularly difficult because of the implications this may have. More practically, it is hard to obtain the knowledge needed to answer the questions in a satisfactory way. This would require research, reflection and exchange, all of which are difficult in a conflict-affected and resource-deprived context. In addition, not all actors have equal influence in discussions over policy directions, nor are all able to decide for themselves whether they can do research or take time for learning. Structural factors, such as the policies of donor agencies, shape the extent to which peacebuilders can develop and share their knowledge.

This study aims to map these elements and find out how peacebuilders can become more effective learners. It centres on two elements: knowledge, embodied by the owl in the title, and peacebuilding, symbolised by the dove. The dove represents the range of activities by civil society organisations that aim to end and prevent violent conflict and establish and sustain peace in the societies in which they work. It also represents an aim, an overall goal of these organisations and the people working in them: the goal of peace. The owl is the knowledge – experiences, lessons learned, research outcomes – that may improve the efforts of peacebuilders and bring them closer to their aim of peace. Knowledge can be an end in itself, but in this context it is considered primarily as a means to an end: peace. In order for peacebuilding work to be successful, it is important that it is based on existing relevant knowledge – knowledge, for example, about the context, the actors and their cultures, the capabilities and constraints of people and communities, and the effect of particular working methods.

An approach currently dominant in development – a field of which, when it comes to funding flows and the practical organisation of work, peacebuilding is often a part – sees development almost as a service industry, producing a set of measurable deliverables. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were agreed upon by the United

Nations (UN) member states in 2000, are a good example of that approach. However, reality is less easy to grasp. In essence, development is not about constructing wells or hospitals. It is about helping develop capabilities of people to use such facilities. In that sense, development is really about knowledge. This does not only include the knowledge of development workers coming to train local people. It is at least as important to mobilise the knowledge of locals. Development “is a process which cannot happen, [...] unless it is based *both* on a good understanding of the particular socio-economic reality that the ‘development’ is intended to change *and*, just as importantly, on an appreciation of the perceptions of local populations as to their options in that reality. Without such ‘knowledge’, interventions fail, as we have seen time and time again.” (Powell 2006: 519, emphasis in original) The decisive factor then becomes to “successfully link [...] the range of knowledge components necessary to achieve your aim” (ibidem).

In countries affected by conflict both the need to find locally appropriate solutions and the difficulty in obtaining and using these are even more profound. In ‘postconflict’ countries large-scale violence has ceased but the underlying grievances, contradictions and structures that caused the conflict are usually still present. As a result the threat of renewed warfare looms large. Peacebuilding organisations employ a wide range of activities to prevent this from happening by addressing the causes of conflict, working for reconciliation and stimulating the development of peaceful structures and institutions. But they do so in difficult circumstances. Local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in conflict-torn countries find themselves in rapidly changing contexts. This calls for flexibility and the capacity to learn from one’s actions. Indeed, as the potential cost of making mistakes is high – it may even cost lives – the need to ‘get it right’ is particularly pressing. Learning from one’s own work and from the experiences of others is therefore a priority.

The characteristics of violent conflicts have changed significantly since the end of the Cold War, as is reflected by the term ‘New Wars’ (Kaldor 2006). Better learning about this new and changing context of conflict, and about the strategies that do and do not work as organisations work to transform this context, is needed. A recent study found that “NGOs best equipped to deal with security threats were those which [...] had a strong analysis of the context” (Goodhand 2006: 107). Similarly, another study of nine successful South Asian NGOs showed that “the success of these NGOs was in part attributable to their willingness to embrace new learning and invest in developing their capacity as ‘learning NGOs’” (Hailey and James 2002: 398). However, learning is difficult in conflict

settings. NGO staff work in a context of urgency, have action-oriented working styles, and as a result often find it difficult to create time and space for reflection and learning. In conflict-torn societies, competition and distrust hamper knowledge sharing, and the content of knowledge itself is often contested. In addition, structural inequalities constrain the opportunities for learning and reflection that local Southern NGOs (SNGOs) have: the low research capacity of Southern knowledge institutions, a lack of recognition of indigenous knowledge, and the imposition of Northern policy priorities as part of the way the funding of NGOs is organised. All these issues contribute to a lack of opportunities for Southern peacebuilders to systematically reflect on the place of their activities in the wider spectrum of peacebuilding, to analyse the effect of their interventions and ask whether they are doing the right thing, to study the needs and priorities of beneficiaries and collect existing ideas and methodologies of peacebuilding, and to document and share lessons learned. Given these difficulties, this study explores ways in which peace practitioners may learn and reflect.

The knowledge strategies of organisations are a relatively new field of analysis, which originated in the business sector in the early 1990s, reflecting an increasing emphasis on the ‘knowledge economy’. Some years later, the development sector began to take up the issue as well. However, this body of thinking remains largely confined to internal learning mechanisms and knowledge flows inside organisations in the global North. From a study of British development organisations, Ramalingham (2005: 26) concludes that these organisations’

“focus on internal knowledge work belies the fact that [they rely] on activities in the South as a key source of their most valued knowledge, and that eventually, all knowledge that is ‘value generating’ must by necessity be tied back to a level of [knowledge sharing] with those in the South. [...] Learning between agencies, between agencies and Southern partners, and between agencies and beneficiaries, is a clear gap in the knowledge and learning strategies [of international development organisations]”.

In order to contribute to filling that gap, *The Owl and the Dove* focuses on the knowledge processes in which local peacebuilding organisations engage as they work in postconflict settings in the global South. It further develops the theory on knowledge and learning in the field of development and peacebuilding, adding elements relevant to peace NGOs in the South. Like the field of organisational learning, peacebuilding and postconflict development are relatively young fields of study. Drawing these together leads to a new picture of the specific characteristics and challenges of knowledge and learning in conflict

settings. This study also uses the outcomes of over a hundred interviews with primarily Southern peacebuilders and analyses case studies of initiatives aiming to improve the knowledge base and processes of these actors and their organisations.

In response to the difficulties that constrain their learning, Southern peacebuilders identify a need to find ways that better enable them to extract, use and disseminate their own implicit knowledge and the knowledge that exists in the communities in which they work. This would make more locally relevant knowledge available in conflict areas and achieve a more equitable balance between Northern and Southern contributions to the development of theory in the field of peacebuilding. In line with this, the much-used concepts of ‘capacity building’ and ‘knowledge transfer’ are conceived as two-way processes. In the study ideas and initiatives are examined that aim at achieving this. The aim of the study, then, is to shed light on the difficulties and opportunities for NGOs in conflict regions in their efforts to become more effective in peacebuilding processes through their participation in learning and knowledge sharing processes. The book centres on the following research question: *What are 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?*

In order to address this question, this study maps the structural factors that shape the possibilities for learning and knowledge exchange and analyses past and present initiatives in this light. Lessons learned from knowledge experiments are documented and placed in the context of theories about knowledge management, learning and networking. The study focuses not on the ‘hardware’ of technical knowledge management solutions, but on the more difficult ‘software’, or people, side of the story. This reflects the current shift in focus in thinking about learning and knowledge exchange from technological solutions to the human and social constellations that make learning possible.¹

The research question posed above leads to a number of more specific questions.

- What is the role and place of local NGOs in contemporary peacebuilding processes, and what does their position in the wider field of actors and processes mean for the knowledge on which they base their work and the learning they engage in?

¹ See 3.2.2.

- What forms does knowledge of peace and conflict take?
- What are general characteristics of organisational learning processes, and how can these be applied to Southern peace NGOs? What characterises the learning processes of Southern peace NGOs?

Theory and conceptualisation

Relevant theoretical discussions that are drawn upon revolve around the following concepts.

- *Civil society and peacebuilding.* A few recent publications look at the roles that civil society organisations play or potentially may play in the prevention or transformation of violent conflict and the building of structures for a sustainable peace (Barnes 2006, Kaldor 2003, Goodhand 2006, Anderson and Olsen 2003). One of the findings from this literature is that civil society and NGOs² often neglect to think explicitly about the way in which their projects go together with those of others and contribute to the wider aim of sustainable peace. The reasons for this are usually not analysed in any depth. Based on conversations with NGO staff, this study explores some of these reasons, such as inter-organisational competition and the lack of funds for analysis and long-term planning. It also asks whether organisational learning strategies have the potential of improving NGOs' reflection on their place in the wider field.
- *Knowledge and types of knowledge in development and peacebuilding.* This literature distinguishes between explicit, readily available knowledge, and tacit knowledge inside people's heads (Sauquet 2004). Other discussions relate to distinctions between academic and practitioner knowledge and between external and indigenous knowledge (Rip 2001, De la Rive Box 2001, RAWOO 2000). Applying these types of knowledge explicitly to the field of peacebuilding, and examining the implications for learning processes, has not been done so far. This book will do so in chapter two.
- *Learning and cycles of learning.* Theories about learning emphasise the learning cycle that was described briefly in the introduction, and distinguish between superficial and deeper learning processes, whereby deeper learning requires questioning the assumptions and theories on which one's entire

² See chapter one for a discussion of the terms 'civil society' and 'NGOs'.

mode of operation may be based (Boonstra 2004, Argyris 2004a and 2004b). Chapter three looks at these processes and connects them to the learning processes of NGOs.

- *Knowledge management and organisational learning.* There is a large body of literature in these fields (Sauquet 2004, Nooteboom 2002). Most of this literature originates in the field of business and business studies. However, recently publications have begun to appear that look at organisational learning specifically for the international development-oriented sector (Ramalingham 2005, 2006; Britton 2005). So far, these publications have almost exclusively focused on Northern-based organisations, and a gap in the literature exists both when it comes to organisational learning by SNGOs, and knowledge interactions between Northern and Southern actors. Chapter three signals this gap, while the remainder of the study contributes to filling it.
- *Bridging research and policy.* In the development sector as well as in other fields of work a body of literature has come into existence about ways to bridge the divide between researchers and policymakers (Court and Young 2003, Carden and Neilson 2005, Stone 2002). However, this literature is somewhat limited as it mostly starts from the angle of the researcher and focuses on influencing policy with one's findings. It also largely leaves out the practitioner: the person who implements policies and from whom new research findings often originate. This study aims to fill that gap by adopting the perspective of practitioners and looking at their knowledge needs, the way they use available knowledge, and the knowledge they have to offer. Most explicitly this is done in chapter five.
- *Knowledge sharing.* Publications on knowledge sharing ask, for example, what the best strategies are for bringing out and sharing tacit knowledge, or what the restraints are that keep people from sharing openly (O'Dell et al. 1998, Ballantyne 2001, Baud 2002). These publications are relatively few. Interview findings regarding knowledge sharing among Southern peace NGOs are used in chapters five, six, seven and eight to provide further empirical data that develop the thinking about knowledge sharing. These data also shed light on the particular difficulties that knowledge sharing encounters in a context of conflict, distrust, and few resources.
- *Networking.* One prominent and much-used knowledge sharing tool is networking, although the aims of networking may be somewhat broader than knowledge exchange alone: action-

oriented networks work together to implement programmes or influence policy, for example. The literature on networking analyses various forms of networks and collects lessons learned on what works and what does not (Stone and Maxwell 2005, Van Deventer 2004, Benner et al. 2004). Much of the literature treats networking as a technical and neutral activity, while the study of North-South and Southern peace networks in chapters six and seven shows that it is in fact an activity shaped by politics and conflict.

- *Capacity building.* Capacity building has become a buzzword in the development sector, although many people are unclear about what it actually means. Most definitions include some element of knowledge transfer, making the concept relevant to this study. Some publications exist, mostly from the development sector itself, that attempt to clarify the concept and define strategies for capacity building (James and Wrigley 2006, Groot and Gerwen 2004). However, a gap exists between the conceptualisation and the actual practice of capacity building. Most agencies strive for optimal ownership of peace and development strategies by Southern partners, and conceptualise capacity building in this light. But the reality of the funding and accountability chain means that genuine ownership and partnership often do not exist. Thus, in chapters three and four this study compares the theory and practice of capacity building and asks whether capacity building programmes are interactive learning processes, or one-way knowledge transfers. In doing so, the concept of capacity building is placed more explicitly in the context of thinking about learning and knowledge transfer.
- *Discourse and knowledge systems.* Publications in various fields shed light on developments in discourse, the dominance of some discourses over others, and the ways in which this shapes knowledge recognised as 'valid'. At an even deeper level, the literature about different knowledge systems in different parts of the world, and the ways in which particular systems have gained ground over others, provide a background for current-day inequalities in who generates knowledge and what knowledge is recognised (Hilhorst 2003, Mawdsley et al. 2002, Mudimbe 1988, Grasdorff 2005). This book (particularly chapter four) discusses the implications of these important discussions for donor-recipient relations and the knowledge and learning strategies used by local peace NGOs.
- *Donor regimes.* Related to the discussion about discourse, a body of literature on donor relations and the way these shape the

radius of action of SNGOs also sheds light on the ways in which power and knowledge are intertwined in practice (Edwards and Hulme 1996, Ferguson 1994, Krieger 2004). This issue emerged from the interviews with SNGO staff as vitally important in order to understand their knowledge and learning processes. Bringing in this literature, and further adding to it using the findings from the interviews, serves to highlight the political dimension of knowledge processes in the world of peacebuilding. This is significant because in the knowledge and learning literature mentioned earlier, these processes are often described as 'flat' (rather than hierarchical) and 'neutral' (rather than political). Chapter four discusses these issues.

Approach

As none of the sources have a *direct* bearing on the subject of the study, the approach chosen for the treatment of the theory is that of an explorative or heuristical analysis. In such an approach, a model is created from various theories and concepts. This model is not used as a fixed framework that is applied to the data, but it continues to evolve throughout the study according to the empirical findings. Information gathered in interviews alters and furthers it. In this way, theory and empirical findings reciprocally influence one another and lead to the gradual development of new theory.

The research question is operationalised by taking local peace NGOs and networks in developing, conflict-affected countries as the main unit of analysis. The focus on indigenous NGOs in the South is important, as their experiences constitute a gap in the literature on the knowledge processes of NGOs. These organisations are studied using a variety of methods. A central place is given to interviews with strategically placed staff members of these organisations – mostly NGO directors or programme coordinators. In addition, conversations with, and publications by, representatives of international NGOs that engage in cooperation with, and capacity building of, Southern partners, serve to complement the picture painted by SNGO staff.

The reason why, in addition to individual NGOs, NGO networks were also analysed relates directly to the nature of the issues under study. Interactive learning and knowledge exchange by NGOs often takes place in networks – or at least, networks are set up with knowledge sharing as their aim. Thus, networks constitute an interesting unit of analysis when looking at the knowledge strategies of NGOs and processes. Several

networks were studied in detail: the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and its regional NGO networks in Southeast Asia, East Africa, West Africa and Central Asia, and two national-level networks in Sierra Leone and Liberia that are part of the West African GPPAC network, which is called the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). In addition, various other networks were encountered and studied in less detail. In many cases, NGO staff members were interviewed both as representatives of individual NGOs and as members of one of the networks, and were asked questions on their organisation's knowledge processes as such, and their participation in networks.

The main regional areas in which interviews have been carried out are West Africa (Liberia and Sierra Leone) and Southeast Asia (the Philippines and Cambodia). These regions were chosen because of several factors. First, the spread over two continents makes it possible to compare between very different regional and cultural contexts and increases the applicability of findings. Second, the four countries have all experienced civil war and witness the proliferation of peacebuilding initiatives, making them suitable for a study of Southern peace NGOs. Third, civil society peacebuilding work in all four countries includes knowledge strategies such as networking and joint learning from practice. Particularly in the Philippines and the West African countries many peace networks are active, while in Cambodia an action research programme is being implemented. These initiatives provide material for the third and fourth Parts of this book, which focus on the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs.

In addition to these two focus regions, travel in the context of other projects made it possible to conduct interviews in East Africa and Central Asia. In Nairobi, Kenya, during a visit in the context of a consultancy project, peace NGO staff from Kenyan, Sudanese, and Rwandese organisations were interviewed for this study. The visit to Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) was undertaken in the framework of a review of GPPAC (the case study in chapter seven) and did not cover the range of issues discussed with interviewees in the aforementioned regions. That said, the Central Asian interviews yielded relevant results beyond the GPPAC case study alone, particularly with regard to knowledge exchange and networking, and the experiences of local peace NGOs with regard to these strategies. These insights have been particularly useful for chapters five and six, which deal with knowledge sharing and networking. They also have broader implications for other chapters, as issues such as the role of civil society in

peacebuilding (chapter one), donor relations and capacity building (chapter four) were discussed.

Structure of the book

Part One sketches the context of peacebuilding, including the background and nature of current-day wars, and the role of NGOs in that context. In addition, Part One discusses the role of knowledge and learning processes in peacebuilding. It does so by drawing on the various bodies of literature outlined above. *Chapter one* addresses civil society, knowledge, and peacebuilding. The chapter looks at the nature and roles of civil society organisations (CSOs) working for peace. It pays attention to the concepts of civil society and peacebuilding, gives an overview of the range of CSO activities, and places these in the broader perspective of peacebuilding as an overall aim. *Chapter two* looks at the concept of knowledge and relates it to the peacebuilding field, addressing different types and sources of knowledge. Exactly what kind of knowledge are we talking about in this study? What knowledge do peacebuilders need for improved practice? *Chapter three* outlines various processes, actors and relationships that contribute to, or form part of, the learning processes of NGO staff, and zooms in on the knowledge strategies of NGOs as they appear in the literature. All this leads to a first rudimentary model of the knowledge processes of peace NGOs. The remainder of the book uses the outcomes of conversations with staff of Southern peace NGOs as well as case studies and additional literature to refine and further develop the model. This process is guided by a number of additional questions emerging from Part One. At the end of Part One the methodology used in answering these questions is outlined.

Part Two introduces the element of inequality and North-South differences and interactions into the picture more explicitly. *Chapter four* looks at structural factors that shape and constrain knowledge generation, access, and dissemination of Southern peace NGOs. Developments in discourse, inequalities in the extent to which different types of knowledge are recognised, and the role of donor agencies in determining the knowledge that is used and produced all shape the extent to which Southern organisations are able to generate and disseminate knowledge. Developing the ability of NGOs to do research and to consciously learn from practice emerges in this context as a capacity building priority. Having outlined the structural framework in which Southern peacebuilding organisations operate, in *chapter five* the book moves on to analyse the knowledge strategies these organisations

engage in in practice. *Chapter six* zooms in on networking as a particular strategy peace NGOs use to improve their knowledge base as well as their contribution to the knowledge of others.

Part Three of the study presents two case studies that further illuminate the interaction between the strategies addressed until then. In *chapter seven*, building on the discussion in chapter six of networking as a tool for knowledge exchange, a global network of peacebuilding CSOs is analysed: the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). In *chapter eight*, a practitioner-oriented Master programme is described that is offered in several conflict-affected regions with an intensive interaction between the regional programmes: the action research-centred Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) programme.

Combining the findings presented and discussed, the concluding chapter revises the model of knowledge processes, actors, and relationships drawn up at the end of Part One, further developing it into a new model that may serve as a tool for analysis and improvement of the knowledge, learning, and knowledge exchange of Southern peace NGOs. The chapter discusses ways to overcome the structural inequalities that limit the learning of Southern NGOs and their contribution to global discussions about conflict and peace, giving a number of recommendations to various actors involved.

Although the field of peacebuilding in developing, conflict-torn societies presents a number of specific challenges that increase both the urgency of learning and the difficulty of doing so, the processes that are elaborated in this study have a wider bearing than on the peacebuilding field alone. Many of the findings and recommendations are relevant to NGOs working in other sectors as well.

Use of terms: North and South

Throughout the book, the terms ‘North’ and ‘West’ are used almost, but not entirely interchangeably. In discussions on donors and recipients of development aid, I use the terms ‘North’ and ‘South’. Here, the ‘North’ also includes a country like Japan. ‘North’ and ‘South’ may be considered synonyms to the terms ‘developed world’ and ‘developing world’. In discussions on culture, the term ‘West’ is used as opposed to ‘non-Western’ regions and cultures. Here, ‘West’ refers more specifically to Europe and the United States.

**PART I. CIVIL SOCIETY, KNOWLEDGE AND
PEACEBUILDING**

Part One of this book sketches the field of peacebuilding, including the background and nature of current-day wars, and the role of NGOs in that context. It pays attention to the role and place of local NGOs in contemporary peacebuilding processes, asking what their position in the wider field of actors and processes means for the knowledge on which they base their work and the learning they engage in. In addition, Part One develops an initial rudimentary model of the knowledge processes of local peace organisations based on literature about learning, knowledge management, and knowledge sharing of NGOs, as well as on some findings from the interviews done with local peace NGO staff, particularly regarding their knowledge demand and supply.

Having introduced the field of peacebuilding, its context, and the role NGOs play in it in chapter one, chapter two looks at the concept of knowledge in relation to peacebuilding. What is peacebuilding knowledge and where does it come from? Next, in chapter three the general characteristics of organisational learning processes are explored and applied to peace and development NGOs. An initial model that outlines the knowledge processes of local peace NGOs, interactions and relationships ensues at the end of chapter three. This model will be further developed as the book unfolds, taking into account the specific characteristics, opportunities and constraints that peace organisations face. At the end of Part One, the methodology used in collecting this information will be discussed.

Chapter 1. Pieces of peace

Civil society and peacebuilding

This chapter addresses the following questions in order to set the stage for the remainder of the book. In doing so the chapter aims to contribute to a better understanding of the role and place of NGOs in contemporary peacebuilding processes and the constraints which they face. This helps to contextualise the discussion of the knowledge processes of local peace NGOs that follows in the next chapters.

- What is the position of NGOs within civil society and vis-à-vis non-civil society actors?
- What does peacebuilding entail, and what is the role of NGOs in this field?
- What kind of conflicts do they strive to solve or change?
- What are the specific characteristics of peace NGOs and what makes them different from other NGOs?
- What kinds of activities do peace NGOs engage in, and what are their aims?
- Which discussions take place about the role and limits of civil society actors when it comes to peacebuilding?

1.1 Civil society and NGOs

The term civil society is usually used to refer to those parts of society that are organised and that exist outside of government and the private sector. The non-governmental and organised nature of civil society is important because it means that – at least ideally – civil society can act as a check or balance on governmental action. As a watchdog of citizen interests civil society is an indispensable element of democracy. At the global level civil society may be especially important since citizens do not relate to institutions of global governance through elections; thus global civil society may be seen as organisations facilitating a “process through which individuals debate, influence and negotiate an ongoing social contract or set of contracts with the centres of political and economic authority” (Kaldor 2003, 79).

The width of the concept depends on the observer. Some see civil society as including political parties, media, sports associations, group interest organisations, idealistic non-governmental organisations, religious organisations, and private corporations. Particularly with regard to the inclusion of political parties, media, and the private sector

there is discussion. The media are often considered another important, but separate, element of democracy and check on government. Political parties are usually seen as semi-governmental institutions and therefore not part of civil society. Businesses have their own relation to government and do not organise civilians around public issues or have a representative function towards government. The way in which the concept of civil society is mostly used, then, is as a sphere of organised society apart from government that includes non-governmental organisations, interest groups, and religious organisations. (Diamond 1992, O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Kaldor 2003, Barnes 2001, Pishchikova 2006)

This study zooms in on one important element of civil society: the non-governmental organisation or NGO. In its broadest sense, an NGO is an organisation that is not part of the structure of government. In that sense it is synonymous with a civil society organisation (CSO). However, in the context of the current field of analysis, the term NGO tends to be used somewhat more narrowly to refer to humanitarian or otherwise idealistic non-profit organisations. NGOs can be distinguished from organisations which represent their own members, such as sports organisations, interest groups and church organisations. In developing countries such organisations tend to be called community-based organisations (CBOs). NGOs do not in the first place represent their own members; they work on behalf of people other than themselves. (Usually these are people considered to be marginalised and in need of support.) They are usually formally registered and include voluntary associations, charities, foundations, and professional societies. NGOs do not make profits. CBOs are not part of this more narrow definition but are covered by the broader concept of CSO.

The first well-known international NGOs were the Anti-Slavery Society (1839) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (1863). Globalisation during the 20th century gave rise to the importance of international NGOs. International treaties and organisations such as the World Trade Organisation were perceived as being too centred on the interests of private enterprises. In an attempt to counterbalance this trend, NGOs emphasised humanitarian values, development cooperation and environmental issues.³ A concern with such 'public' affairs characterises NGOs, and professional associations that try to advance the interests of their members therefore do not really qualify as NGOs.

³ www.wikipedia.org, accessed 1 December 2006; Kaldor 2003, 87-90.

In the 1980s and 1990s the number of NGOs grew dramatically. International NGOs registered with governments and international organisations numbered 13,206 by the end of the 1990s, although the actual number of internationally operating NGOs is estimated at around 40,000. National numbers are even higher and vary considerably depending on the country. The United States has an estimated 2 million NGOs, most of them formed in the past 30 years. Russia has 4,000 NGOs. India has 2 million NGOs. In Kenya, some 240 NGOs come into existence every year.⁴

Civil society in general, and NGOs in particular, are considered an important element of democracy⁵. By organising citizens civil society facilitates their ability to act as a check on government officials, holding them accountable for their actions also in between elections. NGOs are said to stimulate participation in public affairs, help people develop organisational and public debating skills, and foster norms of trust, moderation, and accommodation. (Pishchikova 2006: 43) This applies not only to organisations playing an active role vis-à-vis government, but for any organisation that brings people together for a common cause beyond their own immediate private sphere – including, for example, sports clubs. Such organisations are considered important elements of civil society because they contribute to social capital. (Putnam 1993)

Social capital, a concept made famous by Robert Putnam, consists of relations of trust and reciprocity that are the result of interaction by citizens outside the political sphere. In a study of Italy, Putnam found that social capital is important for democracy because it creates connectedness and common interest and because interaction in civilian organisations stimulates political skills and a sense of citizenship. (Putnam 1993) The concept of social capital has found its way into the discourse of policy makers in development, most notably the World Bank which termed it ‘the missing link’ in development (Harriss 2001). This has led to increased attention to civil society development in developing countries as part of strategies for democratisation, development and peacebuilding. The creation and consolidation of NGOs has come to be seen as an indispensable part of strategies for post-conflict democratisation and peacebuilding (Barnes 2001, Pouligny 2005: 498). “Local civil societies [...] are often seen to carry the best hopes for a genuine democratic counterweight to the power-brokers, economic exploiters and warlords who tend to predominate in conflict-

⁴ www.wikipedia.org, accessed 1 December 2006; Kaldor 2003, 87-90.

⁵ See for example Tocqueville 1998, Diamond 1992, Putnam 1993, and O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986.

ridden weak or failed states, and may even capture the electoral process” (Pouligny 2005: 498)

Over the past two decades, donor agencies have focused increasingly on the development and support of civil society in developing countries as a way to build democracy, peace and economic progress. In the process, the concept of civil society has become ‘instrumentalised’ towards fulfilling a specific set of donor priorities (Pishchikova 2006: 44). Mostly this has taken the form of the creation or support of professional NGOs that may implement the policies of donors with organisational structures ensuring accountability for their activities towards donors. This form of organisation is relatively new to many societies. Pre-existing, more locally grounded civil society groups such as church organisations, councils of elders, or even individual activists are not eligible for donor support unless they become organised as professional NGOs. As a result, “the gap between home-grown civic groups and NGOs that are mainly provided for by Western assistance agencies is disturbingly big” (Pishchikova 2006: 79)⁶. Pouligny (2005: 500) sketches the issue as follows:

“When working in non-Western contexts, most outsiders tend to look for structures representative of a ‘civil society’, i.e. something which corresponds, in reality, to the form it has taken in modern western societies – NGOs, trade unions, etc. [...]. Either they do not find this representation of society and thus create one (as [the UN mission] UNTAC did in Cambodia during the peace process in the early 1990s) or they may find groups mirroring western society that suddenly emerge and claim this label. But such groups are far from covering the range of different modalities of a collective organization (Afghanistan offers many examples). Moreover, these groups (often limited to a few individuals) have difficulty in establishing links with other existing arrangements, especially at the community level.”

Rather than play a political role as social movements or checks on government, the new NGOs are treated as technical organisations implementing a specific policy or delivering a service. As a result, the use of the concepts of civil society and social capital by powerful actors in development is seen by some as part of an effort to ‘depoliticise’ development: social capital and civil society are seen to be “clever ideas which suit the interests of global capitalism [...] because they represent problems that are rooted in differences of power and in class relations as

⁶ Pishchikova adds that “[g]iven such failures to acknowledge home-grown theories and practices of civil society, most donors were initially driven by the assumption that civil society had to be built afresh and reserved for themselves the privilege of deciding what kind of civil society was to be built and how. Since NGOs were indeed non-existent, the success of civil society programs was, and still is, evaluated on the basis of quantitative growth of NGOs.” (Pishchikova 2006: 79)

purely technical matters that can be resolved outside the political arena” (Harriss 2001, 2-3). In this way, development has become an “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1994). In line with this, Kaldor refers to NGOs as “tamed” social movements. Where social movements (especially prevalent in the 1980s and before) aim to transform society, NGOs, more institutional and professional than movements, began to proliferate increasingly from the 1980s onwards. (Kaldor 2003: 86) In sections 1.5.1, 1.5.4, and 4.4, I return to the debate about the depoliticisation of civil society in development, discussing what it means for the organisations and issues under study.

Kaldor (2003: 90-92) identifies several ways of distinguishing among NGOs:

- *Northern versus Southern NGOs.* Many Northern NGOs (NNGOs) are set up to assist people in the South. In achieving their objectives they often work together with Southern NGOs (SNGOs). The latter are often seen as small, informal ‘grassroots’ or ‘community-based’ organisations, but some SNGOs are actually very large and many are based in large cities. To further complicate the picture, NNGOs that operate internationally often have offices in Southern countries, largely staffed by local employees.
- *Advocacy versus service provision.* Service provision includes emergency relief, health care, non-formal education, legal services, the provision of micro-credit, and in the field of peacebuilding, activities like the organisation of dialogues, trauma counselling and the training of community mediators. Advocacy includes lobbying and the organisation of public campaigns to draw attention to an issue or group that needs assistance.
- *Organisational forms.* NGOs’ forms of organisation differ widely. Some NGOs are membership organisations, while others are governed by boards. In addition, the meaning of membership varies. In Amnesty International the members are the owners of the organisation and determine its decision-making. By contrast, the members of organisations such as Greenpeace and War Child are supporters passively donating money.

In this study the focus is on SNGOs in the field of peacebuilding that have various organisational forms and engage in both advocacy and service provision.

1.2 The context: war and peace in the 21st century

1.2.1 Present day wars⁷

War between states and their regular armies, as it was fought during the First and Second World War, has become rare. During the Cold War, wars largely took place *within* states, usually between government armies or government-supported militias on the one hand and rebel groups on the other. Often both sides were supported by one of the Cold War's great powers. After the Cold War this trend of within-country warfare – but with international linkages – has continued.

Rebels and governments are no longer able to turn to one of the Cold War superpowers for support, but to some extent the 'War on Terror' has replaced the old dichotomy. During the Cold War warring parties would clothe their grievances in either Marxist or anti-communist language in order to gain support. Similarly, current-day groups may gain international support either by adopting an Islamist cloth, as the Chechnyan independence fighters have done, or by branding one's opponents as terrorists, as the Russian government does. The first strategy is likely to lead to an inflow of foreign *mujahedin* and of money from Islamic foundations. The second strategy may result in financial support from the United States, or at least it may silence American criticism of human rights violations.

However, international linkages are by no means limited to 'War on Terror'-related support by Islamic groups or the United States to a government or rebel force that is a party to a civil war. In many cases, civil wars have a regional dimension and conflicts in neighbouring countries are intimately tied to one another. In the African Great Lakes region, Hutu *genocidaire* groups from Rwanda play an important role in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a war in which at least nine different countries have been involved at one point or another: Namibia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Angola, Chad, Libya, Sudan, Uganda and Rwanda. The current conflict in Darfur is spreading to Chad and the Central African Republic. And in West Africa, the erstwhile Liberian president Charles Taylor, an important figure in that country's civil war, has recently been indicted by a Sierra Leonean special court for his active role in fuelling the civil war there, a war that can in some ways be seen as an expansion of the Liberian conflict.

⁷ This section draws on publications such as Kaldor (2000, 2006), Duffield (2001), Berdal and Malone (2001), Mair (2003), and Collier (2000, 2003, and 2006).

International diaspora groups add another external element to current-day 'internal' conflicts. Diaspora communities often play an active role in conflicts back home, for example by financing conflict groups or lobbying Western governments to intervene. People who have left their country and have built up an existence abroad can afford to be radical as they do not have to live with opposing groups or with the consequences of conflict on a daily basis. Given the size of the remittances they send home, the 'long-distance nationalism' of diaspora groups can affect conflicts significantly. However, some try to counter this trend by organising dialogues among diasporas from opposing sides.

Transnational criminal networks provide another international link to today's predominantly internal wars. The smuggling of arms and drugs are profitable businesses in war areas. In addition, conflicts create instable and untransparent environments with little rule of law. Such circumstances are suitable for all sorts of illegal activities, such as for example the trade in 'blood' diamonds from Sierra Leone. Such economic endeavours create groups of people with an interest in continued instability and war. For some, illegal activity stops being a means to finance rebellion and becomes a profitable end in itself, with war the means to achieve it. As a result, distinguishing between greed and grievances (Collier 2000, 2003, 2006; Berdal and Malone 2001) and between rebels, warlords and criminals (Mair 2003) becomes increasingly difficult. Many groups combine elements of 'justified' rebel movements with characteristics of criminal gangs.

The distinction between civilians and fighters has also decreased enormously in comparison to the 'classic' wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the Holocaust started a trend in which the majority of war casualties nowadays are civilians. Common terror tactics, as seen today in Darfur, include rape, plunder, maiming and killing civilians, and burning down houses. The reasons behind these tactics are not always clear and lead to considerable speculation. An element of it seems to be to scare local people into submission to militias. These groups also use them to control their own members: for example, children abducted to become soldiers are forced to hurt their own communities to prevent them from trying to return. In any case, it is clear that the use of such tactics has dramatically increased the costs of conflict for ordinary people. Civilian deaths are estimated to make up 75 per cent of all war casualties nowadays. (Barnes 2006: 18)

Particularly in Africa, the phenomenon of 'weak' and 'failed' states has contributed to conflicts. Africa's history of the slave trade pitted African traders against victims of the trade. It was followed by colonisation

which drew artificial borders, used divide-and-rule tactics and appointed particular groups to rule over others. This led to governments that enjoyed little legitimacy in the eyes of their populations. After independence these governments were somewhat artificially propped up by the support of superpowers, but when this ended after the Cold War they weakened further. The governments' lack of resources led to them becoming increasingly indebted to international financial institutions, which demanded particular conditions in return. One of these conditions, privatisation and the related shrinking of state expenditures, further weakened Southern governments, which became increasingly unable to regulate and control their societies and prevent conflicts.

Southern, and particularly African, governments continue to be weak. In situations of weak governance and resulting low security, people fall back on small groups for their sense of security and belonging. Kinship, tribe and ethnicity become important organising factors. In addition, weak governments tend to employ patronage strategies to remain in power. In this way, culture ties in with responses to state weakness to create tit-for-tat style governance systems. Democracy in these countries mainly entails voting for one's patron or ethnic kinsman in return for profitable positions and favours. What Western observers may consider corruption is really a functioning mode of governance. However, it means that controlling the government becomes a way to extract resources from supporters. Problematically, a rule of law tends to be absent. The close interrelation between political power and material wealth raises the stakes in the political game. It makes such power something to fight for.

1.2.2 Conflict, peace and development

Conflict, peace and development are very much connected. The developing world has faced a wave of violent conflicts during the last two decades. Civil wars have thwarted development efforts in which vast amounts of human energy and money had been invested. The main feature of countries in the wake of armed conflict is the very real danger of a resumption of the fighting. The best predictor of future conflict is past conflict: in 44 per cent of all post-conflict situations, war starts again in the first five years after the violence has stopped (World Bank 2004: 8), and about 50 percent of post-conflict countries revert back to war in the first decade of 'peace'. (World Bank 2003: 7) With every violent conflict, a society loses part of its capacity to handle future conflicts in a peaceful way (Miall 2001: 15), endangering future development efforts as well as present ones.

Organisations involved in peacebuilding therefore argue for a shift in emphasis (and financial means) from development projects to peace building and conflict prevention, since a relatively small effort that would help to avoid violent conflict could save large investments in development and prevent enormous expenditures for peacemaking, peacekeeping, and the alleviation of dramatic humanitarian problems that result from large scale violent conflict. The realisation, made public by Mary Anderson in her book *Do No Harm* (1999), that emergency help and long-term development programmes can unintentionally contribute to conflict has stimulated the notion that development efforts should consciously take into account the conflict factor. (Boyce 1996, Ball 1996, Carbonnier 1998, Addison 2003, Moore 2000, Junne and Verkoren 2004)

At the same time, it is argued that peace needs development just as much as development needs peace, as rising living standards and employment opportunities, as a result of economic development, are considered to be effective conflict preventors. The fact that most warfare takes place in the developing world is considered proof of that idea. (World Bank 2003: ix) More and more analysts consider the degree of economic and social development that is achieved, and the fair distribution of its fruits over different groups of the population, to be crucial determinants of whether the shooting and looting starts again. The World Bank notes that “countries affected by conflict face a two-way relationship between conflict and poverty – pervasive poverty makes societies more vulnerable to violent conflict, while conflict itself creates more poverty.” (World Bank 2004: 14) Indeed, economic development gives different groups something to work on together. Orientation may change from looking at the past toward focusing on the future. An interesting job is not only an alternative to fighting, but could also give rise to new professional identity. If people see another perspective than continuous fighting, they may be more resistant to renewed manifest conflict. There will be fewer fighters to pick up their arms, and there will be stronger efforts to stop those who do.

This line of reasoning does not hold true in all cases: sometimes, some economic ‘development’ can be the precondition for the resumption of fighting. If the decline of military activity was mainly due to the exhaustion of the conflicting parties and a lack of means to continue, then ‘development’ may take these constraints away, and with a ‘culture of conflict’ unabated, violent conflict may resume. Therefore, it is not just economic growth which is important, but a specific economic development which addresses the grievances of different groups, allows

compromise between contending factions, and offers sufficiently attractive alternatives to the main opponents.

However, this is more easily said than done. The number of developing countries that have recently been the scene of civil strife is such that post-conflict development has become the norm rather than the exception. Moreover, the pursuance of traditional development strategies may have contributed to the increase of violent conflicts rather than preventing it (Anderson 1999). With a large share in state income in the poorest countries, development aid given to governments may incite opposition groups to fight for their share of the cake. Moreover, 'structural adjustment' programmes have been criticised for reducing the capacity of states to respond to the needs of their population, increasing general dissatisfaction with the government and intensifying the struggle for the remaining sources of income. (Rapley 2004)

1.2.3 Conflict and peace in West Africa and Southeast Asia

This study concentrates on (post)conflict areas in West Africa and Southeast Asia. More specifically, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cambodia and the Philippines are the focus areas of the study. This section briefly describes the conflicts in these countries in order to illustrate the current-day wars introduced above and sketch the context in which to place the findings presented in subsequent chapters.

*Liberia*⁸

In 1989, the relatively peaceful state of the West African region (not counting numerous *coups d'état*) ended with the outbreak of civil war in Liberia. In that year, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor entered Liberia from Ivory Coast to fight the dictatorship of Samuel Doe whose Krahn tribe had begun attacking other tribes. After Taylor had invaded Nimba County the Liberian Army retaliated against the whole population of that region, attacking unarmed civilians and burning villages. Many left as refugees for Guinea and Ivory Coast. Soon after, Taylor's army split when his ally Prince Johnson formed his own militia, based on the Gio tribe. Taylor's NPFL soon controlled much of the country, while Johnson took most of the

⁸ This section is based largely on Richards 2005, Adebajo 2002, www.wikipedia.org (accessed on 1 December 2006), http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict_search&l=1&t=1&c_country=64 (International Crisis Group country page Liberia; accessed on 20 December 2006), and conversations with people in and outside Liberia.

capital, Monrovia, and killed president Doe. The war continued among all groups as both Taylor and Johnson claimed power.

A peacekeeping force of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), called the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), intervened and negotiated a treaty between the NPFL, Johnson, and Doe's remaining supporters. A coalition government was formed in August 1993, but instability continued. In April 1996 particularly destructive fighting flared up in Monrovia. Many international NGOs left and parts of the city were destroyed. In a new accord the parties agreed to demobilise their fighters and organise elections in 1997. These were won by Charles Taylor, who went from warlord to president.

Low-intensity warfare continued, however, escalating around the turn of the century with the formation of new anti-Taylor groups, supported by the government of neighbouring Guinea. By the summer of 2003, Charles Taylor's government controlled only a third of the country. Monrovia was besieged by the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), whose shelling of the city resulted in the deaths of many civilians. Thousands of people fled.

The United States, historically tied to Liberia, sent a small number of troops to defend its embassy in Monrovia, which had come under attack. The United States (US) also stationed a Marine unit offshore, while Nigeria sent in peacekeepers as part of another ECOMOG force. President Taylor resigned in August 2003 as part of a peace agreement and went into exile in Nigeria. A transitional government was installed until technocrat Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected the new president in early 2006. Sirleaf's immediate steps to fight corruption fill many Liberians with hope, although she still faces the power blocs of warlords in parliament and local government.

*Sierra Leone*⁹

Just a few years after it had begun, the Liberian war expanded into neighbouring, diamond-rich Sierra Leone with the rise of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) supported by Charles Taylor. Since its independence from the United Kingdom Sierra Leonean history had been characterised by authoritarian rule and a series of military coups.

⁹ This section is based largely on Reno 2003, Keen 2003, Richards 2005, Adebajo 2002, www.wikipedia.org (accessed on 1 December 2006), http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict_search&l=1&t=1&c_country=96 (International Crisis Group country page Sierra Leone; accessed 20 December 2006), and conversations with people in and outside Sierra Leone.

From 1985 onwards, the dictator had been Joseph Momoh, who increasingly abused his power. In 1991, the RUF began to attack villages in Eastern Sierra Leone on the Liberian border. Soon it gained control of the diamond mines in the Kono district and began pushing the Sierra Leone army towards the capital Freetown. In 1992, a group of young military officers launched a military coup that sent Momoh into exile.

However, the new military government was not able to effectively counter the RUF. By 1995 the rebels held much of the countryside and approached Freetown. In response, the government hired several hundred mercenaries from the South African private firm Executive Outcomes, who drove RUF fighters back to Sierra Leone's borders. Elections were held in 1996, but the winner, UN diplomat Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, was overthrown a year later by a group of militaries that formed a junta jointly with the RUF. Another year later, ECOMOG intervened to reinstate Kabbah, and the RUF resumed its military resistance.

In January 1999 there was severe fighting in Freetown, leaving thousands dead and wounded. ECOMOG forces drove back the RUF attack several weeks later. Later that year, president Kabbah and RUF leader Foday Sankoh negotiated a peace accord. The accord made Sankoh vice-President and gave other RUF members positions in the government. In addition it called for a UN peacekeeping force, which was deployed soon after. Almost immediately, however, the RUF began to violate the agreement, most notably by holding hundreds of UN personnel hostage in 2000. Soon, Sankoh and other senior members of the RUF were fired from their government positions and arrested. However, violence continued and even escalated to such an extent that British troops were deployed in May 2000. They succeeded in stabilising the situation and enforced a lasting ceasefire.

Since 2001, the process of demobilisation and disarmament of fighters has gathered momentum, although their reintegration into communities still presents difficulties. In 2002 president Kabbah and his party won the presidential and legislative elections. The RUF political wing failed to win a single seat in parliament. In the same year, the UN mission began a gradual reduction of its presence and completed the withdrawal of all troops on January 1st, 2006. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Court for Sierra Leone have been established to deal with the perpetrators and victims of atrocities committed during the war. RUF-leader Foday Sankoh was indicted but he died in prison from a heart attack before he could be tried. In addition, the Special

Court indicted former Liberian president Charles Taylor for his role in fuelling the Sierra Leonean war. It was agreed that he would be tried not in Freetown but in The Hague, where he is currently imprisoned.

Even though intra-state conflicts began relatively late in West Africa compared to other parts of the continent, they were extremely brutal. There was widespread use of child soldiers. Rape and cutting off limbs were common actions in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean wars. In Sierra Leone the illicit trade in diamonds turned from a means to finance rebellion to an end in itself. There the distinction between government soldiers and rebels was increasingly difficult to make. With the government unable to pay its soldiers' salaries, many turned to looting and illicit diamond mining as a means of survival. Fighters variously joined whichever group provided the most profits. Some turned into *sobel*s: soldiers during the day, rebels at night (Reno 2003: 58; Keen 2003: 81-86; Adebajo 2002: 79-110).

Political power play and the greed of leaders triggered the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflict, but the root causes are also found at the level of the individuals joining the war effort. These were mainly marginalised and discontented youth, who had little opportunities in life because of exploitative and corrupt political and economic structures. There were increasing land shortages due to increased diamond mining, soil erosion, and population growth, and there was (and is) high unemployment. Disputes with local chiefs over the allocation of land and NGO funds also played a role. Richards (2005) reports that many young men in Liberia and Sierra Leone expressed grievances about chiefs' use of local systems of land tenure and marriage payments as instruments of exploitation. Chiefs impose heavy fines on youth for minor or fabricated offences, and make them do hard labour for years in an almost slave-like fashion in order to pay these fines. In other cases, young men are forced to marry (as punishment for being seen with a girl or as a way to obtain land) but cannot afford the dowry, which forces them to work for their wives' families.

*The Philippines*¹⁰

Mindanao, the Southernmost part of the Philippines, has been a conflict region for decades - or even centuries. The most high-profile conflict in Mindanao revolves around the "Bangsamoro issue". The Bangsamoro, or Moro, people are Muslims who either came from Malaysia or were

¹⁰ This section is largely based on Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005, Stankovitch 1999, www.wikipedia.org (accessed on 1 December 2006), and conversations with people in and outside The Philippines.

influenced by Malaysian traders in the thirteenth century. The Spanish colonisers in later centuries did not manage to penetrate Mindanao as much as they did the rest of the Philippines, and the Moro people - as well as other indigenous groups, generally termed Lumad - were able to retain their religion and culture.

In the nineteenth century however, the central Philippine government in Manila began a policy of sending settlers from other parts of the country to live in Mindanao. These predominantly Christian 'settlers' (they are still called this by Moro and Lumad even though most of them have lived in Mindanao for generations) acquired positions of power over the other Mindanawan groups, sowing the seeds for violent rebellion and conflict. An important issue in the conflict is that of the 'ancestral domains': Moro groups demand control over the territory that used to belong to their ancestors. They aim at a Bangsamoro homeland, sufficient control over economic resources in their ancestral territory, and a structure of governance that will allow Moros to govern themselves in ways that they consider to be consonant with their culture. The difficulty, however, is that these 'ancestral domains' now include significant non-Moro groups (Christian Filipinos) who do not want to be governed under Bangsamoro autonomy. In 1990, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was created, but in a referendum provinces with majority or large non-Moro populations voted to stay out of this region and as a result only a few provinces are currently included.

After the Philippine government concluded a peace agreement with the Mindanao National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996, another rebel movement, the Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which seeks to establish an independent Islamic state in Mindanao, became active. Presently, peace negotiations with the MILF are ongoing. Abu Sayyaf is the smallest and most radical of the Islamic separatist groups in Mindanao¹¹. The group appears to enjoy little popular support in the area. Another armed conflict in Mindanao, as well as in other parts of the Philippines, is that between the government and the communist National Democratic Front (NDF). In Mindanao this conflict is concentrated in the Northern part of the island. The NDF, which has fought for social justice for many decades, is also negotiating with the government.

The Philippine government has established a Presidential Office for the Peace Process, which engages with the rebel groups and with civil society groups from Mindanao to try and find a lasting solution to the

¹¹ It has appeared in the Western media because of kidnappings of Western nationals.

conflicts. At the same time, however, government forces continue to clash frequently with rebels in Mindanao.

*Cambodia*¹²

Cambodia is usually considered to be a post-conflict country in the sense that large-scale armed conflict ended in the mid-to late-1990s with the demise of the Khmer Rouge, who had brutally ruled the country in 1975-1979 until they were ousted from power by a Vietnamese invasion. The conflict dates back to at least 1970, when a military coup was staged and the Khmer Rouge began their uprising in the context of the wider Indochina war and heavy American bombings of the Cambodian countryside believed to harbour Viet Cong fighters. The bombings and civil war in the period between 1970 and 1975 took up to a million lives.

Despite American support for the military government, the Khmer Rouge, supported by China, won the civil war in 1975 and established a revolutionary government that aimed to establish a rural utopia. The regime cleared out the cities and sent the entire population into rural communities where they were forced to do heavy agricultural work to meet increasingly unrealistic production targets while being underfed. Hundreds of thousands died from these conditions, while others were murdered because they were considered urban intellectuals or potential traitors from the Khmer Rouge's own ranks. The total number of casualties of the Khmer Rouge period is estimated at between one and two million people.

Towards the end of its rule the leaders of the Khmer Rouge, increasingly paranoid, began attacking neighbouring Vietnam, which finally retaliated with an invasion that ended Khmer Rouge rule and established a puppet government that essentially lasted until 1991. The Khmer Rouge, meanwhile, had retreated to the jungle area bordering Thailand where they regrouped and formed an alliance with other anti-government groups. The coalition was supported by China and the United States, which was ready to side with any group in order to counter Vietnam and its backer, the Soviet Union. Illicit trading of timber across the Thai border further helped finance the Khmer Rouge's continued resistance.

Only after the end of the Cold War did the Great Powers support peace negotiations, which led to an agreement in 1991. The agreement

¹² This section is based on literature such as Vickery 1984, Shawcross 1985 and 2000, Chanda 1986, Chandler 1991, Doyle 1995, Findlay 1995, Hendrickson 1998, Hughes 2002, and Verkoren 2004, as well as various interviews and visits to Cambodia.

stipulated the disarmament and demobilisation of all groups, to be carried out by a UN mission. This mission, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), was a new phenomenon in international history as its mandate was broad and included many civil tasks, including the organisation of elections. The elections, held in 1993, were considered to be a success, and the UN mission withdrew soon after. However, other aspects of the mission, most importantly the demobilisation process, had been less successful and this allowed for continued warfare after the elections. Moreover, a weak rule of law enabled the elected government to quickly descend into authoritarianism. In 1998 fighting came to an end. However, many challenges remain, including poverty, corruption, weak legal and regulatory institutions, a lack of democracy, and traumas and distrust that are remnants of the conflict. The risk of renewed revolution and conflict in Cambodia is prevalent and may even be growing stronger given increasing inequality between rich and poor and city and countryside, issues which played an important role in causing the Khmer Rouge revolution in the 1970s.

After many years of negotiations between the Cambodian government and the UN, a mixed international-Cambodian tribunal began operating in 2006 to try the remaining Khmer Rouge leaders for their role in the 1975-1979 genocide. However, questions are raised about the political independence of the tribunal, which contains a majority of Cambodian judges, many of whom have close ties to the government.

The conflicts compared

Summarising some of the main characteristics of the conflicts described, the Liberia and Sierra Leone conflicts are very much intertwined, while the Cambodia and Mindanao conflicts are not only separate but very different in nature. Ethnicity and religion play a significant role in Mindanao but not in Cambodia; in West Africa ethnic tensions are part of the conflict but do not emerge as chief causes. Poverty, exploitation and marginalisation of groups – whether a specific ethnic group such as in Mindanao, marginalised youth in general in West Africa, or the rural population in Cambodia – are important factors in all the conflicts. State weakness and corruption play a role as well, particularly in Cambodia and West Africa.

In all four countries these factors have not yet been addressed to the extent that the risk of renewed fighting has faded. In Mindanao peace negotiations are ongoing. In the other countries peace agreements have already been reached and demobilisation efforts have been undertaken with varying degrees of success. Those who have been demobilised still

face poverty and high unemployment, making it difficult for them to reintegrate into society. The conclusion of a peace agreement in Mindanao is likely to lead to a flow of money for reconstruction and peacebuilding, as it did in Cambodia and the West African countries. The difficulty, however, is that at such an early stage local and national institutions have little capacity to spend these funds in a meaningful way. As such capacity develops, as it may slowly be doing now in Liberia, the availability of funds decreases as donors move to other crisis areas.

The most positive atmosphere was encountered in Liberia, which I visited soon after the elections that brought Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power. Although she faces difficult structural constraints, her energetic tackling of corruption has given many people hope. In Sierra Leone, by contrast, the political situation has stagnated and it is hoped that the 2007 elections may bring change to this situation. Cambodia's political situation has not changed much over the past years; although there are regular elections, major issues such as the intimidation of opponents and the government's hold over the judicial system remain.

Both Cambodia and Sierra Leone currently witness tribunals that try the chief human rights violators of the conflicts in those countries. One challenge for civil society is to relate to these tribunals and help disseminate information about them in order to raise awareness about the significance of the trials. Like Liberia, Sierra Leone has also established a truth and reconciliation commission to deal with lower cadres that were often victims and perpetrators at the same time and to bring out the truth about what happened. Here too, civil society has a role to play – in gathering information, making suggestions for the best approach, and raising awareness among the population.

1.3 Peacebuilding

In this book I use the term peacebuilding as short-hand for a broad field of intervention activity by NGOs, states, and international organisations. Other terms used to describe the field include 'conflict transformation' and 'violence prevention'. Peacebuilding includes what is called peacemaking (negotiation to reach a settlement between warring parties or military action to enforce peace) and peacekeeping (military missions that keep warring parties apart) but goes beyond those interventions as it strives for lasting solutions that address the underlying causes of a conflict. Similarly, conflict transformation is an activity that goes beyond conflict management (regulation, mitigation, or containment of

violent conflict) and conflict resolution (mediation or negotiation to reach a mutually acceptable settlement) to include structural issues such as the inequalities between parties and the role of external players.

Conflict transformation aims not only at a settlement that ends the violence but at a 'just' or 'positive' and thereby sustainable peace. Conflict transformation does not see conflict as a negative thing. On the contrary, conflict is the source of change and progress. Even if this were desirable, it is impossible to end or prevent conflict because conflict is omni-present. Instead, the aim of conflict transformation is to reduce the negative, harmful expressions of conflict – violence – and enable people to conflict constructively and peacefully – as happens, for example, in a democracy in which all interests ideally have equal representation.

Peacebuilding is synonymous to conflict prevention, or more accurately, violence prevention, in that it aims to prevent violence either from beginning in the first place or from resurging after it has ended. The latter is a serious risk given that half of all civil wars take place in post-conflict situations and forty per cent of post-conflict countries fall back into civil war within a decade (Collier 2006). Peacebuilding includes activities at various levels of society, or 'tracks'. 'Track One' interventions aim at the leaders of the warring parties. Track One activities may include state diplomacy or high-level mediation to prevent or end warfare. Track One is largely the realm of states and international organisations, but NGOs are sometimes also involved. For example, the Carter Center of former US president Jimmy Carter has been involved in mediation activities at a high level in various parts of the world. Recently, the Dutch branch of the NGO Pax Christi became closely involved in peace negotiations in Northern Uganda. As the NGO had long worked in the area and had built up relations of trust with the various sides it was invited to play a mediatory role (Te Velde 2006). After a settlement has been reached, Track One peacebuilding focuses on building institutions and structures that strengthen the government and make it accountable to its citizens. Strengthening government legitimacy and building up the judicial system, army, and police forces are all generally considered elements of a long-term peacebuilding strategy.

Too often, high-level peace agreements have failed to be implemented because they lacked societal support and failed to address deep-seated grievances and issues. Therefore, 'Track Two' initiatives aim at drawing important societal figures into a peace process in the hopes of giving it a broader base. Track Two peacebuilding involves high-profile, influential societal figures in a conflict region, such as leaders of political parties,

journalists, interest groups, local government leaders, or religious organisations. It may include consultations, workshops and dialogues in which representatives of different sides in a conflict are involved. In addition, Track Two strategies involve institutional development of local NGOs, media, and other potential checks and balances. NGOs often work at this level, sometimes in cooperation with international organisations like the UN. (Ramsbotham et al. 2005: 26)

‘Track Three’ peacebuilding, finally, focuses on ‘ordinary people’: the communities at the ‘grassroots’. It focuses on the causes and consequences of conflict at the level of the individual citizen. These causes and consequences (often difficult to separate from one another) may include inter-communal hatred, discrimination, unequal opportunities, poverty, and trauma. Track Three interventions are usually carried out by NGOs, sometimes in conjunction with local or national government. These interventions are varied and many, and include development work, peace education, the training of community mediators, the organisation of dialogues, strategies to reduce the availability of small arms, the reintegration of former (child) combatants and of refugees, and psycho-social work. The NGOs that are part of this study carry out activities in all tracks, but mainly tracks two and, particularly, three. We will now look in some more detail at the kinds of work they engage in.

1.4 NGOs and peacebuilding

Many people are familiar with the role played in peacebuilding by institutions like the United Nations, regional organisations, and individual governments. The role of NGOs is much less known. This section sheds some light on the range of activities undertaken by NGOs in the field of peacebuilding. As little has been written in the literature about this, the section uses findings from my field research as well as literature on the subject.

1.4.1 Positioning peace work in relation to other NGO activities

One may wonder to what extent peace and conflict NGOs are different from others working in developing countries. In many respects they are similar: they tend to be part of the same policy chain that stretches from policymakers in Northern governments and international organisations such as the World Bank and the UN via international NGOs to local partner NGOs in developing countries. Being part of this chain has

various major consequences for the activities and knowledge of SNGOs. This is the case for development NGOs as well as for peace organisations – at least for those peacebuilding organisations that are financed from development cooperation budgets, as the majority of NGOs studied are. Northern – or international – NGOs receive funds from national development cooperation budgets and spend these via their partner NGOs in the South. In this way they finance ‘regular’ development work such as infrastructure and health care development, but they also have peace and security departments that support peacebuilding work through, or together with, the local NGOs studied in this book. In this sense, peacebuilding is part of the wider field of development and the chain of relationships (and knowledge flows) is similar.

There are also differences. First of all, not all peace work is organised and financed through the development chain. Some Northern/international peace organisations, such as the recently merged Dutch organisation Interchurch Peace Council – Pax Christi Netherlands (IKV-Pax Christi), have a church background. They receive only part of their funding from official development budgets, being financed also through the churches that founded them. This gives these organisations more independence vis-à-vis official policy. Another difference, emphasised particularly by ‘pure’ peace organisations and less so by development organisations that do peacebuilding only as part of their work, lies in the nature of partnerships. The chain model with its emphasis on transferring responsibilities to Southern partners with the aim of creating their capacity to function independently from Northern aid, does not always work in peacebuilding. In that field, external partners sometimes continue to be necessary, whether as neutral interveners in conflict and negotiation processes or as channels to help bring locals’ issues to the attention of international public opinion and policymakers in the North. (Barakat et al. 2006) That said, for nearly all of the organisations visited the chain is very much a reality and it shapes their functioning and knowledge processes.

Another difference between peace work and other development activities relates to the nature of the outcomes of such work. Peace is an elusive concept that is difficult to measure. Understandably, agencies funding the work of local NGOs ask them to show concrete results of their projects. But the results of peacebuilding are hard to pin down. They are part of a long-term process and often cannot be captured after a short project cycle. Peacebuilding is a process rather than a set of deliverables. This is different for at least some other development activities; the outcome of building wells for example is easily measured.

Peace projects can often give numerical information about the number of people trained or the number of meetings organised, but have difficulty showing the impact of these activities. This has led to many discussions and organisations struggle to find ways of measuring results while leaving space for open-ended and flexible processes. We will return to this in chapter five.

1.4.2 Lasting peace as the ultimate aim

The ultimate aim of the peacebuilding activities of NGOs is twofold: first, to end violence and destructive conflicts, and second, to build just and sustainable peace. The first is a more immediate goal that ends direct violence while clearing the ground for the more long-term and difficult task of creating the structures and circumstances for a lasting peace. Such a lasting peace is usually considered to require some form of social justice and legal, political, social and economic equality between groups and individuals. In many cases, a strengthened rule of law, democratic institutions, free media and a strong civil society are seen to be part of that. These elements enable conflict to be managed peacefully rather than through violent means.

Many practitioners include these ultimate aims in their visions and mission statements. When it comes to their concrete programmes, the goals of NGOs are more specific: “to change people’s view of the other side by bringing them together in a dialogue”, “to reduce the likelihood that these people will be killed”, or “to educate children about how to resolve conflicts without violence”. However, the connection between such specific programme goals and the ultimate aims of ending violence and building peace is usually left implicit and is not systematically thought through. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 11-12) Most practitioners agree that the ultimate aims cannot be met through any single programme or organisation and require actions by various players. But few people have integrated visions about how the pieces of the puzzle fit together and about how their own activities relate to the broader effort of peacebuilding.

This does not mean that NGOs should pretend they are able to build sustainable peace on their own. What they *can* do is think more explicitly about what their role is and how it relates to the roles and activities of others – other NGOs but also governments, military actors, and international organisations. Being more aware of one’s role in the bigger picture of peacebuilding not only implies more thorough reflection on the part of individual organisations, but also coordination

among actors in conflict and peacebuilding. The knowledge strategies described in Parts Two and Three strive to achieve both.

1.4.3 The added value of NGOs in peacebuilding

For peace to be sustainable, peacebuilding cannot only be a top-down process. ‘Track two’ and ‘track three’ strategies are needed as well. NGOs are well placed to engage at these levels. Compared with governmental and intergovernmental agencies, they are closer to the communities in which peace ultimately needs to take root and can enable ordinary people to articulate their needs and make their voices heard. Civilians – individual citizens, families and communities – have increasingly found themselves directly affected by the intra-state wars of recent times and the targeting of civilians by armed parties has increased the cost of conflict for ordinary people. In conflicts such as those in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, and the Southern Philippines, “violence often penetrates through the social fabric, involving a large array of armed actors”. (McKeon 2005: 567) As we saw, in current day wars high-level political dynamics combine with grassroots-level grievances and animosities to create “a complex tapestry of interconnected and self-sustaining conflict dynamics at the community level” (ibidem). As a result, ordinary people, living alongside the armed actors and greatly affected by them, have both an interest and a potential in contributing to the building of peace. Civil society organisations - at least in theory - consist of and represent these ordinary people and are therefore well placed to engage in peacebuilding. In the words of Goodhand (2006: 115):

“they are mid-level actors with linkages upwards to political leadership and downwards to communities; they have the potential to play a bridging role between identity groups in contexts characterized by extreme horizontal inequalities; they have the ability to work across lines and gain access to communities living on the wrong side of a conflict; [and] they [...] can work in high-risk environments.”

In addition, NGOs are often considered to be more “flexible, adaptive and innovative” than governmental and intergovernmental institutions (ibidem). Indeed, the study of local peace NGOs has shown that they are relatively unbureaucratic and decision-making structures are flat in that all staff members tend to have easy access to leaders and are consulted over policy. That said, the flexibility and innovativeness of NGOs are limited by two issues: the constraints created by their place in the international policy chain, which will be discussed extensively further on in this book, and, partly related, their often limited learning capacity.

In order to adapt to either changing circumstances or to increase effectiveness requires the capacity to study the circumstances as well as the effectiveness of one's work, to reflect on the outcomes of such study, and to adapt activities as a result. This is what the concept of learning capacity refers to. In the next chapter and beyond, it is explored further.

Moving on to other ways in which NGOs potentially add value to peace processes, another unique aspect relates to their own values:

“[t]hey do not only seek to get things done, they embody a particular set of values or way of thinking about the world. Therefore, just as material resources interact with the political economy of conflict, NGOs' values and ways of thinking interact with ideational and discursive aspects of war and peace. Individual peace entrepreneurs [...] play an important role in the diffusion of ideas and the generation of social energy that can transform social structures and social relations. [...] An example of this [...] is the use of the media to broadcast messages of peace and reconciliation and to counteract pro-war propaganda.” (Goodhand 2006: 121-122)

More generally, a strong civil society, of which local NGOs are a part, is an important element of “the capacity of societies to manage conflict peacefully” (Barnes 2006: 21). As discussed in section 1.1, people coming together in associations and organisations and taking part in the public sphere create what has been called “social capital” (Putnam 1993): networks of interaction, mutual assistance and trust that give a sense of common identity and foster civic engagement and democracy. This is particularly important from a peacebuilding perspective.

1.5 Activities of the NGOs visited

This section aims to give an idea of the range of activities that local peace NGOs engage in. As there is hardly any literature available on this, the section draws on my own field research and is based mainly on the activities mentioned by NGOs visited as they described their own work. Table 3.5 in the methodology section (3.10) provides an overview of the activity areas in which NGOs consulted for this study engage. Most NGOs are active in more than one of the areas described. There are variations in the nature and work of peace NGOs in different parts of the world. However, it is quite striking how similar the range of activities is when compared between countries. This once more draws attention to the consequences of being part of the same funding chain. As will be discussed in Part Two of this book, funding agencies often

present a range of activities they are willing to support, and in many cases local NGOs have few options but to choose from such lists.

However, the picture is a little more complex than that. In part it is a matter of the language used – local NGOs have become adept at using the ‘right’ terms in their project proposals, but this does not necessarily mean that their actual activities are the same. The extent to which these differ has been difficult to establish due to the nature of the research undertaken. NGO staff members interviewed tended to use the same ‘international development language’ in our conversations, and although in some cases it was possible to move beyond that discourse, in most cases I was not able to observe their actual activities in the communities.

1.5.1 Types of activities

The NGOs visited focused on one or more of the following types of activities.

Dialogue and reconciliation programmes are widespread among peace NGOs. Reconciliation includes a wide range of activities that include promoting reconciliation through support to Truth and Reconciliation Commissions; initiating joint reconciliation rituals and symbolic acts; the use of art, sports and theatre to deal with traumas and animosities; and targeted reconstruction or economic development efforts that involve representatives from different groups. In addition many local organisations focus on bringing representatives of divided communities together for dialogue. At a higher political level, some NGOs facilitate unofficial negotiation channels among political leaders from different sides to a conflict. They also employ advocacy to apply pressure on parties to start a peace process. The Mindanao People’s Council, the grassroots NGO network that was also active in the establishment of peace zones, contributed to forging a ceasefire agreement through a large demonstration of mainly internally displaced people who formed a human chain on a highway.¹³

Peace education programmes include creating awareness of the common ground between groups and training people in conflict analysis, peace skills, or non-violent activism. Such education takes place inside schools as well as in communities. In addition, supporting the development of “peace media” stations to foster objective reporting or to counter pro-war propaganda is an increasingly common activity.

¹³ Interview with staff member of Mindanawan NGO network. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.

Civilian mediation programmes train community members basic conflict resolution skills in order to mediate in conflicts that may arise in the community. Some of these programmes focus on influential community members, such as chiefs or elders, and train them as mediators. Others focus on women. Still other community mediation programmes focus on school children, who are trained to mediate within the schools. In some cases this is linked to peace education activities. “Our organisation has set up peace clubs in schools in response to an increase in violence in schools. The peace club members are trained to become mediators and animators. In the last training cycle of two years, 509 people were trained. They use drama, music, lectures, and workshops to promote peace in their schools.”¹⁴ To some extent, civilian mediators even fill the gap left by official court systems that are lacking or being developed. In some cases, mediators from different communities form committees that meet regularly to share experiences.¹⁵

Peace zones and civilian peacekeeping are activities in which NGOs mobilise civilians to protect those vulnerable to violence. Peace zones, such as the ones created in Mindanao, are areas the warring parties promise not to attack. This is achieved through NGO pressure and negotiation. Peace zones create space for NGOs to start much-needed humanitarian, peacebuilding and development projects in order to start building sustainable peace. Civilian peacekeeping can entail the monitoring of a ceasefire by representatives of civil society or the accompaniment by volunteers of human rights activists or others in danger of attack.

Box 1.1: The Pikit space for peace¹⁶

The Pikit space for peace came into existence in response to the wish of local groups to start rebuilding communities in Mindanao, addressing the visible (socio-economic and physical rehabilitation) and invisible (restoring relationships) effects of the war. However, such activities proved impossible due to ongoing violence. In order to proceed with the rehabilitation the NGO Mindanao People’s Caucus asked the main active rebel group, the Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the army to treat the Pikit area as a space for peace. The parties agreed and peacebuilding programmes began to be implemented. After this success, the ‘space for peace’ concept expanded to seven other villages. The chairman of the MPC, who is also pastor of Pikit parish and who played an important role in this initiative, thinks the reason why the soldiers cooperated was that they were approached as human beings who are basically good, rather than as ‘bad guys’.

¹⁴ Interview with staff members of Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

¹⁵ Interview with staff members of Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.

¹⁶ Interview with chairman of the Mindanao People’s Caucus. Marbel, Philippines, 16 May 2006.

Representing a particular group: Many NGOs work to increase the role of women or youth in peace processes and in society more generally. In West Africa in particular youth are of central importance because the large numbers of unemployed young men with little social opportunities present a huge conflict potential. In Cambodia as well, the population is very young and the opportunities of youth are an important agenda item. Indeed, in all four of the focus countries youth organisations are active in the peacebuilding field, as are women's groups. Others work to empower an ethnic, religious or socially marginalised group whose emancipation is considered necessary for long-term peacebuilding. The Bangsamoro in Mindanao are an example of this; a number of NGOs in the region work for their empowerment which they see as an integral part of any strategy for sustainable peace. Partly in relation to this, it deserves mentioning here that many religious organisations such as churches and church umbrella organisations are active in the field of peacebuilding. In addition to activities such as those described elsewhere in this list, they focus on religion as a source of tolerance and inspiration and often organise inter-religious dialogues.

Organisational development, training and networking: Larger, city-based NGOs often work to support grassroots, community-based partners to strengthen and develop their organisations. This set of activities includes giving training, providing advice and helping organisations to find donors and to write funding proposals. Some NGOs engage in research to find out more about the needs and conditions of beneficiaries as well as possible methodologies for meeting these needs. A related set of activities is networking with other NGOs at home and abroad and with governments and regional and international organisations in order to extend the reach of an individual organisation, exchange knowledge, and undertake joint advocacy and other activities.

Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) of former fighters is another set of activities in which NGOs participate. Usually the DDRR process is led by a United Nations mission or government and NGOs carry out supporting activities at the grassroots level. These activities often entail helping ex-combatants find alternative means of living to prevent them from picking up arms once again. To help former fighters find alternative employment, skills training (such as computer proficiency) and vocational education (for example in car garages or tailoring shops) are prominent NGO areas of work within the range of DDRR-related projects. In some cases reintegration activities

are combined with rehabilitation and development work. An example is a farming project in Liberia's Nimba province.

"Farmers who fled during the war work together in teams to clear the land that has become overgrown, plant, and harvest. Over fifty per cent of the farmers and their family members involved are former combatants. Some youngsters have been disarmed but because of their remote location, difficult to reach during the rainy season, they did not benefit from national rehabilitation programmes. These kids are easily recruited to fight in neighbouring Ivory Coast. Our organisation tries to prevent this by involving these kids in programmes such as the farming one."¹⁷

Early warning for early response has recently been getting increasing attention in recognition of the fact that preventing violence is better than responding to it. Civil society organisations are often socialised into the areas in which they work and have access to information about rising tensions and impending events. The problem lies often in getting those who can act on such warning signs to do so, highlighting again the importance of linking up with other actors as well as the difficulty of doing so.

Addressing broader structural issues of democracy, human rights and development is another broad area of activity of NGOs. Organisations strive to contribute to the strengthening of democracy at local and national levels. They do so, for example, by lobbying and advocating for increased transparency and accountability and by organising training sessions for parliamentarians and government employees. A related set of activities concerns human rights advocacy, which includes gathering information on abuses and making this available to various channels and institutions. Lobby and advocacy is also done in other areas, for example to draw attention to issues affecting the peace or the plight of a particular group. Many NGOs consider lobby and advocacy necessary activities that complement community work in order to address the larger political framework in which civil society's peacebuilding work takes place. Local and national governments, governments in the North, and regional and international organisations are addressed in order to put issues on their agenda. In addition, 'regular' development work is sometimes carried out by peace organisations based on the recognition that sustainable peace requires socio-economic progress and an equitable division of wealth. The reverse is also true (development requires peace) and therefore development organisations increasingly have peacebuilding divisions.

¹⁷ Interview with staff members of Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

1.5.2 The countries compared

Before making an attempt to further categorise the various activities and find out whether there are important gaps in the practices of NGOs as they work towards their ultimate goals of ending violence and building peace, I will first take a quick look at the character and activities of NGOs in West Africa and Southeast Asia in order to show the extent to which variations exist among countries within the relatively similar range of activities described above.

The Philippines

The Philippines, including Mindanao, are characterised by a strong and vibrant civil society. The country's activist tradition goes back to the opposition movement during President Marcos' dictatorship in the 1970s. NGOs there tend to be rather political - both in terms of their activist focus and of their connections to political parties and groups. Many NGOs originated from a political party or rebel group or are still closely related to it, even though this is not always clear to the outside observer.

Interestingly for this study, Philippine NGOs are also characterised by the fact that they have formed many networks; some even say too many. One interviewee in Mindanao sighed, "after each conference a network is created. This results in many names and abbreviations, but usually it is the same people who make up these networks. Often the new organisational forms only add to the workload. If the activities aimed at could as well be carried out within one or more of the organisations involved then there is no need to create a separate network or organisation." However, most people see mostly advantages in the fact that the Philippine peacebuilding community is so well networked: people know one another and are familiar with each other's activities, which stimulates cooperation and prevents duplication. There are also some notable networking successes. The Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC) for example contributed to forging the ceasefire agreement between the MILF and the government through a huge demonstration of mainly internally displaced people who blocked the traffic on a highway. The MPC also initiated and carries out a civil ceasefire monitoring mission. As the MPC is a network of grassroots organisations it has been able to mobilise more people than an individual organisation could have done¹⁸.

¹⁸ See also Box 1.1.

Typically, the peacebuilding activities of Philippine NGOs and networks include advocacy, lobbying, building the capacity of grassroots organisations, promoting the emancipation of the Moro people, and monitoring ceasefires and peace zones. In addition, many NGOs engage in what are perhaps more conventional peacebuilding NGO activities, such as peace education and the organisation of community dialogues.

Cambodia

Civil society in Cambodia is significantly weaker than in the Philippines. NGOs often have low capacity and civil society as a whole is less organised and networked than in the Philippines. Language is more of an issue when dealing with international actors and materials, as NGO staff are much less fluent in English than their Philippine counterparts. The relative weakness of Cambodian civil society is a consequence of its very different history. Civil society was non-existent during the Khmer Rouge years, operated under very difficult conditions in the succeeding Vietnamese period, and was only able to grow during and after the UN mission in 1991-1993, which it did exponentially. Not all NGOs that were founded during that period had good intentions beyond profiting from the fact that many funds had suddenly become available, and those that did did not necessarily have the capacity to work effectively. Although this is difficult to know for certain, it also seems that Cambodian NGOs are generally more externally driven and less rooted in local communities than Philippine ones.

Cambodian peace NGOs tend to focus less on activism than Philippine ones, and more on building relations and establishing connections. Some Cambodian interviewees suggest that this is due in part to Buddhist culture which is deemed to be less confrontational. Cambodian peacebuilding NGOs engage mainly in peace education, community dialogues, capacity building of grassroots actors, advocacy and lobby. With varying success, they have also formed networks.

Liberia and Sierra Leone

NGO activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone are relatively similar. The general character of civil society can be compared to the Philippines in one way and to Cambodia in another. Like in the Philippines, the culture or style of NGOs is relatively direct and sometimes confrontational. On the other hand, like in Cambodia, the capacity of NGOs is low and they have few resources. The extent to which they represent, and are rooted in, local constituencies, may also be doubted at least for some of these organisations. As we will see in this study, Northern donors often set their priorities of practice.

The activities of West African NGOs represent the whole range presented above, with a particular emphasis on organising community dialogues, training mediators, facilitating the reintegration of former fighters, and promoting the role of youth in peacebuilding and in society more generally. The latter activity is related to the facts that the populations of Liberia and Sierra Leone are very young, that young people have few opportunities for social advancement, and that young people as a result have played a large part in the wars of the region.

1.5.3 Categorising the activities

It is not always clear how NGOs decide which activities to engage in. Sometimes they are inspired by the work of other organisations. Often they are stimulated by international partners to look at a particular area of work, or are trained to do so. In some cases an analysis of the needs of the community in which they want to work informs such a decision. For example, prior to the founding of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the founders toured the region talking to various members of civil society about the needs for peacebuilding. But this does not happen regularly. Often (would-be) NGOs simply decide to focus on what they are best placed to do given their skills, connections, and region of work.

Most NGOs focus on more than one set of activities and run various projects at once. When they decide to prioritise one theme or project over another this seems often to be largely determined by factors outside their direct influence – in particular, the security situation in a particular region or the availability of funding for particular projects. Organisations regularly grow and shrink in size depending on whether a particular grant has been secured and staff can be hired temporarily to carry out a project.

One way to categorise the various activities of NGOs is according to the diagram below, developed by Anderson and Olsen based on the outcomes of a three-year project called Reflecting on Peace Practice that involved over two hundred peace NGOs. The horizontal axis represents a difference in strategies ranging from activities aimed at involving as many people as possible to activities aimed at a limited number of key people. “More people” strategies want peacebuilding activities to be as broad-based as possible and to have people from all interest- and conflict groups take part in them. In cases where the risk of participating in peace activities is high, this may mean moving incrementally towards involving more and more individuals. In other cases “more people”

strategies might entail organising public campaigns or mass protests. Peace education and the training of community mediators fall into the “more people” category. “Key people” strategies by contrast aim at those people who are considered to be in positions in which they can make a difference, affecting the larger political or economic framework in which peacebuilding efforts take place. These may be people in government, powerful civic leaders, or representatives of international organisations. Lobbying is a “key people” strategy, as is negotiation to create peace zones or efforts to facilitate dialogue among leaders. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48-49)

The vertical axis shows two other dimensions of peacebuilding work. Activities aimed at the individual or personal level strive to start building peace by changing people’s attitudes and perceptions. Peace education is a good example of this. Socio-political level strategies aim at systemic, institutional change at the level of society as a whole. Strategies to strengthen democracy and activities to further socio-economic development both fit within this category. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48-49) If we start filling in the above-mentioned activities in the quadrants of the diagram, it might look as follows:

	More people	Key people
Individual / personal level	Peace education Training community mediators Strengthening grassroots organisations	Lobby Training parliamentarians Dialogues between (religious) leaders
Socio- political level	Mass demonstrations Public campaigns	Negotiating peace zones Facilitating peace talks Early warning DDRR

Figure 1.1: Categorising NGOs’ activities in peacebuilding¹⁹

Fitting their activities into such a figure may help NGOs to better understand how strategically they are placed. It can stimulate reflection on the relationship between activities and final aims. For example, if an NGO works mostly at the individual, key people level, how does it

¹⁹ adapted from Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48

expect this work to trickle down to the more people level - and who and what are needed to make that happen? Alternatively, when an organisation focuses its activities in several parts of the quadrant, do these different areas of work strengthen one another, and how? The next section shows most local peace NGOs have not explicitly done such thinking, but voice a need for more reflection on their place, role, strategy, and results.

1.6 Discussions about the role of NGOs in peacebuilding

This section touches upon the debates relating to the role and limits of NGOs in peacebuilding. Each will be further elaborated later on as it relates more explicitly to the subject matter of this study, and is therefore introduced only briefly here. I will start by discussing a number of limits and gaps in the practice of local peace NGOs. Next, I will mention discussions relating to the following issues: the reduced political role of NGOs, accountability and legitimacy, neutrality in conflict, and the possible contribution of NGOs to the weakening of states.

1.6.1 Limits and gaps in the practice of peace NGOs

It has become clear by now that although NGOs usually mean well and often are able to report local-level achievements such as numbers of community mediators trained, many organisations do not explicitly consider how their programmes and achievements contribute to progress towards the bigger picture: the ultimate aims of ending violence and building lasting peace or about how the projects of a single organisation complement those of other institutions (including, for example, state actors). As a result, some observers feel that “[a]ll of the good peace work being done should be adding up to more than it is. The potential of these multiple efforts is not fully realized. Practitioners know that, so long as people continue to suffer the consequences of unresolved conflicts, there is urgency for everyone to do better.” (Andersen and Olsen 2003: 10) One of the strategies for realising the joint potential of organisations is to have contact and relationships with others in order to think together about the division of labour. Many groups recognise this, which explains why networking is such a popular strategy among peacebuilders. However, as we will see further on in this book, networking in a context of conflict is not always easy, and people are still looking for the best ways to interact in a network.

Asked about the limits of NGO work and the gaps in their activities, staff members sometimes find it disheartening for them to realise that NGOs are only small players who can make only small differences. Civil society peacebuilders often wish they could do more, but they feel dwarfed by the actions of major political players within as well as outside the country in which they work. A Bangsamoro organisation in Mindanao might for years be working incrementally for the recognition of Moro rights when suddenly the 'War on Terror' takes off and they are branded as semi-terrorists. A Cambodian NGO could be advocating for the establishment of a fair trial for Khmer Rouge leaders that includes a truth and reconciliation component for lower cadres, until it finds out that the government has negotiated a compromise with the UN establishing a tribunal that does not meet these requirements.

Another limitation of the peace work of NGOs relates to the difficult concept of effectiveness. Naturally, people like to know whether their interventions are having the intended effect; in other words, whether they contribute to overall peace. NGOs are also under pressure from donor agencies to show the impact (another difficult concept) of their work. The problem is that peace is difficult to measure. And even if progress towards peace can be discerned, then it is usually impossible to determine whether this was due entirely, or at least in part, to a particular intervention or whether other factors and activities have played a role. As will be elaborated further in chapter five, all peace NGOs struggle with these issues and are trying to find innovative ways to assess the contribution of their programmes to peace in the area in which they work.

Two gaps in peacebuilding practice have been found the aforementioned Reflecting on Peace Practice project. First of all, peace NGOs have a bias toward people that are easy to reach. For example, many programmes focus on women and children because these are deemed non-political and are often willing to cooperate. These groups are often non-belligerents. Although working with them certainly has a lot of value, targeting the (potential) war makers is also important, and this is done less. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 50) Another bias that the Reflecting on Peace Practice project identified is one "toward doing good versus stopping bad". Most organisations see their work as "building the positive preconditions for peace". But they tend not to address the systems or individuals that "promote or perpetuate war", even though it would appear that doing so is a precondition for building positive peace. Because of this lack of regard for the negative characteristics of conflict-torn countries, organisations' objectives may be unrealistic: "the benchmarks for such positive-focused peace practice

are highly idealized conditions of social harmony that do not exist even in most countries that are at peace!” (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 50-51)

This observation is related to Anderson and Olsen’s first one about non-belligerents as NGOs’ main target groups. Again, the organisations visited in the framework of this study suggest that the situation is not as one-sided as Anderson and Olsen describe it. In part, their observed bias towards “doing good” is related to the earlier described issue that the missions and visions of organisations tend to be abstract and idealised and the links with their actual activities are not everywhere so well elaborated. These idealistic visions may explain the disregard for the actual negative characteristics of conflict countries that Anderson and Olsen mention.

A limit to the debate is that the project largely leaves out the possibility that not all activities fall in the realm of NGOs. Just because a particular area of work is not done by NGOs does not mean that it is not done at all. Other actors, such as states or international organisations, may be better placed to carry them out. Of course, the need to think more explicitly about such divisions of labour and be less random in the determination of strategy remains. This relates back to the lack of thinking on the place of strategies vis-à-vis the larger aims of building peaceful societies. However, local NGOs face various constraints in doing such thinking. The limitations described in this paragraph with regard to impact assessment, reflection, and longer term action all play a role, as do the larger issues of the civil society policies of donors. The next section raises the question of how these policies contribute to a reduced political role for NGOs.

1.6.2 Reduced political role

NGOs have been facing an increasing need for resources. Competition for funds becomes stronger because of the internationalisation of the field, in which NGOs based in one place compete with others all over the world, and because of the rapid growth of the number of NGOs and other agents operating in the market, such as consulting firms. Another development has been that donor money is increasingly channelled through NGOs rather than through governments in developing countries. In 2004 24.6 per cent of Dutch development aid was channelled through NGOs. Although the Dutch spending of aid via NGOs is exceptionally high, other governments have also developed co-financing schemes in which large NNGOs become vehicles for spending donor money in

cooperation with partner NGOs in the South. This has changed the position of NGOs vis-à-vis the state.

As a result of both developments, NGOs have become increasingly dependent on state funds. According to some²⁰, this has brought them too close to the governments they used to check and criticise. Government funding has come with increased conditionality, forcing NGOs to work in particular countries and demanding an increased focus on poverty reduction – at the expense of other social change goals (Mitlin et al. 2005: 2). NGOs have grown more distant from social movements as they became closer to government agencies as a result of their increased dependence on official subsidies. Thus, from organisations working for social change NGOs increasingly become project deliverers for donors. As a result NGOs may become less pronounced and more similar to one another. Goodhand found from a comparative study of NGO activities in conflict areas that “NGOs, because of their dependence on official funding, were reluctant or unable to lobby for changes in donor policies and practices.” (Goodhand 2006: 145)

As discussed in 1.1, civil society support programmes do not promote an independent and political role for civil society in democratisation or peacebuilding, but tend to be more technocratic and in support of a particular model of social organisation – the professional NGO. In a context of conflict this can be an issue. Conflict is after all inherently political. Sustainable peacebuilding usually requires the transformation of social relations and power structures and the ‘empowerment’ of marginalised groups. Peacebuilding is therefore political in nature - at least when it comes to addressing the larger, structural issues preventing peace. However, few of the NGOs encountered actually work on such more structural issues – political oppression, unaccountable governance, and national and international inequality. This is because political work is sensitive, not only domestically but also with regard to the policies of international supporters.

Domestic obstacles are clearly seen in Central Asia where political authoritarianism is a major issue and NGOs emphasise the importance of maintaining friendly relations with governments to avoid being shut down. In most cases, this means that NGOs can only focus on the more technical, micro-level activities and not on macro-level, political ones. Such difficulties could, and sometimes are, be addressed by NGOs creating international coalitions with civil society actors elsewhere,

²⁰ Such as Edwards and Hulme 1996, Krieger 2004, Mawdsley et al. 2002, and Mitlin et al. 2005.

which may pressure their own governments to speak out or intervene. This can be an important role of civil society networks, and some indeed do try to perform such a function²¹. However, this is not facilitated by the international issues described in this section that reduce the political role of NGOs. Donors often require CSOs to be neutral and unpolitical to be financed (Pishchikova 2006). There is some basis for this, particularly in conflict contexts, as some CSOs are tied to specific conflict parties or interest groups and do not always work in the best interest of peace as a whole (see 1.6.4 below). So indiscriminately supporting CSOs just because they are locally grounded is not a good option. International civil society support is grounded in values, and should be. But this does not preclude a recognition that peacebuilding may entail change in the balance of power, or that critical, autonomous civil society groups are an important part of democracy.

Although development is not an unpolitical project (and this is now increasingly recognised²²), it may be argued that peacebuilding (like the related fields of human rights and democratisation) is even more political. However, much of the work of the organisations visited is supported through the regular development funding and policy chain. There are exceptions; in particular NNGOs focusing exclusively on peacebuilding tend to emphasise more of a political role for their Southern partners. However, even these organisations are increasingly dependent on state funds.

1.6.3 Legitimacy

An important question to ask regarding NGOs is who they represent. Unlike democratic governments, the leaders of NGOs have not been elected. So how legitimate are they? Usually peace NGOs claim to work on behalf of the communities whose conditions they aim to improve. But in practice they account for their actions not to these communities, but to their donor agencies in the North. It is those agencies that demand and obtain evidence of efficient and effective action, not the intended beneficiaries of projects. Another aspect of the legitimacy of NGOs is the way they are governed internally. Not all NGOs are necessarily democratically governed. “[H]ailed as the exemplars of grassroots democracy in action, many NGOs are, in fact, decidedly undemocratic and unaccountable to the people they claim to represent”. (Simmons 1998, cited in Pishchikova 2006: 46)

²¹ For example, the careful activities of the Action Asia network with local partners in Burma.

²² See for example Pronk 2007.

NGOs are becoming increasingly aware of this issue as they try to involve staff more in policy-making and to develop participatory planning and evaluation methods together with the people for whom they are supposed to work. However, there are also NGOs whose reality is different from the picture they are trying to paint and who really serve mainly their own organisational survival. It is not surprising that in conflict and postconflict situations, in which often large amounts of donor money are available, some organisations are founded primarily in order to gain access to these funds. For some, it is a way of generating an income in very difficult economic conditions. Needless to say, such organisations usually do not primarily act on behalf of those they claim to represent.²³ The trouble is that for external actors it can be difficult to find out whether this is the case.

A more fundamental aspect of this issue is the lack of local constituency of NGOs created with outside money (see 1.1). Writing about Ukraine, Pishchikova states that “the majority of foreign-supported NGOs are almost unanimously accused of lacking a grassroots constituency; they also fail to establish and maintain cooperative relations with other civic groups.” She adds that “[s]cholars increasingly talk about the “ghettoized” position of NGOs in the former Soviet Union in the sense that they are closer to their donors and other transnational partners than to their government or society”. (Pishchikova 2006: 80-81) The scope and approach of my study, which has taken place mainly using the perspective of local NGO staff, make it difficult to come up with meaningful conclusions regarding the constituencies of their organisations in the countries visited. However, it is good to keep the issue in the back of our minds and I will return to it in chapter four and beyond. In any case, it is important to realise that, particularly in conflict settings, “being representative of a certain constituency and sustainable still does not directly translate into democratic effects. It is therefore important to neither demonize the externally supported initiatives nor romanticize the local ones regardless of their substance.” (Pishchikova 2006: 81)

Questions of legitimacy are also tied to the issue of effectiveness mentioned under 1.4.3. If NGOs can prove that their activities have a positive impact on the situation of their intended beneficiaries and contribute to the overall aims of ending violence and building peace,

²³ Some organisations are even accused of having bribed their way through the government’s accreditation process for NGOs (source: Interview with director of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006).

then they legitimise themselves in that way. The quest for better methods of assessing impact is thus relevant from the perspective not only of accountability toward donor agencies but also of legitimacy in the eyes of staff, communities, governments, and other organisations. And, as is discussed in chapter five, it is also highly relevant from the perspective of learning and improvement of work.

1.6.4 Neutrality in conflict

Local NGOs are part of the society in which they live and work. As a result, they are also a part of the conflict situation. Notwithstanding their aims of building peace, they may be affiliated more closely with one conflict group than with others. Armed groups “are usually supported by elements of civil society that champion the cause and view armed struggle as legitimate” (Barnes 2006: 21). In the worst case, a peacebuilding NGO may

“simultaneously be a vehicle for the political ambitions of its leaders and fundraisers for peace may in reality raise funds for warfare. The most notorious example is Rwanda, where despite its extremely high civil society density, genocide occurred partly because civil society actors turned out to have stronger loyalties to their government and ethnicity than to their principles [...]. Rwanda stands out as the ultimate nightmare of a naïve support of civil society, but multiple realities of organisations always exist and are usually more innocent, as in the case of service NGOs whose informal objective is to generate job security for their staff.” (Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen 2005: 556)

In any case, “[n]o matter how well-meaning organisations may be, in environments where mistrust and rumours abound, they are highly liable to attract the reputation of being partisan, rendering them ineffective as a consequence.” (Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen 2005: 557) A Sudanese organisation whose headquarters I visited in Nairobi for example mentioned being regularly accused of aligning with the South Sudanese rebel movement²⁴, while an NGO network visited in Mindanao is seen by some as aligned too closely to terrorists²⁵.

Aside from the embeddedness of NGOs in conflict structures, their projects may have unintended impact on a conflict as well. Even ‘technical’ development projects can contribute to conflict or peace. Decisions on what local staff to hire and which areas to target risk

²⁴ Interview with staff member of a Sudanese NGO. Nairobi, Kenya, 28 November 2005.

²⁵ Interview with Secretary General of a Mindanawan NGO consortium. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.

deepening cleavages by supporting one conflict group over another. Food or materials may inadvertently end up in the hands of fighting parties. Armed personnel hired to safeguard staff travelling to dangerous zones could be running warlord-related protection rackets. Even peace dialogues run the risk of branding participants as belonging to one conflict group when in reality their identities may be much more complex.

1.6.5 Weakening states

One reason why donor money is increasingly channelled through NGOs rather than through governments in developing countries is that many of these countries are plagued by weak or bad governance. Corruption is often high, so donor agencies cannot be sure whether their money will end up in someone's Swiss bank account. However, channelling funds through the above-described chain of Northern and Southern NGOs risks weakening these states even further. After all, what these NGOs do is to set up structures of service provision in fields such as health care and education that are parallel to government ministries. This competing structure weakens rather than strengthens such ministries.

The parallel structures of NGOs are funded not by tax income but by Northern donors, which makes them highly aid dependent. In addition, the local branches of NNGOs tend to offer high salaries and draw talented personnel away from government agencies, thus further weakening these. What does this mean for local NGOs in developing countries? How can they prevent inadvertently contributing to weakening their governments? Again we are confronted with the importance of coordination with other actors, in this case governments. NGO-government coordination and cooperation would avoid the creation of parallel structures and help build the capacity of government agencies. However, the extent to which this is possible depends on the type of government an NGO is dealing with. Oppressive governments or governments that are a party to conflict may be better served by more oppositional NGO strategies.

1.6.6 Is it really that bad? On constraints and results

The above summary of gaps in, limits of, and discussions about the work of NGOs may leave some readers with little hope for anything positive to arise out of their work. The problems and limitations that NGO peacebuilders encounter are partly integral to their work, which

after all is done in the midst or aftermath of hugely destructive conflict. Weak or unresponsive governments are often a feature of such conflict and are but one of the countervailing forces that are largely beyond the control of NGOs. All this sometimes makes observers wonder why NGOs continue to work almost against all odds. The question may be raised whether the predominant focus of local peace NGOs on micro-level, relatively uncontroversial issues and not on larger, structural issues means that their activities amount to ‘mopping the floor while the tap is still open’, as a Dutch expression puts it. Is there any use in doing micro-level peace work if larger structures continue to promote conflict?

I would argue that there is. Although more attention for political issues is called for, local peace work has an integral value and may help build a ‘peace constituency’ from the bottom up. Individual stories about small, local-level changes give hope about the work of peace NGOs. Civil ceasefire monitoring in Mindanao, the training and employment of community mediators in Kenya, Liberian women’s sit-in protests for the resignation of president Taylor, and the establishment of a West Africa Network for Peacebuilding liaison office at the regional organisation ECOWAS are just some examples of positive results of local NGOs’ peace work. The European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) has published two books filled with such positive stories (ECCP 1999; Van Tongeren et al. 2005).

The trouble with such achievements is that they are often difficult to measure. Peacebuilding is a long-term process engendering gradual changes in attitudes, perceptions and relationships. To a degree this is something that external parties – donor agencies, Northern and Southern governments, international organisations – may just have to accept. Simply trusting local organisations to do the right thing without always being able to show concrete results appears to be the way to go in some cases. However, this is not the whole story. Local organisations do need to think better about ways to show impact. After all, only if they do so will they be able to elaborate the links between their activities and the bigger picture of peace. I will return to the issue of impact assessment in more detail in chapter five.

In many of the countries visited the larger political issues are at least to some extent being addressed by state actors and UN missions. The activities of NGOs in such contexts may be seen as complementing this kind of work. However, two issues remain in such situations. First, more explicit thinking about *how* the activities of NGOs complement those of other actors would be desirable. Second, an independent civil society

playing a role in the political arena remains important with an eye on the longer term sustainability of peace and democracy.

1.7 Concluding remarks

Chapter one has sketched the context in which to place the discussion that will follow. It is an unstable and rapidly changing context of which observers are struggling to make sense. It is also a context that differs from one country, or even village, to another. That said, as we have seen, there are patterns to be discerned in the aims of NGOs and the ways they describe their activities when it comes to peacebuilding. A global community of peacebuilders exists to the extent that similar concepts and methodologies are used in different parts of the world.

What do the issues discussed in this chapter mean for *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 I put it in the research question posed at the start of the book? More precisely, what can be said at this point in response to the first sub-question - what is the role and place of local NGOs in contemporary peacebuilding processes, and what does their position in the wider field of actors and processes mean for the knowledge on which they base their work and the learning they engage in?

Two main points emerge from this chapter in relation to this question. First, there is a need for local peace NGOs to make space for reflection, analysis, and learning. There are several reasons for this:

- Because of their size and organisation, NGOs have the potential to be more flexible, adaptive and innovative than other actors. Such flexibility could be of high significance in fluid conflict-affected situations.
- An increased ability to do research in communities about the needs existing there would increase the legitimacy of local NGOs and make projects more locally relevant and grounded. What we have not yet looked at is what research is done at present, and by whom, and what the knowledge and discourse is that the potential knowledge output of local NGOs has to compete with. Chapter two will examine these issues. In addition, the case study in chapter eight looks at an initiative that aims to strengthen both the research and learning capacity

of local peace NGOs and their contribution to the wider intellectual field.

- NGOs need to know more about the impact of, and linkages between, activities. This requires time and space for research of the context, analysis of the results of one's own projects, and interaction with other actors – NGOs as well as others – about the way in which different activities contribute to the larger aim of peace. Such interaction is also important in order to prevent duplication of activities and, in the case of coordination and cooperation with government agencies, to prevent contributing to state weakness.

Second, the knowledge processes of local NGOs are complicated by the constraints they face due to the policy and funding chain in which they are embedded. These constraints take several forms:

- Even if local NGOs are able to research the needs of the communities in which they work, they cannot independently determine their operating priorities. International agencies that finance their activities come with their own priorities for action, making local organisations more implementers of international policy than independent actors. Further on in this book, particularly in chapter two and in Part Two, we will look at the knowledge side of this story. In other words, what knowledge and discourse informs the priorities that are set in this way, and how is it different from local NGOs' own knowledge?
- As will be discussed in more detail later on, short-term project funding and an emphasis on activities with direct results leave little room for reflection, research, and exchange. This is compounded by the context in which peace NGOs work, which calls for direct, concrete action and gives staff members a high sense of urgency. We have now only touched upon these issues, which are worth exploring further. This will be done in the next chapters.

Chapter 2. Recipes for peace?

Peacebuilding knowledge

Mobilising indigenous knowledge, learning from practitioner experience, and drawing on academic research are activities that have the potential of making peacebuilding more successful. In the words of Kofi Annan, “we realise more and more that knowledge is what makes the difference: knowledge in the hands of those who need it, and of those who can make best use of it” (cited in Clarke and Squire 2005: 110). Although knowledge is less tangible than material resources, it has an impact on developments by shaping policy and practice. As Keynes wrote,

“[t]he ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believed themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.” (Keynes 1957: 383-384)

The fact that knowledge is itself a resource receives increasing attention in the development field.²⁶ Following developments in the private sector, ‘knowledge management’, ‘learning’ and ‘networking’ are the new buzzwords in the world of development organisations.

“[E]conomic improvement is largely a result of the application of knowledge in productive activities and the associated adjustment in social institutions. [E]conomic growth [can be attributed to] interactive learning involving government, industry, academia, and civil society. It focuses on the importance of learning or continuous improvement in the knowledge base and institutional arrangements for development.” (Juma and Lee 2005: 15)

This chapter conceptualises knowledge and links it to the practice of NGOs working in the peacebuilding field. In doing so, it looks at the question: what forms does knowledge of peace and conflict take? In other words, based on what ideas do peacebuilding organisations work, and where do they get these ideas? The chapter looks at different types of knowledge that can be distinguished, the knowledge demand (and supply) of local civil society peacebuilders, and the content and sources of available peacebuilding knowledge. Drawing on relevant literature,

²⁶ See for example World Bank Operations Evaluation Department 2003 and RAWOO 2005.

section 2.1 distinguishes between different types of knowledge: tacit, explicit and implicit knowledge, and academic and practitioner knowledge. 2.2 links this to peacebuilding, offering some reflections about what conflict and peace knowledge mean. Next, in 2.3, different sources of peacebuilding knowledge are discussed: first, the academia and second, the dichotomy of external versus indigenous knowledge. 2.4 places that dichotomy in the context of traditional and modern knowledge systems. 2.5 offers some reflections about the extent to which knowledge is context-specific (something with implications for knowledge sharing), and finally, 2.6 gives an overview of the implications of all this for the content and use of peacebuilding knowledge.

2.1 Types of knowledge

What kind of knowledge are we talking about in this study? What characterises knowledge of peace and development processes? ‘Knowledge’ is a broad concept that is used in many different ways. It includes ‘information’ but goes beyond that concept: it also includes the meaning that is allocated to information. Knowledge is subjective: ‘I know what a terrible person you are’. Unlike information, knowledge can also be an experience or skill: ‘I know the best way to do this’. There are different types of knowledge. Knowledge can be available in written form (*explicit*) or locked inside someone’s head (*tacit*). It can be theoretical (*academic*) or based on *practical* experience. This section pays attention to different types of knowledge and discusses their implications for learning and knowledge exchange processes.

2.1.1 ‘If only we knew what we know’²⁷: Explicit, tacit and implicit knowledge

A distinction is often made between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge, where explicit knowledge can be processed in a way that makes it accessible to others and tacit knowledge cannot, or less easily. Explicit knowledge can be codified or written down. It may consist of anything from the formal procedure for application to a European Union fund to the way a copy machine works. As it can be recorded, it may be passed onto others who may add it to their own body of knowledge. The challenges concerning explicit knowledge relate to codification and recording processes (processing knowledge in such a way that it is of the

²⁷ Title of a book by O’Dell et al. (1998)

most use to others) as well as dissemination (ensuring that knowledge reaches the people who might need it). The two facets are interrelated: in order to be able to reach the intended recipient, the knowledge has to be recorded in such a way as to make it attractive and accessible to this recipient.

The term tacit knowledge refers to knowledge based on a person's unique experience: knowing how to do something. In the field of peacebuilding, this may be experience-based knowledge of what makes a community dialogue run well. According to some, tacit knowledge can be shared through communication. It may be possible to codify or write down part of it, for example in a manual or report, thus turning it into explicit knowledge. But there are also components of tacit knowledge that cannot be exchanged in written form. The intricacies of interacting with various community members and of sensing the difficulties they may have can never be recorded entirely. It may be possible to transfer such knowledge through face-to-face interaction: during a discussion at a training session, or when colleagues accompany one another during a community dialogue project.

This type of knowledge is like knowing how to ride a bicycle. Although it might be possible to write down some principles, it is only through direct interaction that the skill can be taught. Another important way of transferring tacit knowledge is through personal observation or shared experience. Thus, accompanying an experienced colleague during a field visit can be a powerful way of learning (Smit 2006: 12). Such interaction is also important because often the person possessing tacit knowledge does not realise that he has it at all, or does not recognise it as a valuable commodity for others because it seems natural to him. A granddaughter may not know there is anything special about the way she speaks to her grandmother who suffers from Alzheimer's - until someone points out to her that she has unconsciously developed a skill that others may benefit from.

There are also forms of tacit knowledge that cannot be transferred at all because they are too closely related to their possessor's unique set of experiences and perspectives. Told to another person, this knowledge does not make sense. (Polanyi, cited in Sauquet 2004: 377) This draws attention to the fact that knowledge is subjective and the words allocated to a particular piece of knowledge may mean different things to different people. People may have diverging associations and allocate different meanings when they hear the label 'a difficult person', based on their own past experiences. To transfer knowledge from one person to another often requires translation and explanation; when knowledge transfer

crosses borders of language and culture, the translation process becomes even more complex. Something that can be helpful in this regard is a third category of knowledge: implicit knowledge.

Implicit knowledge refers to knowing what is socially and culturally appropriate in a given circumstance. “[I]t is knowledge of shared beliefs, values and expectations (e.g. knowing that it is inappropriate to undermine colleagues in public)” (Ramalingham 2005: 4). Such implicit knowledge is particularly relevant to our field of analysis because it represents implicit codes of behaviour that are often not universal but culturally specific – whether to an organisational culture or a national or regional one. In that sense, implicit knowledge represents the cultural aspect of interactions and learning processes and as such it will be referred to in various places of this book²⁸. An NGO staff member experienced in running projects in a particular community may have developed personal relations and silent habits of interaction with local people, which a colleague could never simply copy.

We have seen that tacit knowledge consists of both translatable and untranslatable kinds of knowledge. It is on the first kind that I will focus, as translatable knowledge can be meaningfully shared with others and be the starting point of learning processes. Untranslatable tacit knowledge does not really constitute a challenge for us because there is no way for us to access it, nor is it likely to have any value in a different context from the one in which it originates. Translatable tacit knowledge, on the other hand, presents various challenges, the most obvious one being the translation process itself. How can we codify and record tacit knowledge in such a way that it becomes useful to others? And if it cannot be codified and recorded, how can we put people in touch with each other so that the knowledge can be transferred directly? If a person does not realise that she possesses valuable knowledge, the only way for it to come to the surface is through interaction with people who might need it. But how can others know that this person possesses knowledge of value to them? Enabling the ‘right’ people to get together presents a formidable challenge and it is impossible to access and mobilise all valuable tacit knowledge, even if it is translatable. Some types of tacit knowledge may be of such a specialised character that it is important mainly for people to know where it is located, in case they need to draw on this knowledge and obtain specialist advice. This type of knowledge takes the form of ‘I know that you know more about x’.

²⁸ Particularly in 2.4, 4.4, 4.5, 5.6.6 and 8.4.4

The following figure helps to categorise the different kinds of tacit knowledge. The knowledge in the top left hand box is already shared, common knowledge. It is also possible that it has not yet been shared but at least I as well as others know that I have it and therefore everyone knows where it can be found in case it is needed. The knowledge in the lower right hand box cannot be shared, because I don't know that I possess it – and neither do others. If, by chance and through an interaction between myself and the others, we find out that I know something of value, we move out of this 'black' box and into the top left hand corner. The box in the lower left hand corner contains knowledge that I know I possess, while others don't realise this. I might identify people who could benefit from my knowledge and offer it to them, in which case the knowledge moves to top left hand box. Finally, although I am unaware of the existence or relevance of my knowledge inside the box on the top right hand side of the figure, others recognise it and may point it out to me if they need it. In that case, it again moves to the top left hand side.

Figure 2.1: Recognising tacit knowledge

This leads to the following possibilities and questions with regard to the mobilisation and exchange of tacit knowledge:

- Regarding the two movements shown by black arrows in the figure, from top right to top left and from bottom left to top left: how can we transfer it in a meaningful way? What is the best way to get in touch with people who might have knowledge that I want, and what is the best way to get in touch with someone who might benefit from my knowledge?
- Concerning the movement shown by the dashed arrow, from bottom right to top left: how can we create the optimal circumstances for interactions that enable people to discover, and delve into, previously unknown knowledge resources?

2.1.2 'Nothing more practical than a good theory'. Academic versus practitioner knowledge

Another distinction is often made between academic and practitioner knowledge. Drawing on Gibbons (1994), De la Rive Box distinguishes between different modes of knowledge creation. The first mode corresponds with what is called academic knowledge generation. It takes place in the traditional context of the scientific profession, along disciplinary lines. The setting is a homogeneous academic community, with a hierarchical structure and its own specific interests. (De la Rive Box 2001) This community is accountable largely to itself, setting the standards of 'sound scientific practice.' Science engages itself with drawing together data from different contexts into a body of generalised knowledge. In most cases its starting point is concrete, context-specific information. Taking different contextual factors into account, and comparing the information with data from other contexts, lead to knowledge that is considered universally applicable and scientifically valid. A next and difficult step is the re-application of this knowledge in other specific contexts. Combining academic knowledge with concrete experiences leads to a modification of this knowledge, and the process starts again. (Rip 2001: 14).

The generalisation of knowledge in an academic context is accompanied by the use of a particular language shared by scientists in an academic discipline. Particular concepts are used to order the information and make it understandable for a broader academic public. This distinctive language enables results from different production sites to be compared and coordinated. At the same time it makes generalised scientific knowledge abstract in the eyes of practitioners, who have difficulty applying it in practice. Practitioners often view academics as people occupying an 'ivory tower' in which more attention is paid to scientific reputation than to the practical applicability of research findings. To an extent, this view is probably correct. The measure of success for scientists is often determined not by the practical application of the knowledge they generate but by peer reviews. Competence and performance standards are set by colleagues. The distinctive language of academic disciplines reduces lay participation in assessment of contributions. In other words, a scientific field has 'a standardised skills and symbols system which monopolises the communication of results and the means of obtaining reputations' (Whitley 1984: 32).

According to De la Rive Box, there is a second mode of knowledge creation that takes place in a context of application. It often involves a trans-disciplinary approach by practitioners from various backgrounds.

It starts when there is a broad community of people interested in solving a problem. Accountability is not to the academic community, but to the people affected by the problem to be solved. Thus, this second mode of knowledge generation is characterised by social rather than academic accountability, and by user review rather than peer review. Not global models but local problems are the starting point for this kind of knowledge creation. (De la Rive Box 2001) Needs assessments and evaluations carried out by peacebuilding organisations or their donors are examples of this ‘mode two’ knowledge creation. However, such practitioner-generated knowledge, recorded in reports or existing in the form of tacit knowledge, is often viewed by academics as insufficiently valid in scientific terms because it does not comply with scientific standards of knowledge creation. Evaluations and lessons learned reports often do not take into account contextual factors and comparisons with other cases in the way that academic research does, and are therefore considered less universally applicable.

All scientific knowledge in some way has its basis in practice. It can also be the basis for new practice: “there is nothing more practical than a good theory”.²⁹ Most practitioners consciously or unconsciously apply insights that originated in academia. For example, the outcome document of a seminar of practitioners on ‘learning for social change’ notes that academic knowledge is helpful because “it lends itself to building a ‘big picture’ of historical change and can offer a great range of alternative understandings about why and how societal change happens” (Taylor et al. 2006: 17). However, the processes linking the academic and practitioner worlds of knowledge generation are hampered by the gap that exists between them. It is widely agreed that changes and mechanisms are needed in order to bridge this gap. Knowledge networks may be one such mechanism. Indeed, in addition to the two modes of knowledge creation mentioned, De la Rive Box identifies knowledge networks as a third mode, a middle ground. ‘Mode three’ knowledge creation stresses the horizontal exchange of information. It emphasises the complementarity between the academic- and practitioner-led approaches and the exchange among them in dynamic knowledge networks. (De la Rive Box 2001) This study takes up networks as a way of knowledge exchange and joint knowledge generation, specifically in chapters six and seven.

²⁹ This quotation is variously attributed to Kurt Lewin, Ludwig Boltzmann, James C. Maxwell, and Rudie van Lier.

2.2 Knowledge, conflict and peace

2.2.1 Types of knowledge applied

The previous section distinguished between several types of knowledge. One distinction was between tacit, explicit and implicit knowledge, another between academic and practitioner knowledge. What meaning do these types of knowledge have in the peacebuilding field? Tacit knowledge of conflict and peacebuilding includes the practical experience of peace workers with various methods, people, and institutions. Through their work they have developed a feeling for what works and what does not that is often not written down in any explicit way. Through conversations and other forms of direct exchange, this knowledge may become available to others, who might be able to use it in their own work. Some of this tacit knowledge is made explicit in the process of transferring it. Explicit knowledge takes the form of academic publications, project reports, and databases containing information about partner organisations and projects.

Implicit knowledge, understood as social and cultural norms, plays an important role in this field that is characterised by cross-cultural interactions³⁰. These interactions are often characterised by misunderstandings and confusion, caused by cultural differences and diverging social norms. Implicit knowledge is also of significance in carrying out peace projects in local communities, where building on local traditions and norms can yield better results than merely introducing pre-established ideas and methodologies. The interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge raises the importance of a two-way exchange, which as we will see in chapter five is emphasised by Southern peacebuilders. Such an exchange is needed because explicit knowledge needs to be linked to the tacit knowledge of the recipient in order to have meaning – and, as we have seen, tacit knowledge is only transferred through direct interaction. Implicit knowledge is related to the discussion of different knowledge systems in section 2.4. However, as we will see there, the issue of different ‘knowledges’ that is discussed there goes deeper than implicit norms alone and applies to all types of knowledge. The issue of academic versus practitioner knowledge is essentially about knowledge sources. In the field of development and peacebuilding a particularly important distinction in that regard is that between indigenous and external knowledge, to which I return further on in this chapter.

³⁰ for example between staff of international and local organisations

2.2.2 Knowledge of conflict and knowledge for peace

In order to do peacebuilding work, knowledge of conflict is required. This may include general knowledge of theories and research findings with regard to conflict causes and dynamics, such as might be taught in training programmes or academic conflict studies courses. Statistical studies about correlations between conflict and factors such as poverty, the presence of natural resources, and ethnic diversity give an idea of where to look when trying to explain a particular conflict. Ideas about conflict stages and steps in a process of escalation may help an organisation decide when and where to intervene. Theory with regard to the roles of various actors in causing and prolonging the conflict may offer NGOs insights about which groups or individuals to engage with in order to meet particular goals. However, knowledge of a conflict is never neutral. The history and characteristics of a conflict are always contested. Knowledge is part of conflict: “competition over ‘the right to truth’ is an inherent part of war” (Lammers 2006: 104). Conflicts are characterised by conflicting visions of past and future. Information about the conflict is never external or objective to people’s experiences. Lammers writes that for refugees in Kampala the

“political context is anything but an abstract, external given. [...] [They] not only *find* themselves in a political field, but [...] they become part of it, and ultimately contribute to constructing it. In Kampala, where people’s minds were jammed with memories of wartime violence, suspicion and fear were their daily companions. [It] is hard to overestimate how intricately sensitive everything – every appearance, every comment, every visit – is in such a situation. This reality raises questions about truth and the level of objectivity in refugees’ testimonies.” (Lammers 2006: 102, emphasis in original).

In a conflict most people identify to a greater or lesser extent with one of the sides, leading to bias. In addition, people have a need to justify the role they have played or are playing, and the information they give is influenced by that need. People may have a personal or political interest in hiding or exaggerating facts. As a further complication, trauma also tends to warp people’s memories and perceptions. Even what appear to be neutral facts – the numbers of people killed or the size of the area controlled by a rebel group – are in fact stakes in a political struggle. As data are difficult to obtain in a context of instability and violence, different statistics usually circulate, and estimates given often depend on the political programme of those providing them. After a battle has been fought, the two sides almost invariably give widely differing estimations of the number of victims.

Even when people agree about the raw data, discussions arise about how to interpret them. In Central Asia, for example, national politicians strive to frame violence as radical Islamist or terrorist activity, while others call it a legitimate struggle over access to land and decision-making. A similar dynamic is visible *within* conflict countries. Local or private conflicts that may be unrelated to the wider conflict are often cast in the language of that conflict in order to gain support. As a result, looking at macro-level causes and motivations alone will not explain the level and nature of violence used at the local level: “first, actions ‘on the ground’ often seem more related to local or private issues than to the war’s driving (or ‘master’) cleavage; second, individual and local actors take advantage of the war to settle local or private conflicts often bearing little or no relation to the causes of the war or the goals of the belligerents.” (Kalyvas 2003: 475-476)

Peacebuilding activities are designed to limit manipulations of information and limit the divergence of interpretations. Working together on a common ‘truth’ about the conflict is seen as an important step towards peaceful coexistence. Truth and reconciliation commissions are increasingly popular forms of doing this after a conflict. They aim to start a national discussion about what happened, provide accountability on the part of those involved in the violence, and contribute to reconciliation. People also share experiences and try to make sense of them in other shared venues: newspapers, public squares, history books. Part of the effort to establish some kind of ‘truth’ is the collection of data: “[t]he details of history, the careful mining of all resources – from letters to computer files to court records to artefacts and newspapers – provide a focus for questions and both open the imagination to possibilities and deny it the freedom to lie against the facts” (Culbertson and Pouligny 2006: 8). After the collection of data comes the discussion about how to interpret it. Knowledge of conflict is not merely a matter of statistics or events. In large part it is about giving meaning to events. People want to know: ‘how could this happen?’ Blaming is often a part of that. Conflict is at least partly about people’s perceptions of one another. When it comes to the interpretation of facts, the redevelopment of history curricula is often an important but highly contested activity in the postconflict phase. Civil society initiatives try to stimulate dialogue around parties’ diverging interpretations of history.

Having discussed the characteristics of conflict knowledge, we may now raise the question, what is *peace* knowledge? One way to look at peace knowledge is as individual and collective visions of a peaceful future; in other words, of the goal of peacebuilding and social change. This is closely tied to knowledge of what happened during the conflict, and

relates at least in part to backward-looking processes of justice, reconciliation, truth-telling, and confession. Knowing what peace entails requires knowing the individual, social and cultural realities that, if not taken into account, hamper efforts at the development of markets, governance, and civil society. This requires dialogue. (Culbertson and Pouligny 2006: 2-3) Arriving at joint visions of peace is important and may be seen as a next step after truth commission-type processes have been completed. However, this step has not received much attention up to now. As we saw in chapter one, even NGOs whose daily job it is to work for peace often lack an integrated vision of the kind of situation they are aiming to contribute to.

A final aspect to emphasise in relation to knowledge and peacebuilding is that increasing one's knowledge can also contribute to peace more directly by changing perceptions and attitudes, countering misinformation, and empowering people through knowledge. Knowledge, particularly through formal education, also gives people more opportunities for advancement and provides access to ways of income other than fighting or other war-related activities. In fact, one study shows that each year of education reduces the risk of conflict by around twenty per cent (Collier et al. 2001, cited in Lopes and Theisohn 2003: 49).

2.3 Sources of peacebuilding knowledge

This section examines what the literature has to say about sources of knowledge for peacebuilders. First, it looks at developments and discussions regarding the academic discipline of peace and conflict studies and its relationship to the practice. Next, it discusses the relationship between indigenous and external knowledge.

2.3.1 Peace and conflict studies as an academic field

This section briefly sketches the way the field of peace and conflict studies has evolved until today, before moving on to look at its relationship with practice. Although developments in other disciplines preceded it³¹, peace studies as a more or less coherent academic field is

³¹ Developments in the 1930s and 1940s in the field of peace and conflict studies include work by Sorokin, Richardson and Wright in the interwar years which showed that rigorous scientific methodology could be applied to the causes of war, and by implication, the conditions of peace. Their efforts were referred to as polemology. In the same period there were also developments in psychology, politics and international relations, and new research into organisational behaviour and

considered to have come out of the threat of atomic destruction at the end of the Second World War. Conflict resolution and the prevention of war became central to the research agenda of many, including Kenneth Boulding and his group at the University of Michigan, who founded the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* in 1957 (Miall et al. 1999: 42-3). Their main concern was the prevention of large-scale nuclear war between states. In the 1960s, researchers recognised the importance of smaller-scale armed conflicts as well, and the study of conflict and peace broadened to include intra-state conflicts. While the early editions of the *Journal of Peace Research*, founded by Johan Galtung, focus mainly on topics relating to disarmament and public opinion on the Cold War, soon civil war and revolution and their causes became topics for research as well.³²

Galtung also introduced a distinction between direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence, as well as between negative peace (the absence of direct violence) and positive peace (the absence of structural violence). Inequality played a central role in this type of thinking as a cause of structural violence. North American academics rejected this broad definition of conflict and peace and a “struggle” ensued “between European structuralists and North American pragmatists to define the peace research and conflict resolution agenda”, resulting in an “uneasy compromise”. (Miall et al. 1999: 44) The difference in emphasis still exists, with much of American research directed at conflict management or conflict resolution, which takes place between relatively equal parties and within a given structure, and much of European research aiming at conflict transformation in asymmetric conflicts that require radical changes in the very structure of relations among the parties. In the United States, peace and conflict studies have traditionally focused not so much on the analysis of conflicts or the theory of peace, but more on practical negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution skills, which were then applied to conflicts and interactions at all levels. Harvard Law School introduced the soon very popular concept of problem-solving negotiation in which the parties work together to find solutions that are optimal – or at least satisfactory - for all involved. (Fisher and Ury 1983)

A recent development in the field of peace and conflict studies is its attempts to connect better to the field of development studies. Duffield (2001: 1), for example, notes that “development concerns have become

labour management introduced a mutual gains approach to negotiation. The ideas put forward by Gandhi were also widely read and built upon. (O’Connell and Whitby 1995; Miall et al. 1999: 40)

³² *Journal of Peace Research* archive: <http://jpr.sagepub.com/archive/>. Accessed on 24 May 2004.

increasingly important in relation to how security is understood” and vice versa³³. Although little has so far been written about how to translate these ideas into practice³⁴, the new conflict-development nexus receives increasing attention. Various terms are used to describe it, such as ‘human security’, ‘conflict-sensitive development’, and ‘post-conflict development’ (Anderson 1999, Carbonnier 1998, Addison 2003, Junne and Verkoren 2004). This emerging field of study entails a combination of development and conflict theory, although the reconciliation of these two strands of theory is only just starting to occur. Research is not only undertaken by academics but by agencies from the practice of peacebuilding and development, such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well, and much of the research actually goes on in this ‘grey circuit’ of policy reports and the like. This leads us to the relationship between academia and practice in the peacebuilding field.

2.3.2 Academia and practice in the peacebuilding field

Adam Curle, the first professor at the Bradford School of Peace Studies, formulated Bradford’s mission and that of the whole field of peace studies as follows:

- to identify and analyse unpeaceful relationships
- to find out about the economic, political and social conditions in which relationships might tend to be more or less peaceful
- to devise means of changing unpeaceful relationships into peaceful ones. (O’Connell and Whitby 1995: 4-5)

This use of a broad definition of violence and peace at Bradford resulted in criticism that its courses were too diffuse, too abstract and insufficiently applied. Under pressure from the students the department then made efforts to make the curriculum more focused and problem-oriented. With a growing emphasis on practice by the faculty, however, the tension between those in favour of activism and those stressing the academic dimension again came to the surface. (O’Connell and Whitby 1995: 6) Most researchers agreed that the field should include elements of both engagement and academic distance, but discussions revolved around where the balance between the two should be. A related debate was about whether the discipline could be value-free, and if not, what

³³ It is “now generally accepted that international organisations should be aware of conflict and, where possible, gear their work towards conflict resolution and helping to rebuild war-torn societies in a way that will avert future violence” (Duffield 2001: 1).

³⁴ “[T]he new development-security terrain remains underresearched and its study has yet to establish its own conceptual language” (Duffield 2001: 9).

values should be a part of it. In Bradford, these discussions also played out in disagreements about whether the department should engage in activism. In the end, the applied nature of peace studies at Bradford became restricted to the department's policy-oriented research (O'Connell and Whitby 1995: 7-8).

Similar questions have been asked recently by Louk de la Rive Box (2006) about the broader field of development: "how relevant is our understanding of development for the management of social change? [...] Has development studies grown into a field of studies that is only to be judged by the academic standards it has set for itself? By, for example, the number of publications in respected international (read: North American and British) journals? Or do we judge our relevance by the value of our contributions to those engineering social change through enterprises, civil society organisations and public administration? If so, what is the opinion of those colleagues in the global South that we aim to assist?" De la Rive Box's answer is not mild: "our discipline may [...] be on the verge of irrelevance". In his view, development studies have contributed little to global debates and are too much inward-focused. Ultimately it is the notion of development itself that is to blame, as it "implies a paternalistic conception of managed social change based on post - [Second World War] Northern optimism regarding newly independent countries". De la Rive Box concludes that development studies need to "open up [...] to novel global realities" and "move beyond the discourse of development" in order to maintain their relevance. Some directions in which to move may be to substitute the North-South dichotomy by a focus on transnational, informal networks, to pay more attention to non-State actors and movements, and to recognise and analyse new forms of global interdependence among all actors involved. (De la Rive Box 2006)

The new security-development field, however, appears to be one in which the connection to policy and practice is made relatively well. The nature of most publications in this field is predominantly prescriptive and policy-oriented. Few publications aim at developing the theory of the new "development-security terrain" (Duffield 2001) at an abstract level, and no significant attempts have been made to set the research agenda or develop standards for evaluating results. Instead, researchers engage in evaluating field activities and drawing concrete and applicable lessons from them. In addition, certain non-scientific knowledge is taken up by academics. The World Bank is an important player in post-conflict development research. Its publications are often quoted in other studies in the field. (Boyce 1996, Ball 1996, Addison 2003, Moore

2000, Junne and Verkoren 2004). In some cases it is even difficult to distinguish between academic and non-academic literature³⁵.

This does not necessarily mean that academic knowledge is always taken up by practitioners in the peacebuilding field, who have trouble making the time to read and apply scientific publications. The format of most formal research (long books and refereed journal articles full of jargon) does not easily lend itself to application in the field. As in other fields, academics tend to set their own research agendas rather than respond to needs in the field. As a result, “the gap between academic theory and NGO practice is still a wide one”, and “policy is often determined by organizational mandates, past practice and politics, with little reference to the findings and prescriptions of academic researchers.” (Goodhand 2006, 178) Some popular peacebuilding concepts have found their way into NGO handbooks, but academic-practitioner interactions are not continuous. Within some international NGOs thematic departments have been created that aim to make better use of research findings from outside the organisation – but the trouble lies in connecting these thematic departments to the operational, often regionally organised, departments of these organisations.³⁶

Interestingly, policymakers and practitioners in the field of peacebuilding and development increasingly take on the task of research themselves in order to be certain that the research done is practice-oriented and answers their specific demands for knowledge. In addition to large multilateral institutions, NNGOs also try to develop more research capacities. For example, Search for Common Ground has set up a research and development division that “aims to research and develop advancements in evaluation approaches and peacebuilding practice for the benefit of Search for Common Ground and the conflict resolution field.”³⁷ Although this is in itself a positive development, contributing to the output and application of useful research results, it does not necessarily complement, and interact with, the research done at universities – in the North and especially in conflict-affected developing countries themselves.

³⁵ For example, Paul Collier, who plays a prominent role in debates about the causes of current-day conflicts, has done work both in the capacity of director of the World Bank’s Development Economics Research Group and as professor at Oxford University. Whether his World Bank publications are any less academic than his Oxford ones is difficult to say.

³⁶ During a University of Amsterdam course on learning processes in Dutch NGOs for Master students and NGO staff, which I co-taught during the spring of 2007, this issue emerged repeatedly in the discussions and research projects of the participants.

³⁷ www.sfcg.org. Search for Common Ground. Accessed on 18 September 2004.

Much has been written about linking research to policy in the development field. For example, Court and Young (2003, 2005) of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) draw from fifty case studies a number of observations about the impact of research on the development policies that are made by (donor) governments, international organisations, and other influential actors. They note that literature on the link between research and policy is moving away from a linear view, focusing on ways to ensure that research results reach policymakers, towards a more complex view that emphasises a two-way process between research and policy, “shaped by multiple relations and reservoirs of knowledge” (Court and Young 2005: 21). They find that three elements play an important role in determining to what extent research results are used:

- The political context, including “political structures/processes, institutional pressures, prevailing concepts, [and] policy streams and windows”
- The evidence, particularly its “credibility, methods, use, [and way in which] the message is packaged and communicated”
- Links “between policy makers and other stakeholders, relationships, voice, trust, networks, the media and other intermediaries.” (Court and Young 2005: 21)

Political context is often the most important issue in affecting the degree to which research influences policy (Court and Young 2003: 11; 2005: 21). Political contestation, institutional pressures and vested interests play an important role. The political context also includes the political system and processes, the way policymakers think, and policy implementation. In an open political system evidence is freely gathered, assessed and communicated. In non-democratic contexts where academic, public and media freedom are curtailed, this is much more difficult. In terms of the political process, one of the main issues that affect the extent to which research is taken into account is the degree of policymaker demand. Research has a greater impact when it is policy-driven or has high-level political commitment. The degree of political contestation also matters greatly: “even in open systems, many decisions are political and research-based evidence may be completely ignored, even if it was convincing.” Indeed, research is unlikely to affect policy if reforms it suggests run counter to the interests of major political players. (Court and Young 2003: 11-13) Policymakers like straightforward stories and advice they can understand – even if it does not hold up to closer scrutiny. In addition, the agenda-setting process is important to understand for researchers seeking to affect policy. A key influence on the agenda-setting process are ‘political streams’: the wider political

environment, including government changes and public opinion. Research will have a greater impact if it fits within “a range of what can be seen as ‘good advice’” (Court and Young 2003: 11).

When it comes to the evidence, two sets of issues have a bearing on whether research influences policy: the credibility of the research and its communication and packaging. Credibility in the eyes of policymakers relates not only to the perceived quality of the research and the degree of consensus in the research community, but also to the relevance of the research and the extent to which it provides solutions. Policymakers are particularly convinced when something has been piloted and proved successful. The perceived quality of the research is affected by the reputation of the researchers and their institutions. In addition, the research method plays a role. Participatory methods in particular tend to impress policymakers. (Court and Young 2003: 16-18) The success with which findings are communicated matters for their impact on policy. Strenuous advocacy efforts are usually required. The uptake of recommendations is most likely when there has been a clear communication strategy throughout the research process. (Court and Young 2003: 18-19).

Court and Young (2003: 20) also conclude that “the links between researchers and policymakers are critical to bridging research and policy. These include feedback, dialogue and collaboration between researchers and policy-makers; the role of networks and policy communities; and issues of trust, legitimacy and participation.” Feedback refers not only to interactions linked to a particular project, but to continuous feedback loops between research, policy, implementation and monitoring. Shared objectives and views and individual contacts between researchers and policymakers are all highly influential factors in this context. (Court and Young 2003: 20-21) Ideally, contacts should start in the phase of research design. In the words of De la Rive Box, “A better understanding of research design and execution would allow for the realistic involvement of users, and prevent general policy prescriptions from overriding legitimate scientific demands. It would also prevent scientific free riding at the cost of user relevance.” (De la Rive Box 2001)

Building networks of researchers and policymakers emerges from ODI’s case studies as a helpful tool for the bridging of the gap between research and policy. Networks and ‘epistemic communities’ – colleagues who share a similar position or approach in regard to a given issue and maintain contact with each other across different locations and fields – provide important channels for knowledge exchange and the

discussion of perspectives. This confirms De la Rive Box' argument for networks as 'mode three' knowledge creation (see 2.1.2). "The time for grand research programmes at the European level [...] has [...] passed; now is the time for focused programmes supporting existing knowledge networks." (De la Rive Box 2001)

The interactions between academic researchers and policymakers and practitioners in the field of peace and development described here for the most part only apply to Northern academics, and Northern policymakers and practitioners. The challenge is to better take into account local knowledge of people living and working in conflict-affected developing countries.

2.3.3 Indigenous versus external³⁸ knowledge

Local knowledge may take the form of traditional peacebuilding methodologies, such as singing and storytelling as ways to educate people about conflict resolution, rights, and peaceful ways of living together. Traditional peacebuilding methods include traditional rituals that can contribute to peacebuilding. "In Mozambique and Sierra Leone, actions undertaken by traditional healers for children traumatised by war and former child soldiers demonstrate the success of strategies deeply rooted in the social and cultural context." (Pouligny 2005: 502-503) Purification rituals also occurred in Mozambique: "[r]eferring to concepts of pollution and purification, they made it possible not only to designate and describe the period of violence as 'abnormal' or 'unacceptable', but also to define the rules indispensable for the groups' coexistence and survival." Such rituals "reflect a will both to recover one's roots and to reinterpret them in a world that has gone through a profound upheaval". (Pouligny 2005: 502-503) They recognise that the dynamics of a conflict itself has a tremendous impact on people ('possesses' people) and makes them do things that they otherwise probably would not have done, thereby reducing the differences between victims en perpetrators and contributing to reconciliation.

³⁸ The use of the word 'external' represents a conscious choice. The oft-heard dichotomy of 'global' versus 'local' or 'indigenous' knowledge will not be used. The reason is that what is often termed 'global' is really European and North American, and calling it global obscures the fact that it is itself 'local' in origin and context. The fact that the distinction is often made in these terms does reveal an important reality, however, namely that of the global dominance of Western knowledge and of a discourse that labels it as universally applicable and uniquely legitimate. We will return to this in chapter 5. Here we will instead distinguish between knowledge that is 'external' and 'indigenous' to developing, conflict-affected societies.

According to Grenier (1997: 10-11), paying attention to indigenous knowledge may

- create mutual respect, encourage local participation, and build partnerships for joint problem resolution
- facilitate the design and implementation of culturally appropriate development programs, avoiding costly mistakes
- make programmes more relevant and, as a result, more sustainable
- identify techniques that can be transferred to other regions and help identify practices suitable for investigation, and improvement. An example of non-Western peacebuilding methods that have been exported is the concept of restorative justice, which focuses on reconciliation rather than retribution and was made famous by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. A West-African interviewee quoted the concept as a good example of an African way of looking at things.³⁹

However, peacebuilding interventions are often based on Western concepts of conflict resolution, mediation, and institution building. In many cases this happens despite the best intentions of donor agencies and their recognition in theory of the importance of local knowledge. Inequalities in knowledge production and recognition, elaborated in chapter four, play a role in this. In addition, indigenous knowledge is often not easily accessible. It often remains undocumented. It “is stored in people’s memories and activities and is expressed in stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances, myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws [and] local language [...]” (Grenier 1997: 6)

Further on in this book we will see that the importance to combine indigenous and external knowledge, weighing the benefits of both tradition and innovation, emerges clearly from my interviews. Indigenous knowledge is by no means monolithic or unchangeable. It evolves in interaction. Local knowledge systems are dynamic: new knowledge is continuously added. (Grenier 1997: 5). “[I]nnovation is part of every culture’s reality, and that borrowing, grafting ideas from the outside, and reshaping old concepts to hold new experiences are also important local strategies.” (Culbertson and Pouligny 2006: 5) The role of outsiders can be extremely important in learning processes. They can serve as idea givers, researchers, facilitators, or advocates. (Culbertson and Pouligny 2006: 20) However, translation between external and local knowledge

³⁹ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

can be difficult as they are often grounded in fundamentally different knowledge *systems*.

2.4 Different knowledge systems

“We all ‘know’ the world through a combination of our education, language, culture, and belief and, just as importantly, our actual physical realities – gender, location, socio-economic environment. [...] The issue for anyone working on development issues cannot be simply how to deal with ‘knowledge’, but how to act effectively in an environment of multiple ‘knowledges’.” (Powell 2006: 521)

The world has different knowledge systems. “[N]ot only are there different realities, but different people have different epistemologies or ‘ways of knowing’. The distinctions usually made in this respect are between indigenous knowledge and western scientific knowledge, and between different gender epistemologies.” (Baumann 1999: 14) Here we focus on the first distinction – between Western and non-Western knowledge systems. As will be discussed in chapter four, some knowledge systems are more dominant than others. Oversimplifying terribly, the gist of much literature about different knowledge systems is as depicted in Table 2.1 below: in contrast with non-Western knowledge systems, in which magic, myth, intuition, and tradition play an important role (Mudimbe 1988: 189), Western knowledge systems emphasise rationality, scientific research standards, and codified, written-down knowledge.

Western / modern knowledge system(s)	Non-Western / traditional knowledge system(s)
Scientifically generated	Experience-based
Documented, formalised	Undocumented, oral
Codified, abstracted, quantifiable	Qualitative, stories
Scientifically tested	Intuition, tradition
Systematic, verifiable	Myth, magic
Short-term emphasis, deadlines	Long-term emphasis, process-oriented
Reductionist	Holistic
‘Objective’, ‘value-free’	Subjective, moral, spiritual
Focus on learning in formalised settings, separated from applied context	Learning through observation and experience
Data generated by researchers	Data generated by practitioners

Table 2.1: Simplified and generalised overview of the differences between Western/modern and non-Western/traditional knowledge systems

A lot can be said against this simplified depiction of opposing knowledge systems. In reality, elements of both exist both in the developing world and in the West. The elements generally associated with Western-style knowledge, shown in the left-hand column, are part of ‘machine’, ‘logic’, rational, positivist, or even bureaucratic-style knowledge – which certainly has a dominant position in the West but not only there and not to the complete exclusion of elements from the right-hand column. Myths and rituals play a role in each society, and most humans draw on ‘logic’ and scientific types of knowledge as well as more intuitive or even spiritual kinds. In any case, some criticise how

“in their depiction of the way in which western science has conspired to subjugate Third World people, populists come close to resembling orientalist myths that deny people any history or creativity. [...] [T]his populist identification of different types of knowledge removes the need for critically examining the material underpinnings and social context of either.” (Baumann 1999: 15)

Notwithstanding these qualifications, there certainly are differences between indigenous and Western knowledge systems, if only because in the latter the left-hand column elements have dominated for a much longer time. Interviewees of local peace NGOs refer to differences between local and Western knowledge systems and for that reason alone it would be important to look at this distinction. In their view, the elements in the left-hand column of the above table are generally associated with the West, particularly by those outside that region. However, if there is a clash between Western and indigenous knowledge, it takes place not so much between parts of the world as it does *within* countries and communities: between those who have been educated according to Western standards, and those who have not; between the youth, who have access to new sources of knowledge through information technology, and the older generation who stick to traditional knowledge; between politicians who maintain the Western-style state apparatuses installed by colonialism, and traditional authorities at the local level. (Senghaas 2002)

Western or ‘modern’ knowledge is not universal but represents a specific system of knowledge. This is also true for the way knowledge itself is viewed. In the tradition of Western Enlightenment, there is a separation between the observer and what is being observed. This is different for example in Zen-influenced Japanese culture, in which there is no such separation. Baumann generalised this to all non-Western or indigenous knowledge systems, writing that “1) indigenous knowledge is embedded in a particular community and contextually bound; 2) it is not based on a subject/object dichotomy, and; 3) it is not individualistic

and is based on a commitment to a local context” (Baumann 1999: 14). Interestingly, the same things are often said for female epistemologies – as opposed to male ones. Indeed, Baumann (1999: 15) mentions that some authors group together “western/male epistemologies and eastern/female epistemologies”. Given that some women are raised in Western scientific traditions while others are raised in non-Western traditions, it is difficult to explain this. In any case, doing so would go beyond the scope of this study.

In Hinduism, knowledge is seen as a balance of the knowledge of one’s self with knowledge of the external world. The African concept of *Ubuntu* relates knowledge very much to a collective sense of identity. In this tradition the observer is an integral part of the reality he is observing and an individual can only be understood as part of a wider group: ‘I am therefore you are’. “Whereas Western science attempts to isolate a problem – to eliminate its interlinkage with various other factors and to reduce a problem to a small number of controllable parameters – traditional approaches usually examine problems in their entirety, together with their interlinkages and complexities”. (Grenier 1997: 10) In *Ubuntu*, the truth cannot be objectively discovered and verified, as Western scientific traditions like to believe, but is multi-dimensional and ever-changing. No truth is static, absolute or eternal in this way of thinking; instead it is defined by change, ambiguity and movement. (Lammers 2006, 106). Recalling the discussion about the contested nature of conflict knowledge earlier in this chapter, this way of looking at truth seems quite relevant for people engaged in conflict and peacebuilding.

2.5 The applicability of knowledge: how context-specific is knowledge?

In how far is knowledge based on a specific experience useful in a different situation, with different circumstances? To a large extent this question relates to the discussion of tacit knowledge in section 2.1.1. There the conclusion was that some knowledge is so much related to a person’s individual set of mind frames and experiences that it is impossible for others to understand and use. An example from another context may illustrate this. How I deal with the specific issues I face in the relationship with my spouse, issues which are so much related to our personal histories and to the way our relationship has developed over the years, is highly specific to my context. Much of my behaviour takes the form of a habit based on knowledge and experience that I don’t even realise I have. At the same time, it may help me to talk to friends who,

although their characters and personal histories differ, may be dealing with similar issues. Comparing our assumptions and behaviours could lead me to see things from a useful new perspective. Alternatively, a psychologist could provide me with objectified, codified knowledge based on the experiences of many people like me. Even though this knowledge alone might not solve my particular problem, which is too specific for anyone else to understand completely, my problem does contain generalisable facets that others have experience with as well. Applying knowledge that originated elsewhere to my own context remains a task that only I can fulfil.

The question also relates to the differences between ‘Northern’ and ‘indigenous’ knowledge. In this context, De la Rive Box (2001) describes the prevailing assumption in the 1950s that countries were developed because they were scientifically advanced and therefore industrialised. Underdeveloped countries lacked knowledge and therefore that knowledge needed to be transferred first. Sending experts to, or training students from, developing countries could do the job. However, says De la Rive Box, experiences have shown that the technical knowledge required in tropical countries was not available in the West or at least not suited for application in conditions other than those in the West. “Nevertheless, the technology transfer model continued to inspire aid or cooperation policies for decades to come.”

Similarly, Baud (2002: 54) describes the “classical linear model” of knowledge dissemination from North to South, which “assumes that the scientific community produces ‘universally applicable knowledge’”, but which is now widely criticised for ignoring “the context in which the knowledge is produced, and the limits of that context”. In contrast to this model, we will see later on that many peace practitioners interviewed do not view knowledge as produced in one context and transferred to another, but as produced through interaction between and among practitioners and researchers, who are at the same time sources and users of knowledge⁴⁰.

2.6 Implications: forms of peace and conflict knowledge

The dichotomies described in this chapter - tacit-explicit, academic-practitioner, indigenous-external –overlap. Indigenous knowledge, for example, can at the same time be tacit and academic. To show this overlap, the various types of knowledge discussed are combined in the

⁴⁰ See also Baud 2002: 54.

following tables. Table 2.2 deals with academic knowledge and organises it into six categories, using the dimensions indigenous-external and tacit-explicit-implicit. The same is done for practitioner knowledge in Table 2.3. Although many other ways of conceptualising types of knowledge can be envisioned, the organisation in these tables gives an idea of the range of different types and categories of knowledge.

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE	Indigenous / local	External
Tacit / unique	The specific expertise and experience of indigenous academics and local academic communities (1)	Research skills and experience of external academics; Northern academic communities (2)
Explicit / programmable	Local academic publications or lectures (3)	External academic publications (4)
Implicit / cultural	Research findings and knowledge regarding local cultural norms and traditions; norms and traditions of local academia (5)	Research findings and knowledge regarding non-local cultural norms and traditions; norms and traditions of external academia (6)

Table 2.2: Types of knowledge: academic

PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE	Indigenous / local	External
Tacit / unique	Personal knowledge of staff. Stories, contacts, experience. (7)	Travel stories, personal contacts, experience of external people. (8)
Explicit / programmable	Statistics, databases, intranets. Manuals, project reports, lessons learned documents, evaluation reports. (9)	Websites, publications, manuals of external agencies. (10)
Implicit / cultural	Local norms and traditions in NGOs and communities (11)	Northern norms and traditions; norms and traditions of the international peace and development community (12)

Table 2.3: Types of knowledge: practitioner

What is important with an eye on the use of knowledge is that different categories of knowledge present different challenges for learning and knowledge sharing initiatives. Table 2.4 below draws attention to the kinds of process challenges associated with the mobilisation of the twelve categories of knowledge distinguished in Tables 2.2 and 2.3. In addition, the table lists possible beneficiaries of the various types of

knowledge, as well as a number of methods that could facilitate the processes needed to reach these beneficiaries.

Type of knowledge, challenges and methods	Process challenges	Utilisation and recipients	Methods for knowledge production
(1) The specific expertise and experience of indigenous academics and local academic communities	<p>Very few local academics working on peace issues</p> <p>How to make this knowledge more explicit?</p> <p>How to make it available to other researchers and non-academics – locally and globally?</p>	<p>External academics may learn from the skills of doing research in particular local (conflict) contexts</p> <p>Academics in areas facing similar challenges may compare and learn from their experiences</p> <p>Practitioners can use context-specific research skills for reflection on practice</p>	<p>Build local academic capacity through cooperation with external academics</p> <p>Bring together Southern academics and practitioners in research around projects and in discussion forums (see chapter eight)</p>
(2) Research skills and experience of external academics; global academic communities	<p>How document this knowledge?</p> <p>How to make it available to local researchers and non-academics?</p>	<p>Local researchers can learn from these communities</p> <p>Practitioners can use research skills for reflection on practice</p>	<p>Build local academic capacity through cooperation with external academics (see 4.1 and 4.2)</p> <p>Bring together Northern and Southern academics and practitioners in research around projects and in discussion forums</p>
(3) Local academic publications or lectures	<p>How to reach possible audiences abroad?</p> <p>How to apply theoretical ideas to the practice?</p> <p>How to bridge the gap between academia and practice?</p>	<p>External academics may use the knowledge and combine it with knowledge from elsewhere to generate generalised knowledge</p> <p>Academics in areas facing similar challenges may</p>	<p>Capacity building (see 3.6 and 4.7).</p> <p>More research in response to demands from practitioners (see 5.3.4, 5.5.5 and chapter eight).</p> <p>Participatory research.</p>

		<p>compare the knowledge with their own in order to arrive at new conclusions</p> <p>Practitioners at home and abroad may apply the knowledge in their work</p>	<p>Packaging: writing style, summarising.</p> <p>Active attention to communication and dissemination of research results beyond academic community (see 2.1.2).</p>
(4) External academic publications	How to link up with indigenous research – and local and global practice?	<p>Indigenous researchers may combine this knowledge with their own research results in order to generate new generalised knowledge</p> <p>Practitioners may apply the knowledge in their work</p>	<p>North-South research partnerships and networks.</p> <p>More research in response to demands from practitioners (see 5.3.4, 5.5.5 and chapter eight).</p> <p>Participatory research.</p> <p>Packaging: writing style, summarising.</p> <p>Active attention to communication and dissemination of research results beyond academic community (see 2.1.2).</p>
(5) Research findings and knowledge regarding local cultural norms and traditions; norms and traditions of local academia	Intangible nature of such knowledge and fact that it usually exists only in tacit form. Challenge for external actors to gain access to this knowledge and to apply it / adjust to different norms	Northern researchers, policymakers and peacebuilding practitioners – researchers in order to do research more effectively in countries with different cultures, policymakers to make more relevant policy, practitioners to work more effectively	<p>Comes to the fore in indigenous-external exchanges.</p> <p>Attempts may be made to document this knowledge through joint North-South, participatory research.</p>
(6) Research findings and knowledge regarding non-	Intangible nature of such knowledge and fact that it usually exists only	Southern researchers, policymakers, practitioners, in order to more effectively	Comes to the fore in indigenous-external exchanges.

local cultural norms and traditions; norms and traditions of external academia	in tacit form. Challenge for local actors to gain access to this knowledge and to apply it / adjust to different norms	work with external actors.	Attempts may be made to codify through joint North-South, participatory research.
(7) Personal knowledge of staff. Stories, contacts, experience	How to find out who knows what? How to make explicit and share? How to share beyond the immediate community?	Colleagues may access the knowledge present inside their organisation Other organisations could benefit for their own work Researchers (local and external) may use it to generate more generalised knowledge	Staff surveys, yellow pages (see 3.2.4). Encouraging documentation. Create space for intra-organisational exchange through meetings, joint field visits, differing team compositions (see 3.2 and 5.3). Make space for (online) discussion with staff of other organisations and local communities (see 5.3 and chapters six and seven). International conferences, networks or discussion forums (chapter seven).
(8) Travel stories, personal contacts, experience of external people.	How to find out who knows what? How to distil knowledge for sharing? How to codify and share beyond the immediate community?	Fellow practitioners inside and outside the own organisation may benefit from the accumulated practical action experiences (learning how to do something) Researchers may use it to generate more generalised knowledge	Encouraging documentation (see 5.3 and chapter eight). Dissemination of conference reports and organisation of follow-up. Intra- and extra-organisational exchanges (see 5.5). Create global database of experts.
(9) Statistics,	How to write and	'Raw data' for local	Accessible writing

databases, intranets. Manuals, project reports, lessons learned documents, evaluation reports	<p>process them in such a way that they do not end up on a shelf?</p> <p>How to enable people in other regions to learn from local experience?</p>	<p>and external researchers who use it to produce knowledge with a wider applicability</p> <p>Local practitioners use the information in the planning of new interventions</p> <p>Practitioners in other regions may learn from evaluation results, repeat successful activities or avoid making similar mistakes</p>	<p>with possible broader applicability of conclusions on mind.</p> <p>Pay attention to communication of results and issues.</p> <p>Create space for (online) discussion of outcomes.</p> <p>Cooperation with researchers to make sense of information and draw conclusions for wider application (see chapter eight).</p> <p>Create global networks (chapter seven).</p>
(10) Websites, publications, manuals of external agencies	<p>Dealing with information overload.</p> <p>Selection of relevant information, time management issues.</p> <p>Access issues.</p>	See above.	<p>Create online portals and search engines.</p> <p>Make websites interactive, allowing for improvement of manuals based on user experience.</p> <p>Improve internet access.</p>
(11) Local norms and traditions in NGOs and communities	<p>Intangible nature of such knowledge and fact that it usually exists only in tacit form.</p> <p>Challenge to gain access and to apply.</p>	<p>External practitioners in order to work more effectively in local context.</p>	<p>Exchange with locals; observation. Being open to different perspectives, traditions (third-order, cross-cultural learning; see 3.1, 4.7.2 and elsewhere).</p>
(12) Northern norms and traditions; norms and traditions of	<p>Intangible nature of such knowledge and fact that it usually exists only</p>	<p>Local NGO staff are relatively adept at accessing norms and language of external</p>	<p>Exchange with external actors and observation.</p>

the international peace and development community	in tacit form. Challenge to gain access and to apply.	actors in peacebuilding and at translating these to local context	Project and reporting guidelines give information about norms of international peace and development community (see 4.4).
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Table 2.4: Knowledge challenges for peace and development organisations

2.7 Concluding remarks

The table above gives an overview of the forms that knowledge of peace and conflict takes, and the issues and challenges that arise when it comes to sharing them with others. A number of issues emerge from the various types of knowledge discussed in this chapter:

- important challenge for knowledge processes is how to mobilise, exchange and apply tacit and implicit knowledge. In Table 2.4 in the previous section this was concretised some more. But what ideas about learning and knowledge exchange actually exist that try to facilitate these processes? We will turn to that question in the next chapter. The question may also be raised how such processes work in reality in NGOs. While the next chapter provides some initial ideas about this, it is in the remainder of the book that this question will really be explored for the practice of Southern peace NGOs.
- There are some communication issues between practitioners and academics when it comes to the sharing of knowledge, although academic knowledge originates in practice. It is suggested that dynamic knowledge networks could provide an avenue for joint academic-practitioner knowledge creation. But how does this work in practice? In chapters six and seven, we will look at networks as a knowledge exchange and knowledge generation tool.
- Knowledge of conflict and peace is never neutral and there are usually competing versions of the ‘truth’. Discussing these different interpretations is in fact an important part of peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. This means that reconciliation has an important knowledge component. How exactly can knowledge exchange and joint learning processes contribute to peacebuilding? And does this happen in reality? This is another set of questions that we will return to in Parts Two and Three.

Chapter 3. Processes, actors, relationships

Knowledge and learning in NGOs

Thinking back to the research question - *what are 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?* -, this study has so far looked at the role and place of local NGOs in contemporary peacebuilding processes and the forms that knowledge of peace, conflict and development takes. Now, it will turn to the characteristics of organisational learning processes and see how these can be applied to Southern peace NGOs. This discussion is based, first, on publications about learning and organisational learning processes: an extensive body of literature that mostly focuses on the business world. Second, this chapter incorporates recent thinking about knowledge processes in NGOs; thinking which, as we will see, focuses mostly on Northern development organisations.

Organisations working in circumstances of conflict find themselves in rapidly changing contexts, calling for flexibility and the capacity to learn from their actions. Many NGOs look for new ways of working and networking in cooperation with partners. If the quality of work of NGOs in conflict situations is to be maintained and improved, the learning capacity of these organisations and their employees deserves attention. Processes of learning in and by NGOs also come to the fore in discussions around monitoring and evaluation and increasingly have to be demonstrated when NGOs apply for funding from donor agencies. However, the daily circumstances of NGO staff present difficulties: they work in a context of urgency, have action-oriented working styles, and often find it difficult to create time and space for reflection and learning. In such a situation, how do NGO employees find ways to learn and reflect, and to connect this to their work?

Section 3.1 looks at learning processes in general, addressing different levels of learning and briefly paying attention to what characterises learning in circumstances affected by conflict. 3.2 focuses on organisational learning processes. Next, the chapter turns to learning processes in development and conflict NGOs, with section 3.3 addressing the rise of the concept of learning in the development field, 3.4 discussing theory on the knowledge strategies of NGOs, and 3.5 discussing the fact that little attention is paid in the literature to Southern organisations. Next, two bodies of thinking are examined that do shed

some light on knowledge flows involving SNGOs: capacity building (3.6) and networking (3.7). Section 3.8 concludes the chapter.

Sections 3.9 and 3.10 serve to conclude Part One and to set the stage for the remainder of the book. In 3.9, the main findings from Part One are combined into a model of knowledge processes, actors and relationships that exist in and around peace NGOs. This model is used as a starting point for the analysis in the rest of the book. In Parts Two and Three it will be developed further based on the findings presented there. In 3.10, the research methodology used for the study of Southern peace NGOs in Parts Two and Three is outlined.

3.1 Learning processes: Retaining and using knowledge

One of the most influential sources of thinking about knowledge and learning has been the private sector – firms, business schools, think tanks and consultancy firms, particularly in the US, Europe and Japan – which began to recognise the importance of the retention and exchange of knowledge for competitiveness during the 1980s, resulting in many experiments and publications and the coining of the term ‘knowledge management’. Over the past decade, knowledge and knowledge processes have received increasing attention from the development field as well. The recognition that learning is of critical importance is growing among international peace and development NGOs, as is the recognition that a lot needs to be done to improve the capacity for learning. Evaluations pay more attention to the issue than some years ago. The 2002 evaluation of the co-financing programme of NGOs of the Dutch government concluded that the learning capacity of Dutch NGOs and their partners was insufficient. More specifically, the evaluators wrote that two types of knowledge were required: more specialised thematic knowledge and more in-depth knowledge about local contexts. (Stuurgroep Evaluatie Medefinancieringsprogramma 2002: x and xii) In response, during the past decade there have been a lot of activities in many of the multilateral and bilateral development agencies concerning knowledge and information management. The World Bank was the first development organisation to explicitly adopt, and systematically tackle, the goal of becoming a knowledge agency. (King 2005: 73)

This section maps the main theories and discussions on knowledge processes that take place in and around organisations. Various, partly overlapping knowledge processes can be identified: knowledge identification (finding out or realising what relevant knowledge is

available); knowledge retention (preventing this knowledge from disappearing); knowledge transfer (from one individual to others or from one organisation to others); knowledge reception (being at the other end of the transfer); knowledge exchange (the whole process of transfer and reception); knowledge processing (translating the received knowledge so that it can be used); and knowledge implementation (using the received knowledge, thereby changing behaviour and actions). Learning could be conceived as a concept that sums up all these processes, as it includes everything from the identification and adoption of new knowledge to its integration into practice, leading to behavioural change. Organisational learning (3.2) is a concept that applies this to organisations, focusing on the conditions that optimise learning in organisations and learning by organisations. In addition to the processes listed above, one could also identify consciously developed mechanisms that aim to facilitate these processes, in particular knowledge management (3.2.2). Before explicitly linking these concepts to the NGO sector, I will first elaborate these concepts as such.

3.1.1 Defining learning

A common definition of learning is “knowledge acquisition or acquisition of new behaviour” (Smid and Beckett 2004: 406). This implies that learning does not necessarily have to lead to new behaviour. I might gain knowledge about twelfth century French literature that I cannot apply directly to my daily actions⁴¹. In Argyris’ definition, by contrast, learning is a much more practical and intentional act, designed to improve daily behaviour: “[l]earning is the detection and correction of error. Error is any mismatch between intentions and implementation. Learning occurs when these features are connected to effective action. The evidence in learning is that we can implement what we learned.” (Argyris 2004b: 29) This is not to say that it is impossible for behaviour to change towards less effective action: people do not always know what it takes to be more effective, and so they experiment. Another possibility is that people act irrationally, for whatever reason. In conflict situations irrational behaviour is in fact quite common.

As this study concerns itself not with learning for intellectual enrichment, but with learning for more effective action, a definition that includes Argyris’ element of the improvement of action will be useful. “When someone’s head is filled with knowledge, but his behaviour does

⁴¹ although I could argue that this new set of knowledge unconsciously helps shape my world vision and thereby indirectly my behaviour

not change, he has not learned anything in the eyes of his colleagues” (Wierdsma and Swieringa 2002, cited in Smit 2006). Even though a perfect match between intention and result is impossible, practice-oriented learning springs from a desire to function better and obtain better results. This desire may come not only from a mismatch between intention and implementation: even when I achieve my intended results, I might change my aims and intentions and set even higher standards. In order to achieve these, learning is also necessary. When people suspect that they could act more effectively, they may go searching for the knowledge that enables them to do so⁴². At the same time, learning may also be less intentional. It may result not from a conscious decision to look for knowledge that could improve action, but simply from learning by doing. People may think they are doing an excellent job until they happen to come across a piece of evidence that increases their knowledge and enables them to change their behaviour for even better results. People learn unconsciously all the time through daily action and interaction.

According to Smid and Beckett (2004: 409), in traditional mainstream thinking about learning daily practice is not considered a source of learning. Learning is more seen as something extra, a ‘cost’. This school of thought assumes that there is a period of learning, followed by a period of non-learning, followed again by a period of learning, etc., rather than continuous learning-in-action or experiential learning. Traditionally, then, the thinking has focused on learning moments when people are actively spending time on learning. In this line of thinking, when the moment designated for learning ends, people go back to everyday practice. Recent theory, in contrast, focuses on continuous learning or learning by doing. This study includes both. Conscious learning with the aim to acquire new knowledge may complement continuous learning from practice.

In a session in November 2004 with Dutch practitioners and researchers from the field of conflict and development⁴³, the participants were asked what had been their most important learning moments, whether planned or coincidental. The following moments were mentioned:

- during consultations around policy formulation
- during longer periods in the field⁴⁴

⁴² I write “they may” rather than “they will” because in reality it often happens that there is no time or space for this search and therefore it does not take place.

⁴³ Electronic Boardroom session with Dutch NGO representatives and academics, organised by the author in Amsterdam on 29 November 2004.

⁴⁴ A 2003 study on learning processes inside the NNGO Cordaid study confirms this: “[m]ost eye-openers occurred in the field when an intervention triggered unexpected outcomes.” An example of

- during seminars, lunch meetings
- from local knowledge
- personal contacts in the margins of meetings
- learning in response to concrete challenges

From this list it appears that a combination of spending time with partner organisations in different regions and discussions with people inside and outside the organisation creates a learning environment. This is confirmed by a study of learning activities inside the Dutch NGO Cordaid which showed that staff considered discussions with partners around evaluation and the organisation of regular workshops particularly conducive to organisational learning (Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst 2003: 6). From these sources, then, interaction emerges as a key concept for learning. The chances to learn something increase when people encounter others, from different organisations, other regions, or different types of institutions. Thus, I add interaction as an element to my definition of learning. For the purpose of this study, then, learning is *the conscious or unconscious acquisition of new knowledge that makes possible more effective action and/or better results. This knowledge may be gained in daily practice, during designated learning moments, or by combining knowledge gained in those two different settings. Interaction with others plays an important role in learning. The process of learning includes not only knowledge acquisition but also implementation: changing behaviour for better results.*

3.1.2 Schools of thought about learning⁴⁵

There are five theoretical schools of thought about learning: behaviourism, the cognitive school, pragmatism, constructivism, and situated learning. Behaviourism claims that all organisms learn in similar ways and have universally shared association mechanisms. Training programmes should aim to understand these mechanisms and use them in their teaching methods. In this view, the learner is rather passive. Student development takes place through training programmes which aim to impart pre-established information, practical skills and basic competencies. Learning is a one-way process: the learner's role is to receive knowledge. Behavioural change is the central aim of these programmes, and the only indication that learning has taken place.

such an unexpected outcome mentioned by a few staff members of Cordaid was that "getting people around the table for an unrelated subject, sometimes led to reconciliation of groups of people living in conflict areas." (Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst 2003: 8)

⁴⁵ This section is based on Sauquet (2004) and Keursten (2006).

Behaviourism is not of much value for this study, which focuses on learning as an active and interactive process of exchanging knowledge for better practice.

According to the cognitive school, the human mind works as a logical system of information processing. Like all systems of information processing, the capacity of human cognition is limited. Experiences may be interpreted incorrectly and have no learning value. Problem framing constrains the interpretation range and may implicitly orient decision-making. Cognitive theories underscore the need for a better understanding of people's 'mental models' and the wise use of limited cognitive resources. The cognitive school distinguishes between thought and action. For efficient practice to occur there must always be a precedent of intelligent thought. People have pre-existing thoughts and beliefs that guide their actions. Knowledge is a commodity that exists separately from action. It circulates through an organisation as information does. Knowledge is available and can be managed like any other resource. It is not knowledge itself but the capacity of individuals to adopt it that is limited by mental models and suboptimal problem framing.

According to Sauquet, the central premise of cognitivism that action must be preceded by thought is flawed. Instead, intelligence is embedded in practice and people learn by doing. The idea that knowledge can be managed like information is also mistaken and lies at the roots of the limited success of the, until recently extremely popular, notion of knowledge management (see 3.2.2). What is nonetheless interesting in the cognitive school is the attention paid to problem definitions, images and mental models that frame the understanding individuals have of reality and that shape their actions and learning processes. As we will see in the next section, for learning in the most profound or 'deep' sense to take place these frames have to be recognised and questioned.

A third theory, pragmatism, tones down the effects of training by focusing on learning by doing. Learning occurs as one tries to solve practical problems. A problem arises and confusion is the result. To make sense of a situation the individual frames the problem using pre-existing knowledge. This is followed by hypothesis formulation, inquiry, and action to correct the situation. The pragmatist school is quite relevant to this study as it sheds light on practice-oriented learning cycles and has influenced learning concepts such as single- and double-loop learning (elaborated in the next section). However, it neglects the importance of the knowledge of others (whether knowledge made

explicit in theories or tacit knowledge shared through interaction) in shaping and complementing people's practical learning experiences.

A related school of thought, constructivism, focuses on personal interpretation of information as central to learning. People learn by giving meaning to their experience and to other information that they come across. In this way they construct, rather than acquire, knowledge. Constructivism draws attention to the central importance of interpretation and giving meaning to processes of learning. The approach is also useful because it shows that much knowledge is subjective and context-specific, characteristics that our earlier discussion of tacit knowledge, and more specifically, conflict and peace knowledge, also made clear.

Finally, situated learning focuses on the context of the learner and thereby presents a social understanding of learning. The concept of situated learning can be understood as complementing individual cognitivism, pragmatism and constructivism by introducing the social context. The social context determines the way ideas and concepts are incorporated. As knowledge develops in a specific context, it is difficult to transfer it to another context or to establish best practices. The social environment shapes expectations of how things should be done, leading to different solutions in different contexts (see also 3.1.3 on interactive learning). The situated learning approach draws attention to characteristics of the social environment that may promote or inhibit learning. Such characteristics may for example be trust, openness, power, competition, caring, and mutual interest or attractiveness. Changes of context may also play a role in learning. While continuity in one's environment may help a process of experimentation and adaptation, a change of setting may shed a completely new light on a problem and thereby lead to genuine innovation. Comparing one's situation with those of others in a process of knowledge sharing or interactive learning brings in new perspectives.

Depending on the circumstances, each of the approaches described may provide inspiration to people looking to stimulate learning processes. Behaviourism may be helpful in standardised processes in which pre-defined, routine behaviour is required and outcomes are predictable. Cognitivism may provide leads where the use of available, formal knowledge plays a role. This may be the case with medical diagnoses, economic analyses or legal questions. Pragmatism may help with definable problems from practice, where continuous improvement, individual problem solving and experience building are central aims. Constructivism and situated learning fit groups that are jointly looking

to develop new solutions in complex situations in which ambitions, context and approaches are not fixed but are themselves in development. These approaches offer solutions to questions that cannot be solved through 'more of the same'. The latter situation clearly matches the peacebuilding field the best. This means that the learning processes that this study looks at may be best understood in the light of constructivist, interactive approaches. That said, elements of cognitivism and, particularly, pragmatism also play a role in different aspects of a learning process. In line with these considerations, the book treats learning as a social process in which people develop meaning and competence (constructivism) through action (pragmatism) and interaction (situated learning). Finding better ways to access previously documented information (cognitivism) plays a role in these processes as well, to the extent that this information does not constitute an end product but gets fed into processes of experimentation, interaction and sense-making.

3.1.3 Learning cycles

At the risk of introducing too many concepts at once, it may be useful to distinguish between exploitative and explorative learning (Nooteboom 2002: 41). Exploitation, also known as first-order learning, refers to learning to do existing things better. In this type of learning one tries to correct error through practice, in order to better match outcome with intention. Exploration, also known as second-order learning, goes beyond learning to do existing things better. Instead it searches for new things, using a new perspective. This type of learning does not occur as a result of experience, but of reflection upon experience. "Exploration means stepping back from practice and thinking about what you were doing in the first place" (Turel 2005: 27). Intentions, and the values underpinning them, are reconsidered and changed in explorative learning. The following figure explains the process of second-order learning.

Figure 3.1: Second-order learning cycle⁴⁶

The figure shows that second-order learning has its basis in concrete experience. Reflection on this experience (how am I doing? Why? How are others doing in comparison?) abstracts the information derived from this experience. In the next phase, this information is compared with other information or used for experimentation in practice. The conclusions drawn from this are used to improve action. A Liberian NGO worker gave an example from practice:

“At each phase of the processes in which they work, practitioners need to ask themselves whether they are doing the right thing and how things can be done better. At each phase, new stumbling blocks arise. One learns by dealing with these stumbling blocks. For example, in Lofa county there is one village where two ethnic groups did not speak to one another. After some time it became clear that they were not opposed to each other as such, but that politicians in Monrovia had fuelled and managed tensions in order to promote their own interests. People were willing to reconcile as long as their leaders in Monrovia agreed with it. In response, our organisation decided to engage these politicians and bring them to the village in question.”⁴⁷

According to Kolb (1984), most people have a preference for one or more phases of the learning cycle. This is related to their individual learning style. Some people have an activist learning style: they prefer doing. Others prefer reflecting: a reflective learning style. Still others are most comfortable conceptualising, and have a theoretical learning style. Finally there are those who prefer to learn by trying out new ways of working: a pragmatic or experimental learning style.

⁴⁶ Kolb 1984

⁴⁷ Interview with staff members of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 14 February 2006.

Some theorists⁴⁸ add a third mode of learning, which they call third-order learning. In their view, the three types of learning can be conceived as follows.

- First-order learning: the passive internalisation of a pre-given set of knowledge, or improvement of actions based on an acquired store of knowledge and experience
- Second-order learning: trial-and-error reflecting while acting - through an interactive process of asking questions, reflecting, and adjusting while acting. 'Am I doing things right?'
- Third-order learning: "reflection-on-reflection-in-action": reflecting on one's own manner of thinking, acting and learning, and the underlying assumptions. 'Am I doing the right thing?' This also includes questioning the validity of the tasks and problems posed by the context, which may lead to a transformation of that context. Third-order learning is particularly relevant to the processes this study looks at. After all, chapter two concluded that reflection on assumptions and openness to other 'mind frames' are necessary elements of cross-cultural learning.

Third-order learning adds another cycle of reflection and learning to the one portrayed in Figure 3.1 above: the cycle of self-reflection and the questioning of underlying values. What is my own personal role in this cycle? What implicit assumptions and experiences do I bring to this learning process, and do they lead to any distortions? Should my assumptions be modified? Because third-order learning adds another cycle, it is often referred to as double-loop learning. In double-loop learning, the values and assumptions underlying my actions are reflected upon and tested simultaneously with the reflection and testing of the actions themselves. In chapter eight, where the concept of action learning is discussed, the two loops are visualised and elaborated (see 8.3).

Engeström gives a more elaborate typology of types of learning based on the distinction between first-, second- and third-order learning.

⁴⁸ Smid and Beckett (2004: 408), Boonstra (2004: 16), Cummings (2004).

Kind of learning	Explanation	Type
Conditioning	Learning by reward and punishment to react in a certain manner, passive internalisation of pre-given culture.	Surface-level, first-order
Imitation	Copying readily available correct behaviour in the context.	Surface-level, first-order
Trial-and-error	Finding out how correct solutions can be produced even when they are not readily available in the context for copying.	Surface-level, second-order
Investigative	Reflect upon a problem, give hypothetical explanation of principles behind successful solutions. Test of hypothesis and modification according to the results.	Deep-level, second-order
Expansive	No limited or pre-defined contents and tasks, questioning the validity of tasks and problems posed by the context, transform the context itself, externalisation of novel cultural practices gains priority.	Deep-level, third-order

Table 3.1: Five types of learning according to Engeström 1995⁴⁹

3.1.4 Learning in conflict

In situations affected by conflict the need to learn is high, or, put differently, the risk of not learning is great. Not learning from the mistakes of oneself or others may cost lives. The context changes rapidly, and what seemed like common sense yesterday may no longer apply today. For organisations working in conflict-affected settings, flexibility is needed, which requires the capacity to adapt in response to experiences and changes – in other words, to learn. Therefore, conflict may stimulate learning. In a dire situation, people may become more creative, simply because they need to be considering the limited means they have at their disposal. Learning in conflict is not theoretical but solution-oriented; knowledge can lead to survival. At the same time, learning in conflict may be regressive or defensive rather than forward-looking: ‘we have to learn how to prevent this from happening again’.

While conflict may stimulate learning, it may at the same time inhibit it. People working in conflict often have little access to knowledge sources outside their immediate locality. In addition, the role knowledge plays in conflict (see 2.2.2) may mean that people resist learning. “Resistance seems to occur when learning does not resonate with an individual’s reality. Motivation and incentives are also important considerations.”

⁴⁹ Smid and Beckett 2004: 409

(Taylor et al. 2006: 22)⁵⁰ In general, people like knowledge that confirms their views and may be uncomfortable with knowledge that makes them question their ideas and actions. In conflict, this may play a particularly strong role. Group identities harden, ‘truths’ become a way to legitimise actions, and admitting that there are other ways to look at reality risks making one’s own behaviour seem flawed, or even criminal. In the case of organisations that are in the business of peacebuilding, admitting to flawed views and behaviour could even mean taking responsibility for failing to save human lives.

What we can draw from these reflections is that in conflict settings, learning at the tactical level (in order to do something better) is stimulated, while deeper-level learning, which involves questioning one’s views and actions altogether, is difficult.

3.2 Organisational learning

3.2.1 Principles of organisational learning

As we will see in chapter five, SNGO staff do not engage in isolated learning, but stress the role of interactions with others. In this context, the concept of interactive learning, “learning by doing in interaction with others” (Boonstra 2004: 15-16), is worth addressing. It consists of cyclical processes of interaction in which people can learn at the first, second and third levels described above, and can renew their assumptions and action repertoires. Interactive learning is based on the following principles, which organisational uses.

- organisations are conceived as feedback systems
- individuals have room for self-organisation
- people strive for transparency in interactive patterns in order to understand and adjust underlying assumptions, and to jointly chart, recognise, and clarify relationships
- room is made for multiple constructs of reality
- there is a reflection on interrelationships between actors, constructs, and contexts of actors
- there is a shared sense-making of events
- there is room for interaction and reflection on personal actions and underlying assumptions to make room for learning processes (Boonstra 2004: 15)

⁵⁰ Resistance to learning can take various forms: ignoring, devaluing, diverting, cultural apologism, and withdrawal (Taylor et al. 2006, 22).

The importance of stimulating, retaining, sharing and using the knowledge of individuals inside an organisation is now widely recognised. This type of knowledge processes is called *learning in organisations*. Another, more difficult concept is that of *learning of organisations* or organisational learning. Individual and organisational learning are connected. When an individual joins an organisation he or she has to internalise knowledge about the workings and routines of the organisation. At the same time, the body of organisational knowledge that is internalised by the new member constantly changes, because members bring their own knowledge with them, which may become part of organisational routines. (Huysman 2004: 70-71)

Figure 3.2: Organisational learning⁵¹

An individual learns, then, by internalising organisational knowledge and combining it with his or her own experience in a community of practice. This learning can occur in practice, as first-order learning, or through reflection: second-order learning. What is adopted by the community of practice may subsequently be objectified into the knowledge of the organisation. The changed organisational knowledge is again internalised by organisational members. In this way organisational change or innovation is implemented. (Turel 2005: 31) This kind of process takes place at all levels of the organisation. Each change is accompanied by discussions among organisational members as to the value of the change. However, individuals learning in an organisation do not necessarily lead to organisational learning. To illustrate this, Wierdsma and Swieringa (2002, cited in Smit 2006: 9) use the example of a soccer team. Even if the best eleven players of a

⁵¹ Huysman 2004: 75

country are playing in a team, this does not automatically mean that this team wins from teams with lesser players. The team has to learn to do things differently together. That does not mean that organisational learning can take place without individual learning, however. If nobody can play soccer, the team will certainly lose.

A popular way to look at learning in organisations is that it takes place through *communities of practice*: small groups of people who have worked together for some time. They are not necessarily a team, task force, or division. What holds them together is a common sense of purpose and a need to know what the other knows. There are many communities of practice within an organisation, and most people belong to more than one of them. In an attempt to institutionalise such a process, many organisations have established more or less formal 'communities of practice' which regularly exchange knowledge around specific themes. This has happened in corporations as well as organisations that focus on development – the World Bank is a notable example.

Organisational learning thus involves exchanges between staff members, so that people can learn from the experience of others when they try to implement a project. In that sense one may discern a demand side and a supply side of knowledge. The demand side is eager to incorporate the lessons learned by others into the design of a particular activity, while the supply side may have such knowledge to offer. On the demand side, several processes may take place: scanning (finding out who in the organisation has relevant experience to share and getting in touch with them), interpretation (adapting what others have learned to one's own context) and putting the knowledge in practice (starting a new cycle of organisational learning). The problem here is that people on the demand side often do not actively seek the knowledge of others. This can make organisational learning initiatives, often started by management, quite artificial. On the supply side, processes include joint sense-making of experiences, generalisation (determining what part of knowledge is relevant to others and translating lessons into more general terms), and dissemination (face-to-face or through codification). Bringing the demand and supply sides together may be done by a person playing the role of a broker. This may be a trainer, external advisor, or internal learning officer. (Smit 2006: 11-13)

Learning can take place at different organisational levels. It has been said that at the management level, *strategic learning* takes place while among employees actually implementing activities, *tactical learning* predominates. While tactical learning is confined to improving the

effectiveness of daily dealings and activities through practice, strategic learning concerns itself with basic questions about the goal of the organisation and ways to achieve it. It takes the form of broad, long-term planning and may include ‘third-order’ questions about the aims and identity of the organisation. (Turel 2005, drawing on Minzberg) This distinction between organisational levels and their specific types of learning is rather stylised; reality is more blurred. Of particular importance for organisational learning is the interaction among different levels. For example, strategic learning at management level is unlikely to occur without signals coming from operational levels that organisational strategies might be improved. However, this interaction among levels is often problematic. In many instances, organisational levels speak different languages. For example, in larger NGOs the management tends to speak in conceptual, generalised terms while operational staff tend to emphasise the context-specificity of knowledge and do not often generalise beyond the regions or thematic areas in which they work.⁵²

Taking all these issues into account, the questions that much of the organisational learning literature concerns itself with are, first, how to create optimal opportunities for learning at all levels of the organisation, and between levels of the organisation (*creating a learning environment*). Secondly, organisational learning revolves around finding ways to ensure that organisational learning is not merely first-order, but second- or third-order (*building an organisation’s capacity for self-reflection and self-renewal*). Various suggestions are made to achieve these goals. Publications by Boonstra and Britton mention a number of organisational characteristics that promote learning, thereby summing up much of the literature about this issue. They write that the dynamics of an organisation increase and make room for learning and renewal if it has the following characteristics.⁵³

Atmosphere and culture:

- There is openness to new ideas and challenges.
- Feelings and assumptions regarding renewal can be discussed.
- There is an atmosphere of safety in which to express and manage uncertainties.

⁵² Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst (2003: 7) and MBN Werkgroep Kwaliteit (2006: 7). This issue also came to the fore in discussions during the course mentioned in note 36.

⁵³ The following list draws on Boonstra 2004, Britton 2005, and Taylor et al. 2006.

Leadership:

- There is supportive leadership, which places learning high on the agenda.
- Time and money is made available for learning processes.
- The leadership communicates the importance of learning to organisational members, and recognises and rewards their contributions to learning processes.
- Conceptual clarity is provided about what is meant by organisational learning and what kinds of activities contribute to it.

Individual competencies:

- The development of individuals' learning competences is supported. These competences include reflection on practice and on one's own role, interpersonal communication skills, and networking and relationship building.
- Staff members have the capacity to think creatively (rather than being skilled in focusing in depth on a single subject or having a very bureaucratic background)

Organisational structure and processes:

- There is space and time for reflection and discussion about actions and lessons learned.
- Many actors with different points of view (inside and outside of the organisation) interact.
- There is a high degree of interactions between actors and differences between them are made visible.
- There is transparency and access to information; information and feedback circulate rapidly.
- Room is created for processes of self-organisation and employees have the flexibility to experiment.
- Learning is integrated into the planning and evaluation cycle.

How can one see the extent to which organisational learning takes place? According to Britton,

“[i]ndications of a learning culture can be seen when colleagues are confident to express their thoughts and feelings and share their knowledge; when colleagues ask questions of one another, listen to each other and constructively challenge each other's assumptions; when mistakes are rarely repeated; when long-standing colleagues are not cynical about their work and when problems are exposed and dealt with without blame. At an organisational level, a learning culture would be indicated when there is a sense of progression in new

initiatives and when the organisation's leadership recognises and prioritises learning as an aspect of good practice." (Britton 2005: 17)

3.2.2 Knowledge management

The concept of knowledge management is somewhat difficult to separate from organisational learning and knowledge exchange, as the term knowledge management is used with various, quite different meanings, some of which overlap significantly or entirely with other concepts. One definition of knowledge management is that it is a way of "getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time and helping people share and put information into action in ways that strive to improve organizational performance" (O'Dell et al. 1998). This definition in fact covers all organisational endeavours to share knowledge and learn, and does not tell us much about the unique characteristics of knowledge management, if there are any. What is interesting however is that the definition equals knowledge with information.

That leads us to an issue that is often mentioned in critiques of knowledge management (at least in its original form), namely that it focuses too exclusively on information retention and accessibility through technological means such as databases, web communities, newsletters, intranet, and document management systems. This technology of developing organisational memory can be important as a means to an end, but it has its limits; it focuses on the retention but not the use of knowledge. Technical knowledge management solutions also assume that all knowledge is objective and can be codified, leaving out tacit knowledge entirely. Indeed, knowledge management emerged in part as a response to new information technologies and was characterised by a great faith in the potential of these technologies to retain, circulate and use knowledge within an organisation in order to enhance competitiveness. In this sense the traditional concept of knowledge management (and its popularity until recently) is based on the cognitive school, which assumes that knowledge can be managed just like any other resource. However, the cognitive school has its limitations in that it separates thought from action (see 3.1.2). As a result, knowledge management became little more than information management. (Sauquet 2004: 377-378)

This original form of knowledge management did have its value: it helped organisations keep better track of what they know, to retain their organisational memory, and to make it accessible. It also led to the

development of more effective forms of communication. What it did not do, however, is think about the *application* of knowledge. Nor did it lead to the generation of genuinely new ideas. (Britton 2005: 7; Keursten 2006: 4) In more recent years, therefore, literature on knowledge management has broadened its focus, recognising the importance of tacit knowledge and the limits of information technology. This “second generation knowledge management” (Britton 2005: 8) no longer solely focuses on its original strategy of top-down standardisation and codification of data, but includes bottom-up strategies to preserve, share and use tacit and explicit knowledge from all layers of the organisation. (Ballantyne 2001)

Thus, the knowledge management field is moving beyond technical means for knowledge retention toward a focus on the people that are central to organisations and on the development of processes that help them share and use their collective knowledge (Britton 2005: 8). This has brought the concept of knowledge management closer to that of organisational learning. In fact, in many cases it is impossible to separate the two concepts, and they are often used interchangeably.

3.2.3 Scaffolds: knowledge institutions and other external actors

We will see later on that Southern peace NGO staff emphasise the importance of interaction for their learning processes. The literature on organisational learning recognises this as well. This section builds on the brief discussion of interactive learning in 3.2.1 and focuses on the role of other people in the learning of individuals and their organisations. Smid and Beckett (2004: 409-411) look at the limits of individual learning and the opportunities for more extensive learning presented by others. They see a distance between the performance a student is capable of on his or her own, and the performance (s)he can attain in collaboration with a more knowledgeable or skilled colleague. This colleague then functions as a ‘scaffold’. A ‘scaffold’ does not necessarily have to be an individual. It can be anything in the environment of the learner, including the structure of an organisation and the room and opportunities it creates for individual learning. The organisation itself then is also a ‘scaffold’. It can also be a training course that contributes to the understanding and individual has of his situation. Scaffolds, then, are people and structures that help direct and shape the development of the individual learner. As critical outsiders with fresh perspectives, scaffolds may ask the difficult questions (‘why are you doing this and not something else?’) that help a learner move beyond first-order learning towards second- or third-order learning.

Formal education may serve as a scaffold supporting and deepening someone's learning from practice if it stimulates him to relate the theories to his own experience. In line with this, Smid and Beckett (2004: 410) distinguish between a "teaching curriculum" and a "learning curriculum". In a teaching curriculum, along the lines of the behavioural school described in above, support for learning consists of presenting knowledge and facilitating internalisation. This may function as a scaffold but the knowledge may not stick because it is not related to the personal experience of learners. In a learning curriculum support means to use the conflict arising between the activity of the individual learner and existing thinking - the basic principle of a 'Socratic dialogue' - and to enhance development by inviting the individual and collective production of new analytical frameworks.

Smid and Beckett (2004: 411) conceptualise organisational learning as follows. The point of departure is an activity in the real world. To test efficiency, people experiment with this activity. Others may imitate it, attempting to adapt it to their own situation. In this context, exchanges with others over work methods and effectiveness play an important role. In this way, knowledge and rules of thumb are developed. Aided by a third party (who functions as a scaffold), it is possible to develop activities at a deeper level, creating new individual and collective competencies that enable innovative practices. The third party provides an external view that enables the individual to step back from practice and reflect. From this perspective, interaction with an external partner may lead to a better process of reflection and learning. One such partner could be a university, which can provide third party support focused on the learning process. Interaction with an academic partner also creates "transferable competencies": a person's skills and knowledge are recognised and objectified through a degree or diploma that is recognised by others. (Smid and Beckett 2004: 411)⁵⁴

3.2.4 Organisational learning tools

Many different tools have been developed for organisations in order to improve their learning capacity. This section briefly mentions some examples to give an idea of the kinds of measures that are taken. Tools that may stimulate organisational learning include the following.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ We will examine this in chapter eight.

⁵⁵ The list of tools is based mainly on NHS 2005 and Ramalingham 2006. As discussed, most organisational learning and knowledge management text books emphasise that these tools will only work in a learning environment (see 3.2.1). They are unlikely to be effective unless the

- *Knowledge audit*: as a starting point to introducing organisational learning tools, a qualitative evaluation may be held of the knowledge needs, assets, and flows may be held: what are the gaps between knowledge needs and assets? Does knowledge flow from those who have it to those who need it? What obstacles exist? The outcome may be a knowledge map: a visual representation of the organisation's knowledge assets and flows.
- *White pages* are like a staff directory but include details on people's knowledge, skills, experiences and interests. They aim to enable staff to gain access to the tacit knowledge of others.
- *After Action Review*: a discussion to draw lessons from a project or activity after it has taken place.
- *Exit interviews* held with employees who leave an organisation in order to capture the knowledge they have accumulated about "what it takes to do the job", so that colleagues and new personnel may learn from this.
- *Best practices*: a practice widely used also in the NGO world is the identification and sharing of best practices – processes or methods that have proven effective in achieving objectives.
- *Communities of practice*: many organisations have formalised the idea of communities of practice described earlier in this chapter. Thematic groups are formed that regularly exchange knowledge. According to the knowledge management literature, such communities should have voluntary membership, a specific focus, and no definition of tangible results.
- *Action learning sets* are more action-oriented communities of practice that come together for shared reflection and feedback in several stages of the learning cycle described in section 3.1.3. Members of the action learning set constructively challenge one another's assumptions and perceptions, which may lead to new understanding that can be tested in practice. After that has been done, the set meets again in order to discuss the results, explicitly formulating learning points and adapting theories of action before a new cycle of action learning begins.
- *Peer assists*: a formal process in which a team working on a specific activity calls in other teams to ask about their experiences and insights for the benefit of the project at hand. The demand-driven nature of peer assists has advantages over knowledge strategies that focus on the supply-side of making

organisational culture is one of learning and sharing, the leadership of the organisation genuinely supports and promotes learning, and there is sufficient 'social capital' – trust and relationships - within the organisation.

knowledge available without a concrete purpose. People on the supply-side may be more willing to take the time to share their experiences when it is likely that their knowledge will be used for a specific purpose.

- *Storytelling* may be a way to share knowledge in a way that is less dry and technical than with other tools. Stories show the relevance of information in-context. Storytelling is an ancient activity and is still prevalent in many non-Western parts of the world.
- *Thinking hats*, a technique developed by Edward de Bono (2000), enable groups to look at an issue from different points of view and thereby come to more creative insights than otherwise might be the case. Participants in meetings are assigned different thinking hats. The person wearing the white hat looks at the issue in an objective manner, focusing on facts and numbers available. The person wearing the red hat looks at problems in an emotional way, using intuition, judgments and suspicions. The black hat is a negative hat that focuses the wearer on risks and possible negative effects of an activity, while the yellow hat is positive, optimistic and constructive. The green hat is creative and seeks alternatives. The wearer of the blue hat, finally, keeps track of process and discussions – this is the person chairing the meeting.
- *Knowledge centres* are instituted in many organisations. Such centres do not only perform a library function but also create directories that may help staff members find whoever possesses tacit knowledge on a particular topic.
- *Technological tools* such as databases and intranets are usually used to support all these organisational learning methods.

Returning to the distinction made in chapter two between tacit, explicit, and implicit knowledge, we may now categorise these tools according to their aims. Do organisational learning tools aim to create, store, or share knowledge? And do they aim at tacit, explicit, or implicit knowledge?

		Knowledge		
Purpose		Tacit	Explicit	Implicit
	Create	(Action) research Workshops Thinking hats	Knowledge audit	Staff exchanges
	Store	Knowledge audit Exit interviews White pages Monitoring and evaluation Best practices	Knowledge centres Database Intranet	
	Share	Training Communities of practice Storytelling After action reviews Peer assists	E-mail Publications	Storytelling

Table 3.2: Categorising organisational learning tools⁵⁶

The table shows that the majority of tools discussed in the knowledge management and organisational learning literature aim at the creation, storing or sharing of tacit knowledge. The reason is probably that tacit knowledge is more difficult to create, store and share than explicit knowledge and therefore much of the attention is focused on this category. Little attention is paid, however, to creating, storing and sharing implicit or cultural knowledge. This is unfortunate because cultural knowledge is likely to be very important for our field of analysis: knowledge processes of Southern peace NGOs.

3.3 Development of learning in development

In the second half of the nineties, the development sector began to see the relevance of such knowledge strategies to its own activities. Unlike for the corporate sector, for the development sector organisational efficiency is not the only aim. In order to work towards their larger development objectives, development agencies “not only need efficient internal coordination, but also increased ability to be responsive to the situation of the poor, and ability to influence debates and policy processes” (Hovland 2003: 5). The World Bank pioneered the application of knowledge management in the development community. In 1996 the Bank announced its intention to become “the Knowledge Bank” and in 1998 it entitled its World Development Report

⁵⁶ Adapted from Ramalingham 2005: 5

“Knowledge for Development” (Ramalingham 2005: 8). Like the corporate sector, the World Bank’s approach was meant to improve its own business processes. Internal measures included building communities of practice and developing an online knowledge base and directory of expertise. However, in line with the aims of the development sector, the Bank added an external knowledge sharing approach aiming at interaction with the wider development community. This sharing approach was based on the principle that knowledge is the foundation of equitable and sustainable development – a principle increasingly gaining ground. (Kalseth and Cummings 2001: 168)

The World Bank external knowledge sharing approach consisted of the creation of two knowledge networks, the Global Development Network (GDNet) and the Global Development Gateway. GDNet is research-oriented, aiming to enhance the quality and availability of policy-oriented studies (Clark and Squire 2005). The Development Gateway aims to be an internet portal website on development issues. However, the Gateway has been criticised for appearing to be a neutral and independent resource whilst its content is controlled by the World Bank. (Kalseth and Cummings 2001: 169-179) Given that some consider the Bank’s knowledge agenda to be overly narrow, neglecting socio-cultural differences and the links between local development issues and the wider political economy (Mehta 2001, cited in Hovland 2003: 8), this would be quite problematic. Leaving aside the discussion on the content of the World Bank’s knowledge networks, another point of criticism has been that World Bank knowledge policies are still considered to be too internally oriented. Indeed, in 2000 the Bank itself concluded that “[k]nowledge work at the Bank must be more firmly rooted in client demand. While shifts have occurred, the approach remains too internally focused and supply oriented. This undermines impact, client ownership and capacity building, learning from the outside world, and skews priorities” (World Bank 2000, cited in Kalseth and Cummings 2001: 170).

The World Bank’s pioneering focus on knowledge strategies was soon followed by others in the development sector, mainly those based in the North, such as donor agencies and international NGOs. The latter have become particularly active in the knowledge and learning field in the last few years. Particularly in the United Kingdom, independent think tanks and training institutes, such as the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) in Oxford and the London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI), publish on the issue and stimulate the discussion. Academic institutions like the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) of the University of Sussex contribute to the field as well,

as does the NGO network British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND). In the Netherlands, the umbrella organisation of development organisations PSO increasingly focuses on organisational learning as a capacity building strategy. In addition, government agencies acting as donors of NNGOs have begun to emphasise organisational learning capacity as a funding prerequisite⁵⁷.

As with the World Bank, however, the learning activities of development and conflict NGOs have so far remained largely internally focused. Little attention has been paid to learning in interaction with partners in the South. Nor has there been much regard for the particular knowledge and learning challenges faced by Southern organisations. A recent study by Ramalingham of the knowledge strategies of bilateral, multilateral and non-governmental international development organisations found that “the majority [of their staff members] identified the need to address internal issues first, before looking at external issues” (Ramalingham 2005: 26). It may be questioned whether this is the right order, as it means that the knowledge strategies and processes adopted are based on the needs and inputs of Northern, not Southern, staff. Ramalingham (2005: 33) confirms that “there was no sense of how the tools might need adaptation in the context of Southern realities, and how they might add to or compare with existing approaches such as capacity development or participation”. Indeed, when the staff members interviewed for his study spoke of external knowledge strategies they referred mostly to disseminating knowledge from within the agencies to outside actors; only few mentioned the need for information flowing from outside to inside the organisation (Ramalingham 2005: 26).

3.4 The learning strategies of Northern NGOs

3.4.1 Characterising the organisational learning of NNGOs

While the learning of SNGOs and their interaction with partners in the North thus remain under-researched (and under-practiced), a number of publications has recently appeared on the learning processes of Northern-based development and peace NGOs, looking for characteristics that distinguish their knowledge processes from those that take place in corporations⁵⁸. One issue emerging from them is that NGO staff tend to characterise themselves as having an activist working

⁵⁷ For knowledge and learning policies of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, see MBN Werkgroep Kwaliteit (2006: 2) and Heres and Bieckmann (2007: 9).

⁵⁸ Hovland 2003, Ramalingham 2005 and 2006, Smit 2006, Taylor et al. 2006, BOND 2003.

style. Thinking and doing are somewhat separated, and doing receives most attention. However, NGO staff members are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of reflection on, and drawing lessons from, their work.

In 3.1.1 a number of learning moments as seen by NNGO staff were recounted. They implied that, like their Southern counterparts (see 2.3), NNGO staff members primarily learn in interaction. However, procedures set up in NNGOs to promote organisational learning often consider knowledge more as an object that can be transferred from one person to another, rather than something that is created in interaction. The organisations have difficulty moving from cognitive information management to people-centred learning processes. A recent study of NNGOs concludes that the “widespread and tangible outputs of knowledge and learning work tend, thus far, to be based on improved information systems, rather than improved processes or changed behaviours” and that as a consequence, their learning structures are “more supply-led than demand-driven”. A tendency was noted among these organisations to “point to information systems as the ‘end product’ rather than specific processes for knowledge and learning”. (Ramalingham 2005: 14-15) The study warns that this trend may end up contributing to “the increasing prevalence of ‘information graveyards’”. In the final analysis, IT systems cannot be relied upon to create relationships that are at the heart of effective [knowledge sharing]” (Ramalingham 2005: 31).

There are, however, some more positive experiences of NGOs to note. The United Kingdom (UK) government’s Department for International Development (DfID), the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (Oxfam) UK, and Pax Christi Netherlands have experimented with regular reflection weeks, in which staff do not travel but withdraw and reflect together. Another tool has been developed by Action Aid, which has replaced country office reports with annual “participatory reviews and reflections” in which programme beneficiaries participate. The reviews record achievements, discuss challenges and constraints, and reflect on what works and why. Reporting on these reviews and reflections is “light” according to Action Aid, the format is left open and creative methods of reporting are used.⁵⁹

Some NGOs – such as the Dutch development organisation Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos) – employ specialised learning officers in order to perform the role of broker

⁵⁹ www.actionaid.org/wps/content_document.asp?doc_id=475 . Read on 11 December 2006.

connecting the demand and supply sides of knowledge. Whether this has led to improved organisational learning is not yet clear, at least not based on the limited information available to me. One may speculate that employing a specialised officer in itself is not enough. It runs the risk of making learning the responsibility of one rather than all, and giving employees the sense that they do not have to worry about learning. Instead – or in addition to employing a learning officer – each staff member has to become aware of his or her own function in making knowledge available to others, as well as asking others for theirs. This requires a learning culture.

Thinking back to the theory of learning presented earlier in this chapter, some questions arise with regard to the learning processes of NGOs: are they generally tactical (first-order) or strategic (second- or third order)? How much interaction takes place between organisational levels? Do NGOs generally have a learning culture? In the literature not much information can be found about these questions. Upcoming chapters of this book will contribute to answering them, at least for SNGOs (see chapter five in particular). However, at this point a few general points can be made. First, in many NGOs learning is intertwined with reporting and accountability towards donors. This makes it difficult for NGOs to learn at the second- or third-order level. Where first-order learning is merely about realising tactical and operational improvements to a given project, these deeper levels require considering whether a project has been the right one to start with or even whether an organisation is doing the right thing at all. Discussing these questions immediately risks losing the funds that have been allocated to a project. (Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst 2003: 7)

Second, studies about organisational learning in NNGOs suggest that in many cases, individual learning does not yet lead to organisational learning. “Information is acquired through studies and evaluations, but the conclusions are not followed up or disseminated to the appropriate places in the organisation”. (Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst 2003: 6) Part of the problem is that interaction between different organisational levels and departments is difficult in NGOs. The different departments and levels often speak different ‘languages’ and are to different extents tied to the context in which they work. Many organisations have for example established thematic departments, but their communication with regional and country departments remains a challenge⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst (2003: 7) and MBN Werkgroep Kwaliteit (2006: 7). This issue also came to the fore in research done by participants of the course mentioned in note 36.

On the positive side, compared to other organisations NGOs tend to be relatively informal and have little hierarchy, which may make inter-level interaction actually easier (Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst 2003: 6). However, while a 'flat' organisation like Hivos is in principle conducive to free interaction and sharing, in practice informal personal networks may predominate in such an organisation and make it difficult for newer, younger staff to participate fully⁶¹. This suggests that it is necessary to find a balance between too much and too little structure when it comes to supporting organisational learning.

3.4.2 Organisational characteristics affecting NNGO learning

In section 3.2 a number of organisational characteristics were listed that foster a learning culture. They included openness to new ideas and challenges, a supportive and facilitative leadership that rewards learning, the development of the learning competences of individuals, space and time for reflection and discussion, a high degree of interaction between actors with different points of view, transparency of information, an atmosphere of safety in which to express doubts, flexibility for employees to organise and experiment, and the integration of learning into the planning and evaluation cycle. In addition to these characteristics that apply to all organisations, a number of factors conducive to organisational learning have been mentioned that are more or less specific to NGOs working for development and peace. As we saw in section 1.4.2, by their very nature NGOs tend to be flexible, adaptive and innovative, at least compared to governmental and intergovernmental institutions. Related to this, characteristics of NGOs that stimulate learning include

- exposure to the outside world, close relationships to beneficiaries and communities so as to stay in touch with reality,
- direct pressure from grassroots groups and social change leaders to keep looking for new solutions to desperate problems, and
- willingness to surface, identify and cope with issues of power, inequality and differing agendas. (Taylor et al. 2006: 28)

Although these are important potential advantages, knowledge processes in NGOs are complicated by a number of obstacles. In particular, an often-mentioned obstacle to learning and knowledge exchange is work

⁶¹ According to one study, this is the case for the Dutch NGO Hivos (MBN Werkgroep Kwaliteit 2006: 7).

pressure and a lack of time.⁶² NGO staff see the importance of knowledge sharing and are willing, in principle, to engage in exchanges, but time is money, and knowledge exchange and learning are often considered an extra cost to the organisation. Maintaining regular cross-organisational contacts, making space for reflection, and participating in discussion meetings can be time-intensive and costly, and the benefits from an investment in knowledge are vague and ambiguous. This is inevitable: the whole point of learning is that the outcome will be new and unknown. But donors increasingly emphasise ‘direct-impact’ activities and pressure NGOs to minimise resources not spent directly on projects. Particularly organisations that are dependent on project financing find that there is very little room to take a step back from the daily practice of project management and reflect on lessons learned.

The situation is compounded by the fact that for people working on conflict there is always a sense of urgency and a need to respond to rapidly changing circumstances. The limited time available makes it particularly necessary to fall back on the experience of others, and the quickly changing circumstances demand that there is a continuous updating of knowledge. In addition, the issues dealt with are often political in nature, adding politics to the pressures that bear upon staff members and managers. More so than in the private sector, the work of managers in the public sector, be it governments or NGOs, is to a large extent politics- and therefore incident-driven (Noordergraaf 2000: 262). Table 3.3 summarises the contradictory pressures that the staff of international NGOs face.

EFFICIENCY	LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgency: act quickly • Apply standard procedures • Concentrate on large scale projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt to local circumstances • React in a flexible way • Give local staff larger role • Take political situation into account • Keep gender and environmental impacts in mind • Show experimental attitude

Table 3.3: Contradictory pressures on the staff of NNGOs

Additional complicating factors for the organisational learning of NNGOs include

- The island culture of organisations: in the decentralised organisations that NGOs often are, staff members are confined

⁶² Out of ten people interviewed at Cordaid by Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst (2003: 7), seven mentioned “time constraints due to workload as a major obstacle”. See also MBN Werkgroep Kwaliteit (2006: 8).

to one project or region and do not interact much. In addition, the geographical distance between headquarters and field offices often leads to information gaps. At the same time, the geographical range of NGOs may be an advantage in that it may enable them to connect knowledge coming from the local all the way to the international level.

- The target groups of NGOs (variously called ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘stakeholders’) are not the same people as their donors. While most NGOs feel they should be accountable to their beneficiaries, in practice they tend to be accountable primarily to their donors. This is true for both NNGOs and SNGOs. It complicates knowledge flows, something that will be elaborated in chapter four.
- There is usually a high need for success stories to legitimate the existence of NGOs. Indeed, with increasing pressures to show results, a shift has taken place in the public relations strategies of NGOs. Instead of presenting miserable people in precarious situations (which could portray the message that development efforts have little effect), they increasingly try to show successful examples of aid. This emphasis on success stories makes it difficult to pay attention to learning from mistakes. More fundamentally, as discussed earlier, admitting mistakes may mean taking responsibility for failing to save human lives.
- Finally, cultural differences within organisations may be more salient for NGOs than for corporations, because NGOs often have their headquarters in one continent and their field offices in another. Those that do not tend to work with local partners in developing countries. Cultural differences may lead to misunderstandings and since people reason from very different contexts the transfer of tacit knowledge becomes even more difficult than it normally already is. Cultural sensitivity and implicit knowledge transfer are necessary, and this may present problems.

3.4.3 Improving organisational learning by NNGOs

The Dutch development organisation Hivos writes in its 2003 Knowledge Sharing Strategy: “An oft-heard obstacle to knowledge sharing is work pressure and a lack of time. For this reason, knowledge sharing must be included in the normal policy cycle and integrated into the regular work schedule.” (Hivos 2003: 4) How can this be achieved? For one thing, making contributions to knowledge exchange and

learning could be made part of job descriptions and performance appraisals. A recent Economist publication about innovation puts it as follows:

“It is not enough to have original thinking. It must be recognised, valued and put into practice. [...] A lack of innovation usually indicates that managers at all levels lack the awareness or motivation to spot the potential of the ideas floating around their organisation. They may see original thinking as a threat and therefore discourage it.” (Syrett and Lammiman 2002: 37-38)

As characteristics of an innovative organisation the Economist publication mentions a diverse workforce, opportunities for casual exchanges, and an encouragement to share information. These facets should be reflected in personnel policy as well as the shaping of organisational structure and routines. Overall, organisational flexibility is vital: management needs to be open to changes in direction as a result of learning and suggestions from staff. In the present field of analysis, this bears also upon the donors: demanding rigid planning and strictly holding aid recipients to their earlier plans may limit flexibility and learning, in a double way: it restricts the time available for reflection, and it limits the leeway to change course and procedures as a result of learning.

Also of significance for fostering learning despite countervailing pressures is the work culture of an organisation: its rules, habits, interaction styles, symbols, values and world view (Boonstra 2004: 3). Adjustments to organisational routines can create space for changes in work culture, but these latter changes eventually make the difference. “Research [...] provides further support for an emphasis that is less on devising management systems to ‘control’ learning or to ‘manage’ knowledge, more on finding new ways to encourage people to think creatively and feed their thoughts back into the organisation” (Kessels and Harrison 2004: 2). As we saw above, a culture that stimulates learning is one that fosters an atmosphere of safety in which to discuss feelings, uncertainties and assumptions. Trust, a cooperative (rather than competitive) culture, the rewarding of knowledge sharing, and an atmosphere tolerant of mistakes are a part of this (Sauquet 2004: 382-3).

3.5 The South as a gap in the literature

The review of the growing amount of literature on organisational learning by peace and development NGOs reveals an important gap in both the literature and the organisational activities it describes: they

hardly deal with Southern organisations. A number of quotes are given here that make this gap painfully clear. King (2004: unnumbered) notes that

“as the new ideas about multilateral and bilateral bodies becoming knowledge agencies and learning organisations [...] began to circulate in the late 1990s, it was plain that they were sourced very much from the corporate sector in North America and Europe. There was, accordingly, a powerful tendency for the emphasis to be on the capture, synthesis and more cost-effective utilisation of the agencies’ enormous existing knowledge bases rather than on the generation of new knowledge.”

Hovland’s (2003: 12) annotated bibliography of organisational learning in the development sector concludes (abbreviating the term knowledge management to KM) that

“Northern NGOs have so far implemented KM to alleviate their own information blockages – based on the same rationale of efficiency and profit as corporate businesses – rather than using KM to address key questions of how they can contribute to knowledge development in the South. [...] Can KM/learning increase the responsiveness of Southern and Northern institutional processes to the situation of the ‘beneficiaries’? Can KM/learning help to connect the voice of the poor with the institutional knowledge of development/civil society organisations?”

Indeed, the earlier-mentioned study of learning in Cordaid found that “[l]earning processes of [Southern] partners is something that Cordaid says it considers, but people admit that more attention could be paid to this” (Van Dijkhorst and Hilhorst 2003: 9-10). According to Ramalingham (2005: 26), this situation is particularly striking given the nature and mission of development organisations, which base their knowledge on their work in the South. Northern development organisations’

“focus on internal knowledge work belies the fact that all the [studied] organisations relied on activities in the South as a key source of their most valued knowledge, and that eventually, all knowledge that is ‘value generating’ must by necessity be tied back to a level of [knowledge sharing] with those in the South. [...] Learning between agencies, between agencies and Southern partners, and between agencies and beneficiaries, is a clear gap in the knowledge and learning strategies [of international development organisations]”.

Dutch development policymakers Wiedenhof and Molenaar (2006: 11) explain why their internal focus does not help learning by development agencies:

“[k]nowledge management is often perceived as an internal corporate concern [...]. When it comes to learning and knowledge production, it really makes not much sense to focus on internal processes. Like any other form of learning, organizational learning takes place in context. For an organization to fulfil its mandate, it needs to interact with its environment. This interaction is the prime source for learning relevant lessons. Internal processes for sharing such lessons and anchoring knowledge within the organization are of secondary order only.”

Therefore, in the words of Taylor et al. (2006: 29), it is important to “create mechanisms inside organizations for incorporating the voice of the constituencies, or ‘consumers’ as a way to ensure learning practices that allow groups to be in touch with the realities/ problems faced by our constituencies and the ‘real’ world outside the organizations.”

However, there are two bodies of literature that do pay attention to knowledge flows involving SNGOs – even though they do not directly discuss organisational learning strategies. These are capacity building (3.6) and NGO networking (3.7).

3.6 Capacity building: from knowledge transfer to mutual learning?

Although it is usually not connected to thinking about NGO organisational learning, there is one set of literature – mostly from NNGO sources – that does address knowledge strategies of NNGOs vis-à-vis their Southern counterparts: the literature on capacity building. For that reason, the concept of capacity building is discussed in this section. In the next chapter, we will compare the theory of NGO capacity building to the practice encountered in the field.

Capacity is knowledge that enables a person to do something. It is a skill or competence. But capacity also includes a structural aspect – the context in which a person operates allows him to exercise his competence. Capacity building is a development strategy based on the adagio ‘give someone a fish and he eats for a day; teach someone to fish, and he can feed himself for a lifetime’. It aims to assist people and institutions in developing countries to develop their capacities so that they can create their own welfare, build their own peace, and run their own government. Capacity building aims to make development processes sustainable as they become less dependent on external money and knowledge.

As mentioned, capacity development needs to take place at the level of both agent and structure. “Learning is the key ingredient [...]. There is, however, a limit to what an individual or organization can achieve through informal learning” (Lopes and Theisohn 2003: 22). This is where the structure, consisting of institutions, regulations, and social relations, comes in. Because of the structural aspect of capacity building (the need to create the space for people to exercise their abilities), capacity building can also be a political process as it may be necessary to change power structures. “Capacity building is fundamentally a human process of development and change that involves shifts and transformations in relationships and power”. (James and Wrigley 2006: 6)

The UNDP distinguishes the following levels of capacity and capacity building:

- At the level of individuals, capacity building strategies at this level include training programmes, science and technology transfer and development, and increasing internet access.
- At the level of institutions, which “offer continuity and act as repositories of knowledge and experience, reducing dependency on single individuals, while enabling access to accumulated knowledge” (Lopes and Theisohn 2003: 23), strategies focus on improving organisational structures and procedures, improving management, and building organisational learning capacity.
- At the level of the society as a whole, “especially a country and its governance”, capacity building strategies largely focus on strengthening governments and making them more accountable. “The importance of this level of capacity was not fully appreciated until quite recently. Capacity development efforts focused mainly on individual skills and institutions, tacitly assuming that other factors – usually described as externalities or an enabling environment – would sort themselves out. But experience has shown that externalities such as corruption, governance systems or conflict-prone attitudes [...] have impeded – and even brought down – many capacity development initiatives.” (Lopes and Theisohn 2003: 24) In addition to government-oriented strategies, societal capacity building may also include civil society development and the strengthening of legal institutions.

The UNDP (Lopes and Theisohn 2003: 26) has identified core capacities for development at the individual, institutional and societal levels, including:

1. to be guided by key values and a sense of purpose
2. to define and analyse their environment and their own place in the greater scheme of things
3. to define the issues and reach working agreements on purposes or mandates
4. to manage and resolve conflicts
5. to formulate strategies
6. to plan, and act on those plans
7. to acquire and mobilise resources
8. to learn new skills and approaches on a continuous basis
9. to build supporting relationships with other parties
10. to assess performance and make adjustments
11. to meet new challenges proactively, by adjusting agendas, approaches and strategies.

Lopes and Theisohn (2003: 26-27) further note that “all of them are underpinned by fundamental abilities. The formulation of policies and strategies, for instance, calls for more than a structured mind and writing skills. First, it requires a vision of the ultimate goal. Then it demands a whole range of capabilities and mechanisms relating to leadership, engagement and dialogue. Knowledge of the stakeholders and the management of a meaningful process including large groups of people are important, as are the facilities to table tricky issues, negotiate, mediate between divergent interests and manage forms of conflict resolution.” What is also interesting in the UNDP’s list of capacities is the importance of a learning capacity for development, as shown particularly in capacities 8 and 11. Indeed, “[l]earning lies at the heart of capacity development, since it entails a conscious approach to change” (BOND and Exchange 2004: 2).

There are various approaches to capacity building. For example, an instrumental approach holds that “capacity building is about improving project implementation, results and accountabilities” while a transformational approach focuses on shifting relationships and power dynamics. “Those who believe that capacity building must deliver quick, measurable results and can be achieved through the simple transfer of skills, will favour a more instrumental approach. Those who believe that capacity building requires a change in power relationships will take a transformational approach.” (James and Wrigley 2006: 4) We will see in the next chapter that in the practice of North-South peacebuilding and development partnerships among NGOs an instrumental approach is usually taken.

The concept of capacity building is closely linked to that of local ownership. According to most writings about the concept, capacity building needs to be a demand-driven and participatory process and cannot be driven by external interveners. As is illustrated by Figure 3.3, capacity building should “help people and organisations to find their own solutions, involving those that it is meant to support” (Groot and Gerwen 2004: 4).

Figure 3.3: Local solutions to local problems⁶³

Ideally, then, capacity building should involve several steps:

- Participatory problem analysis, involving target groups and partner(s)
- Participatory context and organisation analysis
- Shared strategic choice for capacity building of one (or more) organisations
- Results-based and coherent intervention plan
- Tailor-made interventions
- Tailor-made monitoring and evaluation system focusing on accountability and learning
- Sufficient implementation capacity among partner(s) (Groot and Gerwen 2004: iv)

Such a locally-owned process includes building on existing capacities rather than inserting completely new ones. This would make solutions

⁶³ Groot and Gerwen 2004: 2

more applicable to the local context and more supported by those who will implement them. In order to make this principle clear, the UNDP prefers to use the concept ‘capacity development’ which emphasises that capacities already exist and are merely supported to develop further. Figure 3.4 below illustrates the difference between capacity building and what the UNDP calls organic capacity development. If imported capacities do not build on existing ones, then they will not be relevant and miss their target. The reason for this is that

“[t]oday we know that knowledge cannot be transferred. It has to be acquired, learned and reinvented. And it encompasses both the deep pool of local understanding that is the very foundation of learning, and the wealth of global information that can be reconceived to meet local needs. When adaptation fails to happen, however, there is no ownership and likely no lasting capacity development.” (Lopes and Theisohn 2003: 4)

Organic capacity development, on the other hand, is conceived as an interactive process of knowledge sharing with local actors in order to find out what their capacities are and help develop them by strategically inserting knowledge where it is needed. Although local stakeholders play a leading role, the role of the external facilitator is very important. External actors may provide structure, introduce an external perspective, share learning from other organisations and knowledge institutions, inject energy, reduce tensions that may arise among stakeholders in the process, and ensure that an organisation does not get caught up and distracted by other activities. (James and Wrigley 2004: 20)

Figure 3.4: Organic capacity development according to the UNDP⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Lopes and Theisohn 2003: 10

Theoretically, then, a good capacity building strategy uses participatory techniques and is embedded in the specific local and organisational context. Its approach is people-centred but also pays attention to systemic elements. (James and Wrigley 2006: 12-14) The implications for development practitioners who aim to build capacities include “a need for facilitation expertise, being flexible rather than working to standardised procedures, and creating opportunities to reflect and transform – that is, learning how to learn from experiences” (BOND and Exchange 2004: 3)

3.7 Networking for peace by NGOs⁶⁵

In chapters six and seven we will see that networking is a common strategy among Southern peace NGOs. In recent years some publications have seen the light that discuss networking as a strategy for NGOs active in peacebuilding. This section gives an overview of some of the main insights of these publications. In the sixth chapter, these insights will be combined with other findings about learning and knowledge sharing by SNGOs to form a list of characteristics that influence the success of networking for peace by NGOs.

3.7.1 Networks and peacebuilding

A network is “a loosely structured form of cooperation, in which coordination is done through a horizontal exchange of information, lacking a clear hierarchy. It is composed of communication links between individuals or groups. The network notion stresses these linkages and allows participants to exchange information and attach meaning to it, thus transforming information into knowledge.” (De la Rive Box 2001) The members of a network can be individuals or organisations “that are working toward a common goal, or whose individual interests are better served within a collective structure”. (Van Deventer 2004: 1)

Some observers consider networks to be particularly suitable to deal with issues of conflict and peace:

“Networks are becoming a favored organizational form wherever a broad operational field is involved (e.g. where links are being made between different regions, or between grassroots to international levels), where problems are so dynamic that rigid structures are not

⁶⁵ Earlier versions of this text have been published in Verkoren 2006a and 2006b (see literature list).

suitable, and where loose ties are preferable to formal organizational bonds. All these features are well known in areas of violent conflicts.” (Van Deventer 2004: 1-2)

A 2001 conference on lessons learned by peacebuilding practitioners formulated the importance of networking in the following way. The conference participants concluded that “[n]etworking has a large role to play in pulling together an expanding, but dispersed field”, and went on to state that

“[t]he field of conflict prevention and peace building is expanding rapidly. [...] However, the field is dispersed over a great number of mostly small organizations. In order to pull all these efforts together and identify gaps in the field, the sharing of information and co-operation is becoming more and more important. [...] Networking can help to avoid a duplication of activities. Also, a broad network is the best guarantee against one-sided approaches to the complex issues involved in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.” (Galama and Van Tongeren 2002: 34)

Another advantage of networking noted during this conference was that it facilitates complementary partnerships, which are necessary in order to deal with the lack of resources in the field of peacebuilding (Galama and Van Tongeren 2002: 34). Other observers agree that complementarity is an important element of networks, which may profit from the diversity of their constituencies (Benner et al. 2004: 197).

By networking, participants can advance the work of their individual organisation and also promote the wider field of the network. Collaboration in networks may expose organisations to new ideas and knowledge, enhance and deepen critical thinking and creativity, and help avoid competition and duplication of activities. Being a member of a network may also add to the credibility and influence of an organisation, and lead to new business opportunities. Networks may also enable individual organisations to address global problems through joint action, based on the realisation that none of the organisations involved can address the issue at stake by itself. Such joint action may also strengthen the outreach capacity of the field as a whole. (Åhäll 2006: 4-7; Galama and Van Tongeren 2002: 34; Benner et al. 2004: 196-197) A Dutch NGO supporting networks in the South for example feels that networking is an important tool to strengthen civil society and social capital in developing, conflict-affected countries. In addition, networks may strengthen the voice of particular marginalized groups – such as the

Bangsamoro in Mindanao - , thereby helping to correct structural inequalities underlying conflicts.⁶⁶

The light structure of networks may allow them to respond quickly to new situations and take new initiatives without going through a heavy bureaucratic process. (Åhäll 2006: 4-7; Galama and Van Tongeren 2002: 34; Benner et al. 2004: 196-197) As an organisational form, networks provide more flexibility and openness than more formal organisations. This means that they are able to adjust in the process of cooperation. As a result, at least in theory, network structures can facilitate constant learning from success and failure. (Benner et al. 2004: 196)

3.7.2 Categorising networks

A common type of network is a knowledge network. According to Stone, a knowledge network has two main functions. First, it coordinates the communication and dissemination of knowledge, acting as an intermediary between intellectual communities in different places. It provides “a space for discussion, setting agendas and developing common visions regarding ‘best practices’, policy or business norms and standards”. This helps to avoid duplication of effort and synchronises ‘communication codes’. It enables the network to speak with a collective voice, leading to its second main function: it can have a greater ability to “attract media attention, political patronage and donor support than an individual or single organisation”. (Stone 2005: 93)

Research on knowledge networks has often focused on scientific networks. However, in practice, and particularly in the world of conflict and development, academics do not monopolise knowledge networks at all:

“for a variety of reasons – such as government cutbacks and funding formulas founded on tuition incomes – universities and their research institutes are rarely in the vanguard of identifying or prioritizing ‘global issues’. Instead, major think tanks and leading NGOs with their own innovative policy departments [...] are taking greater prominence [...]. Hence, the growing salience of national to global knowledge and policy networks.” (Mbabazi, MacLean and Shaw 2005: 157)

Knowledge exchange is an important function of peace networks. Many networks, however, combine their knowledge exchange function with

⁶⁶ Conversation with staff member of a Dutch development organisation. The Hague, The Netherlands, 19 April 2006.

other, more action-oriented functions. In the field of peacebuilding this often means joint lobby and advocacy, research projects or the joint fundraising for, and implementation of, programmes on the ground.

Networks can be categorised in various ways. The following dimensions are discussed in this section: the degree of cooperation and organisation, the focus and objective of a network, and issues related to network accountability and exclusiveness.

Degree of cooperation and organisation

One way to categorise networks is according to their organisation. At one extreme of the organisational spectrum, an organisation may look like a spider web: a strong centralised network consisting of a central board and secretariat, surrounded by circles of members in various levels of involvement from full to partial membership. In this type of network the secretariat coordinates the exchange of knowledge and selects and edits knowledge based on standards of quality and focus. Strong centralised networks are usually found in formalised environments in which sufficient means can be generated to pay for the relatively high coordination costs. They tend to be exclusive in that not everyone can become a member.

At the other extreme is the fish-net or cell-structured network, which often exists in societies with weak institutions or threatening contexts. Such a network is characterised by a low level of organisation and coordination. It is inexpensive but depends heavily on the commitment and activity of its members. (Van Deventer 2004: 7-8) The advantages and disadvantages of either approach are summarised in the table below.

	Decentralised network	Structured network
Pros	Ownership of decisions by members Flexibility: participation in activities is elective Lower cost as less is spent on coordination and secretariat	Systematic coordination & consultation Increased capacity building potential Enhanced visibility/strength of network Clearer lines of accountability
Cons	Small and less 'noisy' members not heard Agenda of individual organisations may take over the network Rights and responsibilities of members may be unclear	Expense of running a secretariat Frustrations linked to more complex procedures Need to select a location: risk of regional bias

Table 3.4: Comparing decentralised networks with structured networks⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Robert 2006: 4

*Activities, focus and objective*⁶⁸

Another way to distinguish between networks is to look at their activities and objectives: do they limit themselves to the knowledge exchange component or do they also engage in collective advocacy or project implementation? The degree of cooperation is often related to the activities of the network. Some activities, like joint lobby or campaigning, require more cooperation and organisation than, for example, knowledge exchange.

The focus is another distinguishing facet of networks. The case described in the chapter six shows that it is difficult to be sufficiently focused without becoming too exclusive. There is a balance to be struck when it comes to how narrow or broad the content area is on which a network focuses. If the area of discussion is too narrow

- it will not stimulate a broad enough flow of information
- the interaction may be less creative since creative ideas often result from the combination of hitherto disparate elements
- a too narrow content would only attract the ‘usual suspects’ who already know each other well; little cross-fertilization would take place.

If the subject matter is too broad (‘Conditions for peace on earth’), then

- the interaction remains too vague and becomes uninteresting for serious people,
- it attracts, on the contrary, people with lunatic ideas, and
- it becomes very difficult to arrive at common products which bind the group together.

Some networks have a very specific objective. They may have been created to prepare a specific event or the next annual report, to elaborate a new strategy, or to coordinate a specific project. Common products could be joint publications containing lessons learned or recommendations, joint projects or programmes, the organisation of an event, a broadening of the network, or the start of a new one in a different field or region. Aiming for such a specific outcome can make a network more attractive and active, as participants feel they are working towards something concrete that will serve their interest. Being too specific about the intended outcome of the exchange, on the other hand, severely limits the creativeness of the process and the possibility for arriving at unexpected conclusions.

⁶⁸ This section is based in part on an earlier publication by the author with Gerd Junne (Junne and Verkoren 2005).

Many networks are created for the exchange of knowledge and experience per se. But there is always an implicit assumption that this exchange will lead to better results, if not through joint activity, then through the improved functioning of the individual participants who are enriched by the exchange. Networks working toward a specific outcome often function well, because they have a clear focus, their activity is time-bound, and the participants have an obvious common interest. The problem is often that the knowledge generated during the project is not captured or passed on to colleagues in the participating organisations or other people. There is also little exchange with other networks or organisations with similar activities. For such an exchange, the network should be broader, but as a consequence, the objective then becomes more diffuse.

Van Deventer (2004: 6-7) draws attention to the fact that the two dimensions described so far – activities/objectives and organisation – are often interrelated. Networks formed with high expectations on the benefit side (ranging from merely gaining information to increasing the impact of activities, obtaining resources and gaining collective legitimacy) are likely to carry out more pro-active functions (ranging from knowledge exchange to advocacy and collective interventions) and, as a result, need a higher degree of institutional formalisation.

Accountability and exclusiveness

As chapters six and seven will show, networks face various issues of legitimacy, accountability and ownership. As networks are relatively fluid and consist of many different actors, it is difficult to hold them accountable for their actions and the way they use the resources of donors and participants. “Networks as diffuse, complex and weakly institutionalized collaborative systems are [not] directly accountable to an electoral base”. (Benner et al. 2004: 198) It can be difficult to establish in how far those representing the network really take into account the views of their members. As networks develop, devising formal structures for representation and governance is often necessary in order to deal with these issues, even though such structures may limit the looseness and flexibility that set networks apart from other organisational forms.

A specific issue that has been raised in the literature regarding networking initiatives is their exclusiveness. Often, they have not spanned the North-South divide. According to King many development agencies have been more concerned with “improving their own capacity rather than with improving the quality of engagement with the South”. The first circle of sharing is usually within the organisation, the second

is with other players in the North, and only in third place are the Southern partners and other groups outside the North:

“it could be suggested that the new assumptions of ‘genuine partnership’ between North and South would have made it mandatory to start the explorations of knowledge sharing with the primary actors in the so-called recipient countries. [...] [Instead,] a good deal of the initial knowledge management and knowledge sharing in the agencies has actually taken place behind the protection of an intranet, reinforcing the view that it is the agency’s own staff development that is the primary objective.” (King 2005, 72-75).

Even when networks do cross the North-South border, or when they are South-South networks, exclusiveness can be an issue. Unequal access by different parties that could benefit and contribute may be the result of different organisational capacities, including time issues but also things like access to internet. It may also be a consequence of politics, particularly in conflict areas where some organisations or individuals may not want to engage with others because they are considered to be allied with one of the conflict parties.

Inclusiveness and the broadening of a network are not necessarily positive, however. In chapter seven we will see how members of a global civil society network complain that their network is too inclusive and broad. A balance needs to be found between a certain critical mass to start a lively, sustained interaction, while avoiding the exclusion of important actors. If the group is too small, chances are that

- there will be little exchange, because there are too few people to participate. The positions of participants will be known quickly and cease to be surprising, so that the interest of members in participating will decline rapidly.
- if only people with a similar background participate, opinions may not differ sufficiently to generate creative ideas.
- if only a small fraction of the potential constituency participates, people will turn to other forums where these people do meet.
- the network may lose legitimacy due to unequal access. (Junne and Verkoren 2005)

On the other hand, the community can also be too inclusive. By asking too many people with different backgrounds to join, communication may falter. The reasons are that

- chances increase that individual contributions are beyond the interest of the majority of members.
- people hesitate to engage themselves because they do not see a common denominator which brings participants together.

- the larger number of people may generate so many messages that they will no longer be read by the other members of a community. A community would then drown in its own flow of information, if not skilfully channelled into different subgroups and discussion threads. (Junne and Verkoren 2005)

The issue of exclusiveness also relates to the extent to which a network provides access to other networks. If a Southern, grassroots network is able to link up with international networks, and to provide access to formerly inaccessible policy forums, this can be a vital function for its members.

3.8 Concluding remarks

Learning is what makes people improve practice and avoid repeating past mistakes. At the level of an organisation, learning takes place when the organisation changes work methods or objectives as a result of experience or knowledge encountered. Knowledge and learning processes of NGOs and their employees take place in a cyclical way and are closely related to action. NNGO staff members primarily learn in interaction – with colleagues as well as external actors.

The most profound kind of learning takes place when a person (or organisation) questions his own unconscious bias, assumptions and world views. Such ‘third-order learning’ is particularly relevant for our field of analysis as it supports cross-cultural interaction and learning. At the same time, it is precisely such deep learning that is difficult in conflict-affected situations, in which questioning one’s views and the actions that have been based on them can be quite painful and costly. Interaction with others may help a person or organisation move towards deeper levels of learning. Outsiders can provide an external perspective that is needed in order to step out of one’s thinking world and reflect on it. In this way, outsiders act as learning ‘scaffolds’. Formal education may also serve as such a scaffold if it builds on the practical knowledge and experience of the learner and relates these to theories.

Various issues complicate the learning of NGOs, including work pressure and a lack of time. To an extent these obstacles are of such a nature that they will never be fully removed. However, two types of efforts could help limit them. The first is working to gain recognition of the fact that in the long term learning and efficiency are not contrary but mutually beneficial. The second effort is trying to devise organisational

structures and foster organisational cultures that limit these problems and stimulate learning. Trust, a cooperative (rather than competitive) culture, the rewarding of knowledge sharing, and an atmosphere tolerant of mistakes are a part of this.

Implicit, cultural knowledge is an important but problematic category of knowledge for NGOs, which cooperate with people across cultures and knowledge systems. Not much thinking has so far been done about ways to create, store and share cultural knowledge. This gap is probably related to the lack of attention the knowledge strategies of NGOs pay to North-South (and South-South) knowledge processes. There are, however, two bodies of thinking that do take Southern organisations into account: capacity building, which addresses knowledge flows between NNGOs and SNGOs, and networking, which focuses particularly on exchanges among SNGOs. Regarding capacity building, theory developed by the UNDP and others stipulates that it should not be a one-way knowledge transfer process from North to South but should be based on Southern 'ownership' and build on existing indigenous knowledge.

Literature on networking by peace NGOs suggests that networks are an organisational form potentially suitable for peacebuilding due to their flexibility and capacity to bring together the large number of small organisations that make up a scattered field. Networks may be more or less centrally organised and narrowly focused depending on the degree of cooperation they desire and on whether they prefer inclusiveness and diversity over clearly demarcated objectives and activities. Their governance structures need to pay attention to accountability, which is often a difficult issue given the loose organisation of networks and the fact that they include many different members.

For both capacity building and networking, we will see in upcoming chapters how activities in the field compare with the theory presented in this chapter. In that and other ways, this book aims to contribute to filling the gap in existing theories when it comes to knowledge processes involving Southern NGOs, thereby also contributing to thinking about cross-cultural knowledge processes as part of North-South exchange.

3.9 Concluding Part One: Towards a model of processes, actors, and relationships

In chapter one we saw that Southern peacebuilding NGOs in conflict-affected regions focus mostly on the local, community level. This is also where they have a clear added value compared to other actors. However, the chapter suggests that the relevance of their work would increase if in addition to their micro-level work they paid more attention to the bigger picture of building a peaceful society, reflecting more explicitly on the role their activities play in this big picture and whether they complement with those of other actors. The difficulty of doing so is related to a lack of space and capacity for research, reflection and ‘third-order’ learning about whether the organisation is doing the right thing. This is tied to a model of civil society support on the part of donors that treats local NGOs more as service providers, or implementers of international policy, and less as independent political actors. As a result there is not much incentive to reflect and little space to address the larger, political features of conflict and peacebuilding.

Chapter two showed that conflicts are characterised by competing ‘knowledges’ and interaction around different visions and interpretations of reality is part of peacebuilding. When local NGOs organise community dialogues or peace education projects, such exchanges are part of these activities. Their own knowledge – the ideas and concepts on which they base their actions – develops mainly through action and interaction. Joint learning through exchange with people in- and outside the organisation is emphasised as a way to increase the understanding of NGO staff and the relevance of their actions. When such interactions involve people from different cultural backgrounds, as is often the case given the large role of Northern donor agencies in shaping the practice of local NGOs, they are complicated by the fact that different knowledge systems meet. Oral traditions have to adjust to written ones and different definitions of how knowledge is generated, and what constitutes valid research, interact. The question is whether implicit, cultural knowledge on the part of all involved could help improve such interactions.

The third chapter suggests that a ‘third-order’ willingness to question one’s own assumptions and ideas could potentially facilitate cross-cultural learning, namely. This would lead to more openness towards the knowledge and views of others. However, it is difficult because of conflict (which stimulates tactical-level learning but not deeper reflection about whether one has been doing the right thing) and also because of structural inequalities among the actors involved in

exchange, particularly between NNGOs, acting as donors, and the SNGOs that receive their aid. Chapter four analyses these structural issues. Capacity building and NGO networking represent two bodies of thinking and activity that may contribute to overcoming them. Parts Two and Three examine the way they function in the field.

As is clear by now, interaction emerges from Part I as a major element of the learning processes of NGOs. In order to map the various actors that engage in these interactions and the way they relate to one another in processes of learning and knowledge exchange, Figure 3.5 provides an initial typology of the knowledge processes, actors and interactions that feature in and around Southern peace NGOs. It is explained below.

Figure 3.5: Knowledge flows in and around Southern peace NGOs

The light blue box represents the Southern peace NGO. Inside this box an ideal-type cyclical learning process takes place, as introduced in section 3.1 on learning and 3.2 on organisational learning. The cycle in this model has been adapted to the project cycles of NGOs, in which

conscious planning plays an important role. The black arrows inside the blue box show where the organisation – or parts of it – moves from one learning step to the next in a project cycle. The process may start at any point in the cycle. (Often it starts with the introduction from the outside of abstract concepts and generalisations, such as peacebuilding methodologies developed elsewhere.) Next, these concepts are analysed and related to the circumstances and aims of the organisation, followed by a planning phase in which the newly adapted ideas are concretised into a programme or project. That programme or project is carried out in the next stage, which provides an opportunity to test the ideas in action. Finally, organisational members reflect on their experience and draw lessons from it. These lessons make up new abstract concepts to be analysed and adapted in a new cycle of learning, and the process starts all over again. As was discussed in this chapter, this organisational learning cycle is facilitated by a learning culture: an organisational environment that creates the optimal conditions for learning.

However, these organisational learning processes do not occur in isolation. Various actors interact in and around them. Such interaction with external people is important as it has the potential of stimulating deep, reflective learning, something that is important both for innovation and for learning and exchange across cultures and knowledge systems. This is particularly relevant given that deep (third-order) learning is hampered by conflict or its legacy, which makes it difficult for people to question their assumptions and the actions they have based on them. In Figure 3.5, a number of potential external counterparts are portrayed that interact with SNGOs and thereby exchange knowledge. The remainder of this study will analyse these interactions in more detail.

For people working in peace and development NGOs, the beneficiaries of their programmes represent one important actor in these interactive learning processes. In addition, interaction is likely to occur with colleagues from other NGOs in the same area. This may happen informally, during joint activities, or in networks. Often joint learning and interaction by staff members from different NGOs is consciously stimulated during training workshops provided by international or large local NGOs. Staff members of international NGOs that fund the activities of Southern organisations also interact with their local partner NGOs, typically around project proposals, reports and evaluations, thereby feeding into the planning stage. In addition, through capacity building activities they may contribute abstract concepts. The arrow reflects that, according to the theory, capacity building activities should consist of two-way knowledge flows.

These international NGOs act as donor agencies towards their Southern counterparts but are themselves recipients of donor money as well, interacting with Northern government agencies, foundations, and intergovernmental agencies around the policy of these donors. These Northern donors in some cases also interact directly with the SNGOs that are at the centre of this analysis, for example through their embassies in Southern countries. Besides, they interact with the governments of the countries in which SNGOs are based, for example as providers of bilateral development aid. These Southern governments in turn interact with NGOs in their country. These interactions may be through consultations or networking around policymaking or as part of the lobby and advocacy activities of NGOs. Knowledge institutions, such as universities and research institutes, play a role as well. We have seen in chapter three that they may function as scaffolds that support deep learning.

The above is a schematised, hypothesised sketch of actors, processes and relations. The remainder of this study sets out to establish how these processes function in reality. In doing so it addresses a number of issues that are raised by the relations and processes outlined above, and that the theory presented so far has not yet dealt with. We have seen that the literature on organisational learning by NGOs hardly touches upon organisational learning in SNGOs and about North-South knowledge interactions. Part Two aims to contribute to filling these gaps. Specifically, it looks at a number of research questions that Part One has raised:

1. What factors constrain and support the learning of these NGOs?
2. How do power differences, donor relations and North-South dynamic influence the knowledge that is used and the learning that takes place?
3. What do the knowledge and learning processes of local peace NGOs look like, what are their strengths and weaknesses, and what are difficulties and gaps in their learning practice?
4. Given the structural reality in which they operate, what initiatives are undertaken to improve the learning processes of local peace NGOs? What can we learn from these initiatives?
5. To what extent do these initiatives facilitate cross-cultural, 'third-order' learning?

3.10 Research design and methodology

The research approach and design has been the combined result of inputs from practitioners in the field of peacebuilding and of a literature review. At the start of the research process, a meeting was organised with Netherlands-based experts of peacebuilding and learning processes. The purpose of this meeting was to make the research focus and design as relevant as possible to the interests and needs of the peacebuilding field. In an *Electronic Boardroom* session⁶⁹ that combined face-to-face and chat room discussion to record literally what was contributed by the participants, a discussion was held on the priorities and questions for the study. The seventeen participants were Dutch NGO staff and researchers working on conflict and peace and with a special interest or expertise in knowledge processes. This session contributed to the first research design.

3.10.1 Spread and representativeness of NGOs visited

The table below gives an overview of the NGOs whose staff were interviewed for this study. The main criterion for selecting NGOs was that they were local organisations with peacebuilding as their mission. In addition, a spread in size, geographical base, and focus area of the organisations were aimed at. As the table shows, this has been achieved relatively well.⁷⁰ The NGOs were contacted in several ways. First, the Dutch donor organisations Inter-Church Development Organisation (ICCO) and Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid (Cordaid)⁷¹ suggested partner organisations and other contacts. Second, the networks analysed provided lists of member organisations. Finally, people interviewed suggested additional contacts.

In the table, the organisations have been divided into several categories:

- Scope: whether an NGO is local or national; regional; or global in scope.
- Base: the country in which the office is based.
- Size: the number of paid staff members.
- Focus: the areas of work on which the NGO concentrates.
- Rural/urban: whether an NGO has its office in a national capital, a provincial capital, or a small town.

⁶⁹ Amsterdam, 20 November 2004 (see sources).

⁷⁰ See below for some qualifying remarks.

⁷¹ ICCO and Cordaid are two of the four largest development NGOs in the Netherlands.

- Finally, the table gives the total number of people interviewed and the total number of NGOs they represent.

Overall:		Focus:	
Total number of people interviewed ⁷²	105	Reconciliation	8
Total number of NGOs	76	Networking	11
		Dialogue	26
Scope:		DDRR ⁷³	7
Local / national NGO	56	Peace education	25
Regional NGO	9	Training (community) mediators	18
Global NGO	7	Human rights / justice	11
		Development	13
Base:		Women	9
Kenya	7	Youth	19
Sudan ⁷⁴	2	Research	4
Rwanda ⁷⁵	1	NGO development	6
Ghana	1	Democracy	8
Sierra Leone	16	Representing a particular group	2
Liberia	10	Church organisation	9
Philippines	10	Lobby and advocacy	14
Cambodia	14	Early warning for early response	4
Kyrgyzstan	5	Dialogue	26
Tajikistan	6	Peace zones and civilian peacekeeping	2
Kazakhstan ⁷⁶	1		
Uzbekistan ⁷⁷	3	Rural/urban:	
		Based in national capital ⁷⁸	47
Size:		Based in provincial capital ⁷⁹	29
Staff less than 5	15		
Staff less than 10	21		
Staff less than 25	23		
Staff more than 25	17		

Table 3.5: Categories of NGOs visited

⁷² In many cases several staff members of the same NGO were interviewed. In addition, donor agency representatives (Netherlands) and staff of government agencies (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) were interviewed to obtain a government's perspective on civil society, peacebuilding, and knowledge.

⁷³ Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation

⁷⁴ Interviewed in Nairobi, Kenya

⁷⁵ Interviewed in Nairobi, Kenya

⁷⁶ Interviewed in Utrecht, Netherlands

⁷⁷ Interviewed in Osh, Kyrgyzstan

⁷⁸ Nearly all of these organisations have programmes, and sometimes offices, in the countryside

⁷⁹ Nearly all of these organisations have programmes, and sometimes offices, in the countryside

It has been difficult to establish how representative these NGOs are of the broader field of peacebuilding organisations. Few global or regional directories of peace organisations exist, and those that do (including the United Nations NGO database) tend to include only large international NGOs and not local ones based in conflict areas. The OneWorld partner directory of development NGOs does not include many peace-oriented members. GPPAC has a directory of peace NGOs but this directory is rather limited and does not include many grassroots groups. It provides no information on the number of staff members and focus. Donor organisations like ICCO and Cordaid have not integrated information of country desks about local partners into a central directory.

Looking at the table, however, the following remarks can be made with regard to the spread of the NGOs.

- Concerning geographical spread, the interviews concentrate on Southeast Asia and West Africa. This is the result of the selection of these regions as case study areas. In addition, some interviews were held in East Africa and Central Asia. This means that the Asian and African continents are represented relatively well.⁸⁰ The question whether the countries visited are representative of their wider regions is discussed in section 3.10.4 below.
- The table also specifies the proportion of rurally-based versus urban-based NGOs. The majority of NGOs consulted are based in either a national or provincial capital. This is not surprising given that most NGOs in these countries have their offices in these towns. Reasons for this include better infrastructure and electricity, and being near the offices of donor agencies, government institutions, and international organisations. Most of the projects of these NGOs, however, are in rural areas. Few of these projects were visited, because the study does not discuss any individual projects. The study is about the organisations themselves and their activities and perceptions with regard to knowledge and learning.
- Although some local branches of international NGOs were visited, the focus is clearly on indigenous organisations. This has been a conscious choice. International NGOs have been relatively widely studied, and they themselves sometimes analyse knowledge flows among their branches. Locally-originated organisations face a different set of challenges in

⁸⁰ Latin America is not represented; there the processes studied may well look different.

gaining access to information and getting their voices heard than international NGOs. Since these challenges are at the core of the study, the local NGOs receive the most attention. Analysing their relatively under-studied issues, it is hoped, will contribute most to the development of theory in the area of North-South knowledge flows and processes.

- Under ‘focus’ the areas of work which the organisations mentioned as core activities are listed. Most organisations work in more than one of these areas. All the focus areas mentioned are usually considered part of peacebuilding work, although there is some discussion with regard to whether social and economic development projects and human rights advocacy are part of the core toolkit of peacebuilders.⁸¹ In general, a relatively fair representation has been achieved of the range of activities in which peace NGOs around the world tend to engage.⁸²
- Finally, the size of the NGOs, expressed in the number of paid staff members, has been specified. As the table shows, organisations of different sizes are relatively equally represented. Nonetheless, it was somewhat surprising to me that such a large proportion of the NGOs encountered had relatively high numbers of staff members. The perception prior to the field visits had been that the majority of Southern peacebuilding organisations were very small in size. Upon counting staff based in rural areas it turned out that many of the NGOs encountered were larger than expected. That said, not all staff are paid regularly and in many organisations there is a high variation in staff size depending, for example, on whether a particular grant has been secured for a project. It is not clear whether the organisational sizes of the NGOs visited are representative of the whole population of Southern peace NGOs.

Related to questions about the representativity of the peace NGOs visited is a set of issues relating to those organisations’ constituency in the regions in which they work. Are NGOs acting on behalf of communities or do they mostly represent their own organisational interests? Have they been created as a result of a need arising out of communities, or have they been founded in response to funds becoming available? Do they mostly implement projects determined by donors, or

⁸¹ Most people would say that they are not, but that they do contribute to the overall aim of building sustainable peace.

⁸² As stated above, there is not much reliable information about this. However, publications such as European Centre for Conflict Prevention 1999, Van Tongeren et al. 2005, Anderson and Olsen 2003, and Barnes 2006 give an idea of the range of activities undertaken. In chapter one more will be said about these activities.

do they set priorities through participatory processes among the beneficiaries of their work? The picture varies among regions, countries, and organisations. In some countries, particularly those emerging from large-scale violence that has destroyed many of the societal structures which may have been present before, many CSOs lack a real constituency – something that has for example been noted in Liberia. There, as in other parts of Africa and also in a country like Cambodia, there have been instances of ‘fake’ NGOs: organisations founded exclusively to get access to donor funds. In a country like the Philippines there is a strong tradition of a well-organised, interest-based civil society⁸³.

The interviews do not answer these questions, because they only give the view of NSO staff themselves. No NGO staff member is likely to admit that his or her organisation has only a limited constituency. It is likely that organisations have been visited which are not well rooted in local constituencies. It is even possible that some organisations have been ‘fake’ NGOs – although this is not very likely, as it is difficult to imagine why these organisations would be interested in discussing issues of knowledge and learning. Anyhow, the approach taken does not double-check the picture painted by interviewees of their activities; few actual projects of the NGOs were visited. However, this is also not the central aim of the study. The aim is to learn about the NGOs themselves and their perspectives of knowledge and learning.

The interviews did shed light on a related issue: the extent to which SNGOs are able to set their own agenda based on the needs of the people for whom they work. In many cases, donor relations limit the radius of action of local organisations. Despite the popular language of capacity building and ownership, local partners are often treated as subcontractors that implement the policies set by donors. There is little room for local partners to contribute to policy development by outlining the local needs and priorities. This limits the extent to which CSOs represent local communities; in some cases they seem rather to be acting as outposts of donor agencies. Chapters one and four discuss this issue.

3.10.2 Regional differences, culture and context

The reason behind the selection of countries to be visited in different parts of the world has been to increase the validity of findings for

⁸³ although there, too, doubts have been raised about the extent to which these organisations represent the grassroots

various contexts. It was also thought that the comparison of findings between regions – particularly the two main focus regions, Southeast Asia and West Africa – might yield interesting observations about regional differences in approaches and experiences with knowledge and learning. In fact, it has proved difficult to make such comparisons between regions, as differences within regions are very large. The countries visited within regions differ significantly – particularly in Southeast Asia where Cambodia and the Philippines are very different. Differences include stage and scope of the conflict (with relative peace in Cambodia for eight years and peace negotiations ongoing in the Philippines, and the Cambodian conflict involving the whole country while the Philippine conflict is concentrated in one region), maturity of democracy and civil society (with civil society in the Philippines much stronger and more longstanding than in Cambodia), and the focus area of peacebuilders (with Philippine organizations being more political and action-oriented than Cambodian ones, which tend to emphasise gradual engagement and dialogue as strategies).

The different nature and focus of civil society organisations in the two countries relate in part to large cultural differences. In Cambodia, a traditionally Buddhist culture exists, which is influenced by Chinese as well as Thai traditions and the legacy of the French colonizers. The Philippine culture is influenced by Catholicism, Spanish occupation, and American influence; and Muslim and indigenous cultures in Mindanao. The case may even be made that those two countries represent two extremes of a range of Southeast Asian contexts. In that sense, the two countries are not a bad representation of the region as a whole. That is less true for West Africa. Sierra Leone and Liberia are neighbouring countries. They have different pasts (Sierra Leone was a British colony while Liberia is linked historically to the United States) but are both Anglophone countries and have relatively similar conflict histories. Countries in their direct neighbourhood, such as Ivory Coast and Guinea, have faced comparable and related civil wars, but other countries in the region deal with different kinds of conflicts and issues.

The Francophone parts of West Africa have not been visited. Those countries are said to be different culturally as well as in the level of civil society development (lower than in the Anglophone countries). Differences in colonial and administrative practices in French and British colonies have given rise to different state-society interaction. Put very briefly, the French tended to rule directly while the British ruled through local elites. The latter form of colonial governance had the advantage that locals developed governance experience, but it also led to conflict as some groups were selected to govern over others. In sum, the

study cannot claim to apply equally well to all of West Africa. However, the combination regions and countries visited, not only Southeast Asia but also East Africa and Central Asia, widen the validity of the findings.

Looking at what the differences in context mean for the findings when it comes to knowledge and learning processes by local peace NGOs, no obvious differences between the countries visited emerge from the interviews. In fact the issues are that NGO staff members around the world raise are quite similar. Indeed, this similarity follows from some of the developments that are discussed in this book, particularly the occurrence of exchanges among NGOs and the prevalence of a specific peacebuilding and development discourse. However, this raises a difficult question. Do the issues raised by interviewees correspond to their reality, or are they merely talking about the issues they know tend to be discussed and they expect will be understood by the researcher?

In fact the story is not that bleak. Indeed, many of the NGO staff members interviewed are faced with the same reality when it comes to the funding regime of which they are a part. This funding regime is international and has similar characteristics in different countries. It has led to similar issues when it comes to the knowledge local NGO employees use in their work. In response, employees in various places voice similar criticisms of the situation. They speak the language of the dominant discourse, but are not uncritical of it. From their position at the interface of international discourse and priorities on the one hand, and local realities on the other, they face dilemmas that occur relatively independently of the cultural or regional context.

3.10.3 Methodological approach

The methodology employed is essentially qualitative rather than quantitative. It does not use numerical data but analyses stories and case studies. The approach taken throughout the research has been explorative or *heuristic*. This means that theory and empirical data interact. Both are used to build up a new conceptual model. As part of the heuristic approach, data is collected using a variety of methods and perspectives. The study employs *triangulation*: the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon by combining multiple theories, methods, and empirical materials, in the hope of overcoming the weaknesses and biases that are

integral to single method, single-theory studies.⁸⁴ Having collected data through various methods and perspectives, the heuristic analysis is directed toward discovery of similarities. "Proceeding in this manner, the overall pattern, showing the structure of the topic, will gradually emerge. All data have to be considered and incorporated [...]. The analysis is integrated into the process of data collection and mutually dependent on it." (Kleining and Witt 2000)

What have been these various methods employed? Central elements of the study have been the review of various bodies of relevant theory on knowledge processes, civil society organisations, and peacebuilding work, and a large number of interviews with staff members of primarily Southern peacebuilding NGOs. In addition, the study has employed elements of action research (see section 3.10.7), observation, and case study research. As part of one of the case studies, namely the study on GPPAC, an e-mail survey was conducted. The survey findings also have some broader application beyond the case study alone, and have been particularly useful for the chapters on knowledge sharing and networking (chapters five, six and seven). All these elements (which are elaborated below) are combined in an inductive manner. The analytical model is not fixed but changes depending on the empirical data collected. Thus, the findings from the interviews, action research observation, and case study research serve to adjust and further develop the theoretical framework.

An approach which has inspired the methodology used for the current study is *appreciative inquiry*. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a method for bringing about changes in organisations, starting from the strengths of the organisation. The approach concentrates not on the problems, but on the positive elements within the organisation. It explores what drives an organisation, what connects staff members with each other, and what inspires and motivates them. AI attempts to identify moments from the past in which organisational processes worked best, and to analyse the factors and strengths that made these moments possible. In other words, appreciative inquiry does not emphasise problem identification, but discovering, understanding and fostering social innovation. Although this study does identify issues and problems, it also aims to go beyond these and make suggestions for ways forward that build on the positive potential of the existing experiences and knowledge of Southern peacebuilders. Another principle of appreciative enquiry is that research

⁸⁴ <http://www.tele.sunyit.edu/traingulation.htm>. Website on triangulation as a research methodology.
Accessed on 1 December 2006.

should be applicable, that is, it should generate theoretical knowledge that can be used, applied, and thereby validated in action. As will be discussed in 0.11 below, this is indeed what this study aims to do.

The study also contains some elements of another approach: *action research*. Action research is a mode of research in which the researcher does not strive to be an objective observer but is herself involved in what she is studying. Acknowledging her own role, she studies her own interventions and consciously reflects on her own assumptions and theories in doing so. The action research elements of the study came about primarily as a result of opportunities to do advisory work for several organisations engaged in knowledge processes in the peacebuilding field. They are further discussed in section 3.10.7.

Choices made regarding the approach - the selection of programmes, organisations, and countries to visit, and methods to employ - have been primarily based on the topic and questions at hand. The triangulated, explorative approach chosen is relevant because knowledge processes of Southern peace organisations are little-researched. On the specific topic few sources are available. Thus it becomes necessary to develop new theory, which is done by combining different (but related) bodies of theory with empirical data. The empirical data are obtained not only from interviews but also by observation and action research in order to balance the possible bias that the interviewees may bring, given that their views cannot easily be tested by comparing them with the studies of others – which are hardly available.

The above-mentioned consultancies (see 0.7 below) matched the content of the PhD project - which is why I was asked to carry them out. Their inclusion in the study did not lead to a reduction or alteration of the approach as it had been developed from a content perspective. They only *added* methods and travel destinations. For example, the review of GPPAC that is discussed in chapter seven made it possible to carry out a global survey among CSOs on networking in general, and the GPPAC network in particular. This survey was added to the methodology toolkit already planned or used. This applied only to a specific subset of issues: those relating to networks and networking.

3.10.4 Interviews

Central to the study are open-ended, semi-structured interviews. These have largely been with NGO people working in various conflict-affected countries. Table 3.5 gave an overview of the backgrounds and

characteristics of the interview partners and their organisations. In addition to these 105 Southern peacebuilders, around twenty-five conversations were conducted with people involved in supporting these peacebuilders, namely, European and American staff of donor agencies and international NGOs. The nature of these conversations ranges from formal interviews to informal discussions. The questionnaires used as reference points to guide the interviews differed depending on the respondent. Sometimes respondents were interviewed primarily as network participants; in other cases more attention was paid to learning processes. In many cases an interview was held for more than one purpose⁸⁵.

Although lists of questions were used as reference points, the conversations were open-ended and often changed their focus depending on what issues proved to be of particular relevance in relation to the respondent's situation. Having said all this, some general themes and questions were addressed in most of the interviews, such as the ways in which people learn, the knowledge they feel they need in order to improve their work, the extent to which they are able to gain access to this knowledge, and the difficulties they encounter when trying to learn new things. How NGO staff members apply new knowledge in their work was also addressed, as were the modalities and difficulties of sharing knowledge with others. Besides, the interviews paid attention to the type of knowledge interviewees think they have to offer and whether or not this knowledge reaches potential users. The role of donor agencies in supporting or inhibiting knowledge processes was often discussed, and most interviewees were asked whether they thought some types of knowledge are considered more important than others in the field of peacebuilding.

3.10.5 Action research

I have been involved in the GPPAC network analysed in chapter seven as well as in the ACTS programme of chapter eight. I have carried out a review of the GPPAC network as an external consultant invited by the network's International Steering Group. The GPPAC analysis is not a classic case of action research in the sense of one's intervention in a situation being the object of study. The role of the researcher has been that of an external interviewer and observer. However, the fact that the

⁸⁵ For example, one and the same respondent may have been interviewed as a member of GPPAC for the case study in chapter eleven, as a participant in ACTS for the case study in chapter twelve, and in addition he or she may have been asked questions about general issues regarding learning and knowledge sharing.

research was designed and carried out in close interaction with people within the network, and that a number of concrete recommendations were formulated which were then discussed in a seminar organised by GPPAC, points to a relatively active role of the researcher.

For ACTS, I was an advisor in developing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for the programme. However, as this M&E development is a relatively long-term process which has only just commenced, it is difficult to see the outcomes of my intervention as of yet. In addition, although the M&E framework is an important element of any programme and sheds light on the programme as a whole, its development is not the central object of analysis in this chapter. This means that the study of ACTS is not a classic case of action research either. All the same, what is taken from action research methodology is an awareness of a researcher's own involvement in the object of study and the implications this may have.

3.10.6 (Active) observation

Observation was employed as a method in two ways. First, several network meetings and other events at which knowledge was exchanged were attended. These concerned two meetings of the International Steering Group of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), a provincial-level meeting of the Network for Collaborative Peacebuilding Sierra Leone (NCP-SL), a curriculum development workshop of the Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) programme, a Cordaid conference with staff and partners on networking as a peacebuilding methodology, and a GPPAC seminar on the same topic. The latter seminar was attended by all fifteen GPPAC Regional Initiators plus a number of representatives of other regional and global networks⁸⁶. In addition, academics working on peace issues and representatives of donor agencies participated in the seminar.

These observation activities overlap partly with the action research described above, as in some of the meetings described I gave a presentation or otherwise provided inputs. In those cases it became possible to study the effect of my own interventions in the short- to medium-term.

⁸⁶ such as the International Action Network on Small Arms, the Nonviolent Peaceforce, and the Amani Parliamentarians' Forum in the Great Lakes region

3.10.7 Survey for GPPAC case study

The GPPAC case study, discussed in chapter seven, uses the results of a written survey that was e-mailed to people involved in the GPPAC network, which consists of fifteen regional networks around the world. I was able to do this because the study was combined with a consultancy aiming to carry out a review of the network on behalf of GPPAC's International Secretariat. The survey was developed in close consultation with the International Secretariat. Two versions were elaborated: version A for people directly involved in GPPAC, and version B for people indirectly involved⁸⁷.

The survey was sent to 623 people around the world. 199 people (or 32%) returned it. The statistics for each region are depicted in Annex 1. They show that all but two of the fifteen regional GPPAC networks achieved the minimum response of 25 per cent aimed for. Particularly high percentages of surveys were returned in Central Asia (78%), the Caucasus (58%), and Central and East Africa (51%). Two regions did not meet the threshold of 25 per cent of the surveys returned: Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. In Southeast Asia 24 per cent of the surveys were returned, which is very close to the threshold. In addition, 29 people were interviewed in this region. The Latin America and the Caribbean region is more of an issue because only two out of 87 surveys (which had been translated into Spanish) were returned and no interviews were held. This was due to organisational difficulties and deficient communication between the various parties involved in carrying out the survey in that particular regional network⁸⁸. I cannot assume that the two surveys returned are representative of the larger population of GPPAC members in this region, and have to conclude that Latin America and the Caribbean is not really represented in the case study.

3.10.8 Bias and role of the researcher

Ideally, researchers should be non-judgmental when compiling findings. Since complete neutrality is impossible, this characteristic is a controversial aspect of qualitative research. While absolute objectivity is impossible, it is paramount that researchers enter the field or study

⁸⁷ 'People indirectly involved' usually do not consider themselves members of the network but they have been in contact with it as resource persons, donor agencies, or through informal contacts with network members.

⁸⁸ Namely, the International Secretariat of GPPAC, the GPPAC Regional Secretariat for Latin America and the Caribbean, a local researcher, and myself.

group with an open mind, an awareness of their own biases, and a commitment to remain detached from those biases as much as possible while observing and interviewing. Indeed, all that can be done is to be as explicit as possible about possible biases and ways in which these may have influenced the findings. First of all, the choice to visit a number of different countries rather than just one has meant that field trips have been short: not more than one month at a time. There has not been time to immerse in a culture and environment and genuinely get to know people. Clearly to the people encountered, I was 'en passage' The role of the researcher, as a result, has been essentially that of an outsider coming in to talk to people, and then to disappear again. The limited immersion in the countries means that there may be biases that I am unaware of. The approach may also have led interviewees to withhold more information than they would with someone they have come to know. Indeed, several people honestly stated their suspicion of Northern researchers coming to 'extract information' and taking it away for their own benefit, leaving respondents with nothing. As will be discussed in the final paragraph of this methodology section, it has been attempted to minimise this issue by involving respondents as much as possible in the process and by feeding results back to them. Nonetheless, some suspicion may well have been there.

In terms of North versus South, two opposite biases may have been operating at the same time: on the one hand, an inbuilt Northern bias of myself as a researcher, being born and raised in Europe, and on the other hand, a pro-South sentiment. My unavoidable Northern bias has an impact on concepts such as time and effectiveness, which are under discussion during the research (for example when the interactions between Northern and Southern partner organisations are discussed). Being a scientist gives me an additional bias, emphasising the need for statements to be scientifically verifiable, preferring written information, and disregarding myth and intuition as a source of knowledge (see chapter four). Although for the aims of the study it is important to be open to different perspectives and to criticisms of Northern ways of seeing things, I unavoidably still look at these from the perspective of someone who has been immersed in those ways from a young age. A sympathy for Southern groups as the 'underdog' in North-South relations may have played a role at the same time. In that context, even some indirect sense of guilt about Northerners' impact on the developing world over the centuries (from the slave trade, to colonisation, to Cold War sideshows, to neoliberalism) may be a factor. In addition, I tend to sympathise with pro-change actors such as civil society organisations working for a better world in difficult circumstances.

My age (young) and gender (female) may have influenced the responses given by interviewees, particularly in countries with patriarchal traditions. At least I myself perceived this to be something of significance in some instances. Upon entry, people would act surprised at my youth (and often at my gender, which my name usually does not give away to non-Dutch people). I sometimes had the feeling that I was taken more seriously after I had presented a book I had previously co-edited, and some copies of which I had brought along as gifts. At the opposite extreme of not being taken seriously, it is also possible that people may have accorded me some status on account of being from the North and academia, and tried to impress me by giving what they may have perceived as ‘socially desirable’ answers – although when looking at the interview reports it is difficult to envision what these may have been.

Importantly, and somewhat connected to the previous point, I played different roles in different interviews, and often played several roles at once: PhD researcher, consultant evaluating a Northern partner (this was the case for the Kenyan interviews), consultant carrying out a review of a global network in which the interviewee is involved (in the Philippines, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), and consultant facilitating a process of joint monitoring and evaluation system development (in Cambodia). Although the different ‘hats’ were clearly introduced, this may still have been confusing to people. Moreover, depending on the roles, interviewees may have been more or less open. For example, if an interviewer is introduced as only and purely a PhD researcher (as was the case in West Africa), people may be more forthcoming than when she is evaluating an organisation they work with (as was the case in East Africa). The different roles played also had advantages, however. The consultancies provided me with access to information and contacts that would otherwise have been difficult to obtain. In addition, I entered conversations with a different status from a PhD researcher. People may have been more willing to meet me and more thorough in providing information when they knew that it would be used for a concrete project.

3.10.9 Research ethics and outcomes

As was mentioned above, some SNGO staff are critical of researchers coming in to pick their brains only to take the knowledge away and use it for their own benefit (for example, to obtain a degree or publish in an academic journal). Such issues do not only lead to ethical considerations

in the methodology section; they are part of the subject of the study as well. Because of this it has become even more important to make the research process as relevant and fruitful for the Southern respondents as possible. This has been done by according them as many feedback opportunities as possible (by e-mailing semi-structured questionnaires, interview reports, travel reports, and articles) and by sharing with them the results of the research and the information obtained in the process. Indeed, the intention is to feed the outcomes of the study back to those consulted for it as much as possible. This may lead to the generation of additional products aside from this book, such as a website with lessons learned, recommendations, links to additional information, and opportunities to participate in discussions taking place.

3.10.10 Presentation of the research outcomes

Since the study takes a heuristic, inductive approach, it does not rigidly separate theory (or the findings of others) from my own empirical findings. Literature and empirical data combine to lead to the model that gradually emerges from the different chapters. The first three chapters were mostly based on literature. The fourth chapter is based on a mix of theory and interviews, while the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth chapters are almost entirely empirical. As much as possible I try to indicate the basis on which statements are made. Where a statement is made about the views of Southern peace NGO staff, these reflect the views of the majority of people interviewed. Where quotes from interviews are given, these are intended to illustrate more widely carried opinions and ideas, rather than being exceptions to the rule (unless this is expressly stated).

**PART II. STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN THE
KNOWLEDGE STRATEGIES OF
SOUTHERN PEACE NGOS**

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

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

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 journals⁸⁹. 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.

“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:

“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”

(Mwinyimbegu 2006). 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.”⁹⁴

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 province⁹⁵

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.⁹⁶ 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 practice⁹⁷. 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)⁹⁸.

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.”¹⁰⁰

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

Molenaar 2006: 10) 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)

Figure 4.1: Joint learning?¹⁰¹

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

contemporary world” (Sagasti 2004: 85). 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.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 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”.¹⁰⁹

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.”¹¹⁰

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”¹¹¹.

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 NNGOs 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 NNGO itself is funded may play also 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 NNGOs that receive longer-term, less tied grants have more freedom to engage in a dialogue with SSNOs 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 NNGO 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 NNGOs 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.”¹¹⁹

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 convincing¹²⁰. 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.

“After the peace agreement many funding institutions came. Local NGOs were just being set up. The donor agencies knew exactly what they wanted the locals to do, while the local NGOs were still figuring out what they wanted. Now the local NGOs have matured and they are beginning to demand that the international NGOs listen to their concerns and priorities. Some donors have come to realise that they should consult local NGOs to find out the needs of their communities.”¹²¹

“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 if 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).”¹²²

“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.”¹²³

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.”¹²⁴

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 writing¹²⁵. 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 content¹²⁶ 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.”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.

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.

¹²⁷ Interview with director of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 February 2006.

Box 4.3: Capacity building in Mindanao by Catholic Relief Service (CRS)¹²⁸

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 results¹²⁹. In addition, capacity building does not tend to

¹²⁸ Interview with CRS peacebuilding coordinator and attendance of opening session of course. Davao, Philippines, 15 May 2006.

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’.”

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 NGO 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

about their policy dialogue (Partos 2006: 20). 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 organisations¹³³, 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 organisations¹³⁴ 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 *do* largely fit the aid chain description.¹³⁵ 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

¹³³ 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).

¹³⁴ Such as Cordaid and ICCO in the Netherlands or USAID in the United States

¹³⁵ 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.

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.”¹³⁶

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 NGOs¹³⁷, 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.

¹³⁶ Interview with director and programme coordinator of NPI-Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 29 and 30 November 2005.

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 NNGOs 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 SNGOs 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 NNGOs 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.

- NNGOs 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 NNGO itself is funded plays an important role in this regard. If the NNGO 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 NNGO and the SNGO. NNGOs 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 SNGO increases mutual trust and good relations and makes it possible for an NNGO 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 NNGOs 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.”¹³⁸

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.

organizations¹³⁹ 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.

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

Chapter 5. Practice to knowledge and knowledge to practice

Learning and sharing by Southern peace NGOs

Having outlined the structural aspects that shape the learning of Southern peace NGOs in chapter four, I will now examine the ways in which these organisations exercise their agency within these structural constraints. Thus, this chapter focuses on the following sub-question: *what do the knowledge and learning processes of local peace NGOs look like, what are their strengths and weaknesses, and what are difficulties and gaps in their learning practice?* The answers given in this chapter are largely based on the interviews done with local NGOs in the countries visited¹⁴⁰.

Section 5.1 looks at the practical meaning of peacebuilding knowledge, a concept discussed in chapter two. 5.2 examines the types of knowledge needed and offered by the peacebuilding NGOs studied. Next, the chapter turns to the strategies these organisations employ for learning and exchange.

Hailey and James (2002) studied the learning activities of a number of Indian NGOs considered successful in their work. They found that these NGOs held regular meetings, retreats, workshops, and seminars. One organisation even “moves staff around in the organisation or assigns them to new projects as part of its strategy to encourage cross-functional learning. It transfers staff from research posts to field positions and from specialist to management positions in an attempt to disseminate and institutionalise learning.” Other knowledge-related activities of these organisations included sponsoring relevant and applied research and publishing research findings (Hailey and James 2002: 402-403). Section 5.3 looks at our sample of Southern peace NGOs and the organisational learning activities they engage in. It assesses their knowledge acquisition, knowledge retention, knowledge application and transfer, and research and dissemination.

The Indian NGOs from the study by Hailey and James also had “sophisticated internal management information and monitoring systems”. However, “[t]he extent to which donor-led evaluation processes contributed to learning was mixed, with the incentive to cover up mistakes in order to maintain funding undermining the learning

¹⁴⁰ See the overview of NGOs visited at the end of Part One and the description of their activities in 1.5.1.

process.” (Hailey and James 2002: 404) As we will see in this chapter, this is consistent with the picture emerging from my interviews with local peace NGO staff. Section 5.4 explores some reasons for this and explores ways to better make use of the learning opportunity provided by monitoring and evaluation procedures.

The learning processes of the peace NGOs analysed in this study do not necessarily occur purposely. The organisations have few formalised organisational learning policies in place. Their staff members emphasise informal learning from practice as the main way of learning. Interaction – with colleagues within and outside of the organisation, beneficiaries, and others that play a role in peacebuilding – is deemed an important way of learning by SNGO staff. Section 5.5 looks at these processes of knowledge exchange in more detail.

Important constraints exist that limit the learning of Southern peace NGOs. The structural constraints discussed in the previous chapter play a major role in this. In addition, there are a number of more specific obstacles to learning. These are discussed in 5.6. What may also play a role is a lack of priority accorded to knowledge and learning processes by Southern peace organisations. This is difficult to say for certain because although interview partners did recognise the importance of learning for their work, this may also have been because they were asked about it.

5.1 Peacebuilding knowledge in practice

5.1.1 Knowledge for peacebuilding

Section 2.2 mentioned that knowledge of conflict dynamics in general is a prerequisite for peacebuilding knowledge. My interviewees made clear that knowledge of the specific context is a necessary addition to such general conflict knowledge when one wants to successfully intervene in a conflict. This includes knowledge of local power relationships, cleavages, identity groups, leadership, and the role of external parties in causing, prolonging or de-escalating a conflict. Such knowledge may be found among academic experts of particular countries or regions and their publications as well as, importantly, among (former) residents of the region one is dealing with. Insiders at different societal levels can offer different expertise: people familiar with a country’s leadership know about the power dynamics at the national level of decision-making, while a (former) foot soldier will be able to relate what causes

individual fighters to join a militia – and what it may take for them to lay down their arms.

Section 2.2 also discussed how efforts to establish some kind of common ‘truth’ about the conflict can be part of peacebuilding. Part of this is the collection of data. The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), a local NGO financed mainly by international donor grants, has been collecting more than 600,000 pages of documents detailing the workings of the 1975-1979 Khmer Rouge regime. DC-Cam’s director Youk Chhang, himself a victim of the Khmer Rouge regime which killed his parents and sister, says that “knowing and understanding what happened has set me free.”¹⁴¹ DC-Cam’s documentation includes minutes of Khmer Rouge leadership meetings, confidential memos describing conditions in the countryside, and the confessions under torture of prisoners killed by the secret police; maps of some 20,000 mass grave sites, 189 prisons, and 80 memorials; 6,000 photographs; 200 documentary films; and 4,000 transcribed interviews with former Khmer Rouge soldiers.¹⁴² In addition to data collection, civil society initiatives try to stimulate dialogue around parties’ diverging interpretations of history. For example, the Split Screen project ran a pilot with Israeli and Arab youth in the Netherlands who put their histories of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict alongside each other on a computer screen. The aim was not to agree on a common history but to become aware of others’ different views.¹⁴³

Arriving at joint visions of peace may be seen as a next step after processes of fact-finding and joint interpretation (sometimes in the form of truth commissions) have been completed. However, this step has not received much attention up to now. As we saw in chapter one, even NGOs whose daily job it is to work for peace often lack an integrated vision of the kind of situation they are aiming to contribute to. Through their networking activity (discussed in upcoming chapters) the NGOs visited do pay attention to this, albeit usually not very systematically. Other initiatives in this direction appear in the literature. Powell (2006: 530) gives examples of projects that employ participatory processes to explore and express societal issues wider than the planning of a programme:

- The Dialogues Politiques project by the organisation Environmental Development Action in the Third World

¹⁴¹ Interview with DC-Cam director. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 2001.

¹⁴² Ibidem. (In 2006, the work of the Center took on another value as the tribunal for Khmer Rouge leaders has finally begun its operation.)

¹⁴³ <http://www.netuni.nl/splitscreen/> (in Dutch). The Network University Split Screen project. Accessed various times. Accessed various times.

(ENDA) in Dakar, Senegal, aims to give each Senegalese person the opportunity to become an actor in change and development. It focuses on marginalised groups in particular and organises workshops in which people give their vision about the future of the country. Dialogues are organised on themes such as cross-border trade and cooperation, agriculture, and sustainable fisheries, involving the people working in these sectors. ENDA also stages dialogues around the elaboration of local, regional and national development plans.¹⁴⁴

- In Brazil, the Landless Workers Movement has carried out similar visioning activities among its members, which “have not only managed to secure land, therefore food security for their families, but also continue to develop a sustainable socio-economic model that offers a concrete alternative to today's globalization that puts profits before people and humanity.”¹⁴⁵
- The international NGO Action Aid has developed the Reflect Programme, an “innovative approach to adult literacy and social change, where groups construct their own learning materials using drama, story-telling and songs. It was tested in nations including El Salvador, Bangladesh and Uganda and is now used by 350 different [partner organisations] in 60 countries.”¹⁴⁶

Some peacebuilders interviewed see knowledge sharing as contributing directly to peace by changing perceptions and attitudes, countering misinformation, and empowering people through knowledge.¹⁴⁷ Having access to various sources of knowledge is likely to make people less vulnerable to propaganda. A Sierra Leonean interviewee noted that “in a society with seventy-five per cent illiteracy, high unemployment, poverty and food insecurity, people who have knowledge are in a position of power. Many try to use their knowledge to influence people with ideologies.”¹⁴⁸ Giving traditionally marginalised groups access to knowledge may reduce their grievances. Cambodian women are one example:

“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.

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.endadiapol.org/>. Accessed on 28 February 2007.

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/>. Accessed on 8 February 2007.

¹⁴⁶ http://www.actionaidusa.org/un_student_donate.php. Accessed on 8 February 2007.

¹⁴⁷ See table 6.1 in section 6.2 summarising findings on the benefits of networking and knowledge exchange.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with director of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Kenema, Sierra Leone, 22 February 2006.

This happens with the children of the generation that had lacked education opportunities under the Khmer Rouge.”¹⁴⁹

5.1.2 Indigenous and external knowledge

Most interviewees emphasised the importance of indigenous knowledge for peacebuilding. Not taking local knowledge into account can lead to peacebuilding and development projects missing their target partly or entirely. According to one NGO worker in Liberia, “the experts designing the national DDR [disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration] programme said that combatants had to be put in an encampment. This would have been suitable if they were regular soldiers, but instead they were often kids who simply defended themselves. They just needed to be taken back home.”¹⁵⁰ This resonates with the problems caused by donor-driven projects that were discussed in section 4.6.

In line with the distinction between different knowledge systems (see 2.5), traditional conflict resolution and peacebuilding methods in countries like Cambodia, Sierra Leone and Liberia differ from ‘Western’ ways. Western methods often involve written text, while in many developing countries knowledge transfer tends to occur orally and illiteracy is high. The following citations show what this can mean for the practice of local NGOs.

“In accordance with our oral tradition, written exchanges have received less priority within our network [of peace NGOs] and when we ran out of funds the quarterly newsletter and ‘From the Field’ reports were the first activities to be cancelled. They were deemed less important than direct facilitation of peace processes in the field. Nonetheless we try to create more of a habit of writing – as long as this is done to retain important knowledge and benefit from our own work and that of others, not to boast or take credit. We feel that donor agencies sometimes push us to publish stories from our practice for the sole purpose of providing them with ‘deliverables’ and enabling them to show off our results.”¹⁵¹

“There is no reading and writing culture in the Philippines. This is sometimes difficult towards donor agencies. The NGOs that know how to make funding proposals are the ones that get the funding.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Cambodian NGO staff member. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 22 May 2006.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with staff members of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

¹⁵¹ Interview with director of West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

¹⁵² Interview with staff member of Philippine NGO. Manila, Philippines, 19 May 2006.

Other differences between Western knowledge systems on the one hand and African and Asian ones on the other that were mentioned in the interviews include the way people deal with gender and the role of religion “as a fall back during war and a source of strength and resilience”¹⁵³. Both issues are mentioned particularly often in (Muslim) Mindanao. Family structures are also different, with African and Asian families being much more extended and parents exercising particular positions of authority. The influence of elders is often used to resolve conflict. Elders mediate and their authority is respected. “This type of conflict resolution leads to reconciliation, whereas going to court only leads to dissatisfaction and hatred on the part of the losing party”.¹⁵⁴ Another difference is in the way people experience time. Where Western donors demand time-bound activities with clear deadlines, Africans and Asians tend to be more process-oriented: the process has to be completed regardless of the time it takes. Consultations and consensus are important elements of indigenous, including Islamic, ways of working.¹⁵⁵ Although Western or ‘modern’ knowledge is usually considered particularly rational, in this case one may wonder whether Westerners’ obsession with time, independently of the natural time that processes take, is not in fact quite irrational.

Southern peacebuilders emphasise the importance of traditional symbols in peacebuilding – acts such as land cleaning or exchanging gifts and sharing meals to validate an agreement and build trust. Western donor agencies do not always recognise these activities to be important. They do not match Western standards of scientific validity. From the perspective of a Western-educated academic such as myself this is often quite understandable. For example, an organisation in Liberia organised a workshop on traditional early warning systems with elders from two ethnic groups, in order to expand the toolbox for early warning and conflict prevention. As it turned out, in some traditions early warning signs were found in dreams and occurrences like the movement of birds.¹⁵⁶ These are very far from what most Westerners would consider valid signs.

However, Western concepts do not necessarily clash with indigenous traditions. Most of the African and Asian NGO staff interviewed conclude that both ‘modern’, ‘Western’ knowledge and traditional knowledge are important. They do not agree about whether the two

¹⁵³ Interview with chairman of Mindanawan NGO network. Marbel, Philippines, 16 May 2006.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with staff member of Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with staff member of a Mindanawan NGO. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with national coordinator of a Liberian NGO network. Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006.

clash or complement each other. Some say that there is no tension between Western and non-Western concepts of peacebuilding: “Western concepts are more elaborated, but not fundamentally different”¹⁵⁷. Others see a more contradictory relationship between types of knowledge seen as closer to and further from local traditions. The intermediary, and most often stated, position is that many Western concepts are useful but need to be applied in a way that is sensitive to local circumstances and traditions. Western methods are not unfit for the local context, but the crux of the matter lies in their implementation. They cannot be replicated in Asia and Africa without modification. For example, for programmes to succeed one must work with traditional power structures, and to do so, knowledge about these structures is required.

Another way in which the intermediary position was stated was that both Western and indigenous approaches are needed. Sometimes one proves workable, sometimes the other. “Western medicine can bring new solutions but does not know which leaf in our woods cures which condition.”¹⁵⁸ It is important to be armed with both concepts. “It does not really matter whether useful knowledge is originally Western or African. Different knowledge systems are interacting in a globalising world, and a strong traditional system may no longer be applicable because of changes taking place.”¹⁵⁹ Human rights NGOs tend to emphasise these changes and the importance of getting into line with modernisation. They state the position that “human dignity overrides [...] culture and tradition. People have to be educated about their rights in the modern system.”¹⁶⁰ Non-human rights organisations tend to place more value on tradition and cultural differences.

Regarding regional differences, a Ghanaian peacebuilder hypothesises that

“Asian countries have compromised less with Western knowledge systems and retained more of their own knowledge; or at least they have been better able to integrate traditional and modern knowledge (whereas in Africa modern and traditional knowledge are completely unconnected). As a result they have been better able to develop politically and economically.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Interview with staff members of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Freetown, Monrovia, 16 February 2006.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with director of West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Liberian NGO director in Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Liberian NGO staff member. Monrovia, Liberia, 10 February 2006.

¹⁶¹ Interview with director of West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

This hypothesis is not really corroborated by the findings that came out of interviews in Cambodia and the Philippines. The picture arising from those did not differ significantly from the one emerging in Africa. But the Philippines and Cambodia may not really have been the kind of economically successful Asian countries the Ghanaian had in mind¹⁶². In any case, what emerges is that it is difficult to generalise across continents.

In any case, it is important not to suggest that modernisation is always bad or that traditional, local knowledge is always good. Indigenous ways of doing things may in fact have contributed to conflict, like in Sierra Leone where traditional systems of land ownership and hierarchical relations between generations led to a marginalisation of youth, many of whom joined one of the warring parties (Richards 2005). In Liberia, some traditional laws (such as the ‘trial by ordeal’ in which an iron is held in a fire and then pressed on a suspect’s leg – if he does not get burned he is innocent) have been outlawed by the constitution because they are now generally considered to be inhumane, but are still implemented locally.¹⁶³ Similarly in Mindanao, various interviewees refer to the traditional *Rido* system of revenge killings as something that needs to be changed.

5.2 A two-way exchange: Knowledge demand and supply in the field

5.2.1 Knowledge demand

Based on the interviews held with peacebuilders in different parts of the world, what knowledge do they need in order to do their work well? What knowledge do they have to offer? Starting with the knowledge need, people working for peacebuilding NGOs in developing countries mention - in the context of this study - several kinds of knowledge to which they would like to gain access in order to work more effectively. Table 5.1 below gives an overview of the kinds of knowledge that were mentioned¹⁶⁴. They can by and large be placed in two categories: first,

¹⁶² It is probably true that different countries have responded differently to the potential tensions between ‘knowledges’. Analysing these different responses, and their results, would be an interesting research project in itself.

¹⁶³ Interview with Liberian NGO staff member. Monrovia, Liberia, 10 February 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Like the ones that will follow, this table is intended to give an impression of the kinds of issues that people mentioned when they talked to me about knowledge and learning. Although the table is split up into different countries, the numbers given cannot be read as representative of the views and activities of NGOs in these countries. This is because not all interviews addressed all questions. The semi-structured, open-ended nature of the conversations in combination with time limits meant that

the NGO workers identify a need for peacebuilding content knowledge. Second, SNGO staff would like to gain more knowledge on working skills. In addition to these categories, the table portrays two remarks that were made: first, some people said that they did not (or not only) seek a specific kind of knowledge, but that they rather sought interaction with others through which new knowledge could jointly be created. Second, a large number of people emphasised that although they would like to gain knowledge, this would need adaptation to the local context before it could be usefully applied. Both issues are elaborated further on in this section.

Knowledge demand			Lib (10)	SL (16)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	Total (49)
Peace-building content knowledge	Theories, methods	General peace-building	9	4	3		16
		Lobby and advocacy	1	3		1	5
		Human rights and justice	2	1		1	4
		Early warning and response		1		1	2
		Conflict analysis	2				2
		Global issues				2	2
		Peace education		1		1	2
		Mediation			1		1
		Solidarity work				1	1
	Research into traditional ways of conflict management		3		1		4
	Research on needs, issues beneficiaries		1	1	2		4
	Case studies from elsewhere		1	2			3

some interviews went in other directions than others. This also depended on the specific place and role of an interviewee. As a result, when an interviewee did not mention a particular issue, this may also simply be because it did not come up during the conversation. An additional thing to note about this particular table is that it includes only interview findings from Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Philippines and Cambodia.

Working skills	Capacity for reflection and documentation	3	5	4	3	15
	Organisation/project management; planning; financial management	4	4	3	3	14
	Impact assessment	3	4	4	3	14
	Research capacity	2	2	2	1	7
	Fundraising	2		1	2	5
	Creative ways to spread information	1		2		3
	Funding opportunities	1	2			3
	ICT / webpage design	1	1			2
	English language skills				1	1
	Joint brainstorming to create new knowledge	2	3	4	3	12
Knowledge gained needs adaptation to be useful		6	9	7	7	29

Table 5.1: Knowledge demand of Southern peacebuilders¹⁶⁵

Additional insights may be obtained from the survey done among members of the GPPAC network for the case study portrayed in chapter seven. Annex 2 provides excerpts from the global survey reports of this survey. In response to a question about their priorities for knowledge sharing, many people mentioned conflict prevention and peacebuilding knowledge and methods in general, while a number of specific issues and methods were mentioned. In this category, peace education, human rights, arms and disarmament, early warning and early response, lobby and advocacy, and good governance were mentioned more than once. In addition to peacebuilding knowledge, respondents wanted to exchange experiences about activities undertaken by members. In terms of working skills, networking methodologies, capacity building methods, and strategic planning were mentioned as issues around which to exchange knowledge.¹⁶⁶

Summarising the findings from the interviews and the survey, the peacebuilding content knowledge that Southern NGO staff would like to gain includes:

- theories and methods of peacebuilding that have been developed and tested elsewhere. Peace NGO staff see value in comparing

¹⁶⁵ Lib refers to Liberia, SL to Sierra Leone, Phil to The Philippines, and Cam to Cambodia.

¹⁶⁶ See question 22 of survey version A in Annex 2.

these with their own methods in use and to take out applicable elements that can be adjusted and applied to the local context.

- research into traditional ways of conflict management. Few studies have been carried out into the elements that keep people together in all those traditional communities that live in relative peace.
- research on the needs and issues affecting the beneficiaries or stakeholders of NGO programmes, and the priorities of these target groups.

Working skills include:

- capacity to reflect upon activities, analyse trends, causes, and achievements, and to document the outcomes of such reflection and analysis. Related to this are research capacity (in order to be able to carry out the above-mentioned research into traditional ways and the needs of beneficiaries) and ways to assess the impact of work
- practical skills relating to organisational management, financial administration, information and communications technology (ICT) and webpage design, fundraising, project cycle management, and strategic planning. In addition there is a desire to gain access to new and alternative ways of bringing a message across to the (often illiterate) public, such as documentary making. Among GPPAC members, networking methodologies and capacity building skills are priorities.

5.2.2 Knowledge supply

Although they would like to gain more knowledge and skills, local peacebuilders in West Africa, Southeast Asia and other regions are obviously not void of these themselves. They emphasise that they have unique experiences and knowledge that they have developed as they carry out their work. Some of this knowledge is specific to the context (for example, how to address the chief of a particular tribe), but other parts may be of use to others working in the same field. Table 5.2 below gives an overview of the types of knowledge the interviewees feel they have to offer¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁷ See note 164.

Knowledge supply	Lib (10)	SL (16)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	To- tal (49)
Specific area of work	5	3	2	3	13
Communal, leadership structures; symbolism	3	2	2	1	8
Experience with grassroots work	4	2	1	1	8
Application and translation of external knowledge	2		3		5
Information from locals; knowledge of context (early warning)	3		1		4
Working under difficult conditions, with limited resources	1	2			3

Table 5.2: Knowledge supply of Southern peacebuilders

In addition to specific expertise around their area of work (people mentioned for example peace education skills, networking, and training), local peacebuilders may offer

- tacit and implicit knowledge about communal structures, family structures and traditional leadership structures, and the role of symbolism. For example, one NGO staff member noted that “we can help explain the nature of the chieftaincy in Liberia to non-locals. A chief in Liberia is not an autocratic ruler. His role is much more circumscribed and difficult to define. Symbolism plays a large role. A chief is like a bee queen: the softest and most valuable, but not necessarily the strongest. One never really knows what authority he exercises until he is removed; then everything falls apart.”¹⁶⁸
- experience with grassroots work, including the facilitation of dialogue at the community level and the stimulation and support of grassroots initiatives
- ways of applying peacebuilding methods developed elsewhere in the context of war-torn developing countries and experience with efforts to combine traditional and Western methods
- access to local information through work with local people who keep them informed. This knowledge can also be used as early warning signals in the case that a potential for renewed violence is identified
- experience with working under difficult conditions and being creative with limited resources.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with staff members of a Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

5.2.3 Interactive knowledge generation and learning

When asked about the nature and value of knowledge transfer and sharing¹⁶⁹, local peacebuilders emphasised the importance of comparing one's ideas with the thoughts, concepts, and experiences of others. This helps put people's work into perspective and find new dimensions. Indeed, local NGO staff emphasise that learning and capacity building tend to occur through interaction with others. "I do not really have a defined set of knowledge that I would like to acquire. I am more interested in commonly achieving new insights through knowledge exchange and joint brainstorming, taking the problems organisations face as a point of departure."¹⁷⁰ This is particularly the case in non-Western parts of the world that have an oral tradition and where even those who are educated often do not have the habit of reading and recording information. As a result, face-to-face meetings and training sessions are considered to be more valuable than written documents. This is particularly the case in Africa, where the oral tradition is emphasised the most, but it also plays a role in the other regions studied - except perhaps Central Asia where the Soviet past has left a highly educated population accustomed to working with knowledge in written form.

Oral traditions are not the only reason why people emphasise learning through interaction. Exchange is more generally seen as a requirement for creativity and innovation. One interviewee introduced the expression 'knowledge that is not shared does not grow'¹⁷¹. Together people arrive at new insights. Interaction also helps reveal the tacit knowledge that others have, sometimes without being aware of it. "[N]o explicit knowledge [...] has any meaning unless it connects with the tacit knowledge held by the user" and "[s]uccessful communication and application of knowledge [...] depend as much on the recipient as on the provider". (Powell 2006: 520) When someone simply sends you an article without explanation, it is unlikely that you will prioritise reading it or see its importance. When someone sends you an article explaining that 'the other day after we had talked about your work, I realised that this might be relevant for you because..' you are likely to respond with more interest.

SNGO staff consider learning and knowledge exchange to be necessary in order to keep up to date on new and different ways of solving

¹⁶⁹ See also table 6.1 in section 6.2.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with staff members of a Liberian NGO, Monrovia, Liberia, 14 February 2006.

¹⁷¹ Interview with the director of a Sierra Leonean NGO, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 February 2006.

problems. Although it is important to learn by trial-and-error, a grounded knowledge of issues and existing methods can help one work more systematically and consciously. It is by combining one's own experiences with theory and the lessons of others that genuine learning occurs. In this way, gaining new knowledge also leads the staff of organisations to being more reflective about their work and that of others. This process of reflection and interaction changes individual perceptions and attitudes. In addition, as we shall see in upcoming chapters, knowledge sharing builds solidarity and can be a source of inspiration and learning. For example, a Sierra Leonean youth organisation that employs drama as a peace education method read in the report of another organisation about the use of film as a more cost-effective alternative to theatre. "Though in some ways community drama is better – involving the whole community, it gives people a sense that it is about them – this opens up new possibilities."¹⁷² An example given in Liberia is that "exchanging knowledge with people from countries with trust and reconciliation commissions could bring useful experiences to Liberians dealing with the newly established commission here"¹⁷³.

Southern peace NGO staff members feel that both external and internal knowledge are needed for good practice, and that it is by combining these bodies of knowledge that true learning occurs. In response to questions about the context-specificness of knowledge, many peace practitioners interviewed made it clear that they do not view knowledge as produced in one place and transferred to another, but as produced through interaction between and among practitioners and researchers, who are at the same time sources and users of knowledge¹⁷⁴. As written in 2.1.2, knowledge production can be conceived as being basically conducted in two processes: first by translating local problem definitions into the language of more generalised knowledge, and then by translating the results obtained from generalised knowledge back to the local context (Rip 2001, 14). What is perhaps most important in this conception is that although knowledge is not universally generalisable and applicable in every context, it (or parts of it) can often be translated to another context. This translation process requires an open mind: making explicit and calling into question one's assumptions and perspectives¹⁷⁵ may open a person up to other 'mind frames' and 'world views', making translation possible.

¹⁷² Interview with staff member of a Sierra Leonean youth organisation. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006.

¹⁷³ Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 10 February 2006.

¹⁷⁴ See also Baud 2002: 54.

¹⁷⁵ As in third-order learning: see 3.1.3.

5.3 Organisational learning activities

In this section the knowledge-related activities in which local peace NGOs engage are discussed in some more detail. First, I will look at the ways in which they acquire new knowledge. Secondly, I will examine strategies to share and retain such knowledge inside the organisation – in other words to prevent it from getting lost when knowledgeable staff members leave the organisation. Thirdly, the processes in which organisations translate, apply and pass on such new knowledge are analysed. Finally, I will look somewhat more specifically at research and dissemination as a knowledge strategy.

5.3.1 Acquiring knowledge

As Table 5.3¹⁷⁶, shows, SNGO staff in the various countries visited find interaction with other organisations working in the field (elaborated in 5.5) and ‘learning by doing’ the two most important ways of acquiring knowledge. In West Africa, both strategies were equally important, whereas in the Philippines the first was more important and in Cambodia the second. It was often said in the interviews that practical experiences yield knowledge than can never be obtained from other sources. The knowledge of beneficiaries is considered another source important of knowledge. Their experience with peaceful coexistence or living with conflict are seen as untapped sources of peace and conflict knowledge. In addition, knowing about their needs and specific circumstances helps make programmes more relevant and effective. Spending considerable time in the communities of beneficiaries is therefore considered important, as is research into local needs. More attention is paid to the interactions between SNGOs and local communities in 5.5.3.

¹⁷⁶ Like the tables that will follow in this chapter, this table is intended to give an impression of the types of issues mentioned by interviewees when discussing knowledge strategies. It should not be read as a representative sample of NGOs in these countries, because of the open and semi-structured nature of the interviews done. If a particular item was not mentioned during an interview, it is possible that this was because the issue did not come up during the conversation. This table does not include Kenya and Central Asia at all since organisational learning strategies were not structurally discussed in the interviews in those countries.

Acquiring knowledge	Lib (10)	SL (16)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	Total (64)
Interacting with other organisations	5	8	9	2	25
By doing	6	6	4	5	21
Beneficiaries	5	5	6	1	17
Training	3	5	2	5	15
Internet		2	2	5	9
Colleagues	3	1		3	7
Books, manuals	2		2	2	6
Conferences		1	2		3
Project monitoring and evaluation	1	1	1		3
Following procedures				2	2
Formal education				2	2

Table 5.3: Organisational learning activities of Southern peace NGOs: acquiring knowledge

The mentioning of the knowledge of communities (and colleagues) shows the importance accorded to local expertise. Most Southern peacebuilders agree that the knowledge of local people is invaluable. After all, they have used it to sustain themselves throughout the years. No one can better judge the best ways to deal with local circumstances and traditions than the people living in the locality itself. Local knowledge may take the form of traditional peacebuilding methodologies, such as singing and storytelling as ways to educate people about conflict resolution, rights, and peaceful ways of living together.¹⁷⁷ In Mindanao people mentioned the *Djandi* system, a mediation process between tribes led by a chief or spiritual leader¹⁷⁸. Other traditional peacebuilding methods include traditional rituals that can contribute to peacebuilding. In Cambodia, mediums and healers played a role in the reintegration of displaced people and refugees.¹⁷⁹ In Liberia, land purification rituals took place involving the whole community, mediums and healers.¹⁸⁰

Workshops and training courses are also considered to be important ways of gaining new knowledge. Such courses tend to be relatively short (from several days to a few months) and may take place in the home country of participants or abroad. Courses abroad that have been attended by interviewees are offered by institutions like Johan Galtung's Transcend (in various locations); Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in Virginia in the United States; Responding to Conflict, a British NGO

¹⁷⁷ Interview with staff member of a Sierra Leonean youth organisation. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with director of a Mindanawan NGO. Amsterdam, Netherlands, 9 April 2006.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with staff member of a Cambodian NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

based in Birmingham, United Kingdom; and Bradford University's School of Peace Studies in Bradford, the United Kingdom. Only a small percentage of interviewees have attended such courses, but those who have seem to occupy rather central positions in the NGO community in their countries. The director of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), an EMU graduate, is a notable example. Interactions with colleagues from different countries during these programmes are deemed very useful in order to gain new perspectives and compare approaches.

Other NNGOs, international organisations, and larger SNGOs offer training courses in the areas in which the local NGO staff work. About two-thirds of interviewees in each country has attended such training sessions. Most of the courses mentioned focus on various types of peacebuilding methodologies, such as analysing and conceptualising conflict and peace, early warning, mediation and conflict resolution, peace education, and reintegration and reconciliation. In addition, people attend courses on practical subjects like fundraising, management, proposal writing, and training and facilitation methods. Often the concepts and methodologies introduced there are considered quite useful, although the SNGO staff members emphasise that the concepts gained during training workshops usually need to be adapted to local circumstances. Once trained, some local NGOs attempt to further disseminate the knowledge gained by organising their own training courses and training of trainer programmes¹⁸¹ (see section 5.5).

SNGO staff also noted interactions with colleagues as a source of learning. Accompanying and observing experienced colleagues and simply following the rules and instructions of their organisation are related activities that people mentioned. This is how people learn to write reports and proposals, for example. Mentoring by experienced colleagues, peer-to-peer exchanges and networking were found to be important ways of learning. Formal education is hardly seen as useful for peacebuilding practice. In West Africa, most interviewees have not had access to university education. In Cambodia the quality of university education is considered low and little attention is paid to crucial skills like critical thinking and social awareness¹⁸². However, NGO personnel in all countries do deem formal education to be important, mainly because of the status and opportunities a university degree brings.

¹⁸¹ Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

¹⁸² In response a new private university, Pannasastra University of Cambodia, has been founded explicitly to focus on these issues.

In line with the lack of importance attached to formal education as a source of knowledge, academic knowledge does not figure in the list of sources mentioned. This has to do with the fact that little academic knowledge is available locally when it comes to peacebuilding. The vast majority of academic institutions doing peace and conflict research are based in the North. Some universities in (post)conflict countries have recently begun to develop programmes in this field, but as yet they remain exceptions to the rule. Still, academic knowledge finds its way to local practitioners in other ways. The manuals and training courses provided by NNGOs as part of capacity building often use concepts developed by academics like Johan Galtung, Hitzkias Assefa, and John Paul Lederach. Via the manuals and workshops these concepts find their way to local practitioners. As we saw above, training courses abroad are often (though certainly not always) organised by academic institutions. Finally, internet resources and books, though not frequently mentioned as sources, often originate from a scientific source.

West African and Southeast Asian NGO staff often refer to the oral tradition of their societies as a reason why reading and, particularly, documenting experiences are not widespread practices. They emphasise that most learning takes place through face-to-face interaction. Another reason for this may be that tacit knowledge gained through direct interaction is especially valuable in faster moving contexts – in which explicit knowledge is always running behind reality (ALNAP 2003: 58). Still, many interviewees see a need for more documentation of experiences and work. This is necessary for advocacy purposes, for interaction with donors (“those who know how to make proposals get the funding”), and in order to disseminate and exchange knowledge beyond the immediate locality in which they work. Despite their shared emphasis on oral interaction, Liberian, Cambodian and Philippine peacebuilders sometimes read books and manuals. Particularly in Cambodia, they also look up information online. Staff members look up information on issues like decision making and leadership, or search for the details and activities of other organisations working in peacebuilding¹⁸³. However, peace practitioners tend to have difficulty finding their way through the myriads of information available and in finding the time to read these sources. One interviewee mentioned that the archive of his organisation was an important source of information for him – he could look things up if needed. However he also noted that a basic level of education is needed to be able to do this. Less educated people can less easily search and find information.

¹⁸³ Interview with staff member of a Cambodian youth NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2006.

Western literature on peacebuilding concepts and methods is mentioned only by Philippine NGO workers as a source of knowledge. Some read books by authors like John Paul Lederach and try to adapt relevant concepts to the local situation, creating new theories and frameworks. These are then disseminated further to other SNGOs, grassroots groups and village leaders. In one case, village leaders trained by an NGO are now being invited by other organisations to introduce these concepts and discuss the way they are applied in their village.¹⁸⁴ A few organisations mention having obtained training manuals from large SNGOs or partner NNGOs, and trying to adapt these manuals based on their own experience. One staff member noted that the manuals are based mainly on Western concepts and that information on traditional ways of conflict management has not really been documented.¹⁸⁵

A Cambodian youth organisation uses interns from abroad as a way to acquire new knowledge. These interns participate in the development of new training curricula, supplying concepts they have learned in their education. These are then adapted by local staff and developed for use in the local context. Interns have also been useful to this organisation in the areas of technology and fundraising. When it comes to the latter, the interns' mastery of the English language is an asset. The NGO's own staff have difficulty in communicating in English, and interns help by reviewing funding proposals.¹⁸⁶

No matter what the source of knowledge, nearly all interviewees emphasised that newly acquired ideas, concepts, theories, methods and skills must be compared with the situation at hand and adapted to the context before they can be used. This point was already made in previous section when the importance SNGO peacebuilders attach to interaction for learning was discussed. As a result of the interaction between knowledge from external sources, knowledge from experience and colleagues and the NGO's analysis of the context, new methodologies are created.¹⁸⁷ In the necessary interaction around the application and translation of external and local concepts, the role of local staff is of vital importance because of their familiarity with the context. Someone who is thoroughly familiar with a situation may feel it when change begins to occur. This may not always be tangible and will go unnoticed by external observers, and the reporting formats of

¹⁸⁴ Interview with chairman of a Mindanawan NGO network. Marbel, Philippines, 16 May 2006.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with staff members of a Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 10 February 2006.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with director of a Cambodian youth NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2006.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with staff member of a Mindanawan youth NGO. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.

NNGOs and back donors usually do not capture it. Local NGO staff members nonetheless try to translate these kinds of changes into the necessary format, but part of the knowledge gets lost in the translation process.

In my interviews, project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) were mentioned only three times as sources of learning – even though all SNGOs engage in these activities. A study by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) confirms the lack of learning taking place as a result of M&E: “[n]one of the respondents mentioned [...] agency monitoring and reporting systems as sources of learning [...] Lack of reference to these mechanisms may result from their not generally being set up in a fashion that promotes learning.” (ALNAP 2003: 48) We will return to this in section 5.4 below.

5.3.2 Retaining knowledge within the organisation

When asked, the staff members of local peace NGOs affirm the importance of sharing information internally. As Table 5.4¹⁸⁸ shows, regular staff meetings are the most common way in which this is done. Other methods – from the organisational learning toolbox discussed in chapter three – are rarer. One Sierra Leonean organisation holds a three-day reflection with all staff every three months, involving staff travelling in from different field offices. At these sessions, a staff member may be given a particular topic to prepare and this issue will be discussed. Also everyone reports on their work and is given feedback by the others.¹⁸⁹ A Mindanawan organisation mentions that its activity plans are shared and discussed among staff, and their implementation is jointly monitored.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ See note 164.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with staff member of a regional NGO working in several West African countries. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 20 February 2006.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with director of a Sierra Leonean church-based NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 20 February 2006.

Retaining knowledge	Lib (10)	SL (16)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	Total (76)
Staff meetings	1	4	4	4	13
Post-training seminars	2	3		1	6
Discuss work plans	1	1	2		4
Staff required to stay after training	2				2
Share materials		2			2
Writing reports		2			2
Provide job security	1				1

Table 5.4: Organisational learning activities of Southern peace NGOs: retaining knowledge

A big problem for SNGOs is high staff turnover. Talented, knowledgeable staff members are often the first to leave as they are able to obtain better-paying positions, sometimes in government (as happened in large numbers in Liberia after the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as president) and more often in the local offices of international organisations, such as the UN, or NNGOs. This problem is salient in Sierra Leone and particularly in Liberia, where there are large UN and international organisation offices. Indeed, “all local Liberian organisations have lost knowledgeable staff to the government and international NGOs”¹⁹¹. It is not an exclusively West African issue, however. It is mentioned in every country visited.

In Cambodia the staff of peacebuilding NGOs also frequently change jobs and organisations, but seem to move more between SNGOs rather than to NNGOs, international organisations or government. This staff mobility is related to the fact that local organisations regularly grow and shrink in size depending on whether they have funding for a particular project. Once project funding has been secured, they hire additional staff, but after the project has finished, they have to let these people go again. This is seen in the other countries as well – a consequence of funding being largely tied to projects. It makes it difficult for SNGOs to provide job security – another reason why staff leave for positions in international organisations or governments, which are often more secure. That is, until an international organisation leaves the country and leaves its local staff behind.

High staff turnover presents local SNGOs with the following dilemma: they want to invest in the knowledge and training of their staff, but as soon as they do, this raises the value of their newly trained employees and thereby their job opportunities elsewhere. As one NGO director put

¹⁹¹ Interview with staff members of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.

it, “we invest in our staff and their knowledge. Unfortunately this means that they become quite sought after by other organisations and sometimes leave for better-paid positions”.¹⁹² A Sierra Leonean organisation sent two staff to the Netherlands to attend several training courses. After they had attended the courses they disappeared and never came back to Sierra Leone.¹⁹³ When such people leave their organisation, the danger is that they take the knowledge with them which they have acquired, leaving their employers and colleagues empty-handed.

In order to deal with this dilemma, Southern peace NGOs have come up with a range of measures. In one Liberian NGO, when staff attend training they are required to do two things: first, they have to organise a training for all staff after the course in order to spread the knowledge inside the organisation, and secondly, as a prerequisite to attending the training they have to commit to continue working with the organisation for at least two more years.¹⁹⁴ Similar measures are taken by other organisations. One NGO director mentioned having a regulation that all course materials received during trainings are the property of the organisation. In addition, staff are required to write reports on the training they have participated in.¹⁹⁵ NGO directors also note that to retain staff it is important to pay well and provide job security. In order to achieve this, quality work needs to be delivered so that donors can be convinced of the need to give more funds for staff costs. Unfortunately most funding is tied and few donors are willing to fund this.¹⁹⁶

An indication that knowledge acquisition and exchange actually lead to learning is when operational changes are made as a result. A few organisations revisit working plans every year to see whether they are still relevant.¹⁹⁷ Evaluating activities – and relating the outcomes to other experiences and ideas – can play an important role in this. The problem here is that evaluations are usually carried out primarily at the request, and according to the methods, of donors, and that this external accountability function of evaluation often tends to get more emphasis than its internal learning function. Section 5.4 elaborates on this issue.

¹⁹² Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

¹⁹³ Interview with staff member of a regional NGO working in several West African countries. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 20 February 2006.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with staff members of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with staff member of a regional NGO working in several West African countries. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 20 February 2006.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with director of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

One interviewee mentioned that it is not always possible to change a programme directly as new knowledge comes in – because investments have already been made in a particular programme or because donor agencies do not allow changes to be made along the way. However, it is always possible to make small changes at the tactical level – and this is something NGO workers do on a daily basis, often without even realising it.

As discussed in section 3.2, staff working at different levels in an organisation may possess different types of knowledge. Genuine strategic learning primarily takes place when these different levels are connected – for example, when field-level experiences of implementing a given policy are connected to management-level discussions on strategy. Davies (1998: 209) suggests that indeed, in SNGOs, different types of knowledge and learning are required of different categories of staff: “[t]he short memory of the office staff is not problematic, because their work is highly routinised whereas the work of field staff involves more discretion and this requires more contextual knowledge.” However, in most NGOs I visited there is no clear distinction between office staff and field staff. As nearly all staff are engaged in operational activities in the field, they have to perform different learning functions instantaneously – from a more tactical to a more strategic level. At the same time, as we have seen, to a large extent policy is made outside these organisations and it is with donor agencies that strategic policy discussions should, and sometimes do, take place.

5.3.3 Adapting, passing on, and applying knowledge

Table 5.5¹⁹⁸ portrays the strategies Southern peace NGOs employ to process, pass on, and use the knowledge they gain. It shows that in all countries visited, networks are very prominent forums for sharing and refining knowledge. The next chapter will elaborate this strategy. Particularly in West Africa and the Philippines, interviewees mentioned organising community workshops at which they pass on their knowledge while at the same time learning new things from the interaction with local people. Capacity building of grassroots groups and weaker NGOs and peace education are related activities and the use of all these terms overlaps. Again, these ways of applying and adapting knowledge are mentioned particularly in West Africa and the Philippines. Cambodian and Central Asian NGOs do not mention this strategy. This may be because they are generally weaker and are not able to provide capacity

¹⁹⁸ See note 164.

building. Advocacy towards policymakers is seen as another avenue for passing knowledge onto others. Southeast Asian NGOs also employ staff exchanges and internships as ways to pass on and adapt knowledge.

Adapting, passing on, applying knowledge	Lib (10)	SL (16)	Kenya (11¹⁹⁹)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	Central Asia (15)	To-tal (76)
Networks	6	9	3	7	7	5	37
Community workshops	6	6		5	1		18
Capacity building	5	8	2	3			18
Advocacy	1	4	1	6	1	2	15
Peace education	4	4		2	1		11
Create new manuals, modules	2	1		2		1	6
Newsletters	1		2	3			6
Internships, staff exchanges				3	3		6
Booklets, comics	2			2			4
Conferences	1		1			2	4
Resource centre	1	1				1	3
Storytelling	1	1	1				3
E-groups, listserves				1	1		2
Website	1						1
E-mail		1					1
Press conferences, policy briefings		1					1

Table 5.5: Organisational learning activities of Southern peace NGOs: adapting, passing on, and applying knowledge

As discussed earlier, all SNGO staff interviewed are open to new knowledge, but some are wary of culturally inappropriate, Western concepts being imposed. In some areas people see a tension between Western concepts and local culture, for example with regard to the concept of gender and the role of women. The challenge is to look for a convergence of different concepts rather than emphasising the divide. Indeed, Southern peacebuilders generally agree that they can learn from available theories but they have to put them into the local context; to translate them. Each conflict is different. It is one thing to receive knowledge through training and quite another to implement it in one's work. Theories have to be compared with the situation at hand and adapted to it. As a result new methodologies are created. All

¹⁹⁹ This includes two Sudanese and one Rwandese organisation; all based in Nairobi, Kenya.

organisations do this in one way or another – some more explicitly than others. Usually the translation process is informal, but sometimes more formalised, written tools are developed as a result of adapting external knowledge to local ideas and circumstances. The resulting knowledge finds its way into community workshops and capacity building activities.

Particularly in the Philippines, NGOs have been active in using relevant concepts from books and training and adapting them to the local situation, creating new theories and frameworks. Examples include the training and documentation activities of Catholic Relief Service (CRS) Mindanao. Its Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute²⁰⁰ aims to help grassroots organisations to learn about peacebuilding concepts and frameworks, and how to apply these on the ground. The application, adaptation, contextualising of concepts is already assisted during the course when cases from the practice of participants are used to illustrate the concepts that are introduced. These concepts come from books by renowned peace researchers and from conflict resolution manuals from NNGOs.

CRS emphasises that local organisations can offer insights derived from their experience with grassroots peacebuilding experiences and knowledge about initiatives that are working. For this reason the third week of the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute is an exposure programme in the field where the participants can see how the communities are doing things. This also reinforces the effort of the local community.²⁰¹ Another example of initiatives to translate external knowledge into new concepts is the development of modules and frameworks for grassroots actors and village leaders by the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC): see Box 5.1 below.

Box 5.1: Module developed by Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC)²⁰²

The Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC) has developed a module on the 'culture of peace'. The module includes the history of the Mindanao conflict, conflict resolution skills, cultural sensitivity, and inter-religious dialogue. The module is taught to people at the grassroots and paramilitary groups. Storytelling is an important tool used in the programme – one that fits Mindanawan traditions of knowledge transfer. The approach emphasises that no one should be treated as enemies; instead, all are victims. Via the participants in the course the organisation hopes this view will slowly spread to their colleagues in NGOs and paramilitary units, who often have a more adversarial approach. The staff of the MPC are often invited by NGOs and others to speak.

²⁰⁰ See Box 4.3 in section 4.7.

²⁰¹ Interview with staff member of Mindanawan NGO. Davao, Philippines, 15 May 2006.

²⁰² Interview with MPC chairman. Marbel, Philippines, 16 May 2006.

These Mindanawan organisations are not the only SNGOs that engage in the provision of training courses. As we will see in section 5.5.4, which deals with capacity building by SNGOs, many organisations visited do. Their courses are offered to other NGOs, grassroots organisations and communities. They tend to focus on peace education and peacebuilding methodologies. Some training programmes offered also include more practical issues like organisational management, financial administration, ICT, fundraising, and impact assessment. One NGO has made it a focus activity to link up organisations that provide training with people who can benefit from it.²⁰³

In addition to training courses, there are various other ways in which Southern peace NGOs pass knowledge on to others. Some SNGOs regularly publish newsletters which are handed out to beneficiaries during field visits or e-mailed around to organisations that might be interested. Some organisations let members of the target group of their newsletter – other NGOs, grassroots partners - contribute to it themselves so that they can share their stories and feel ownership of the knowledge sharing process. Other SNGOs publish booklets documenting information about grassroots peace initiatives – such as the Mindanawan zones of peace - and translate them into local languages so that they may inspire people. Some larger peace NGOs also publish peacebuilding manuals. Others produce comic books which provide information to communities in a more easily digestible form. (One organisation mentioned that drawing the pictures for its comic book was a long process because it had to make sure the drawings were culturally sensitive.²⁰⁴)

5.3.4 Research and dissemination

As Table 5.6²⁰⁵ shows, nine of the 76 NGOs visited mentioned research as an explicit focus area. Of these, three are based in Sierra Leone, three in Kenya, two in the Philippines and one in Tajikistan. In Liberia and Cambodia research was not mentioned as a prominent activity. This is not to say that peace NGOs in these countries do not carry out research. Most organisations try at least informally to gather information about the circumstances and needs of beneficiaries, while some also study local peacebuilding practices.

²⁰³ Interview with director of a Mindanawan NGO. Amsterdam, Netherlands, 9 April 2006.

²⁰⁴ Interview with staff member of a Mindanawan NGO. Davao, Philippines, 15 May 2006.

²⁰⁵ See note 164.

Research and dissemination	Lib (10)	SL (16)	Kenya (11 ²⁰⁶)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	Central Asia (15)	Total (76)
Research and dissemination		2	3	2		1	9

Table 5.6: Organisational learning activities of Southern peace NGOs: research and dissemination

A lot of interviewees said that they would like to do more research than they are doing at present²⁰⁷. They would like to study local needs, the experiences and methods of others, and their own work, taking more time to reflect on experiences and ways forward. For example, a Mindanawan NGO staff member mentioned she is considering writing a proposal to do a participatory research project on how to reconcile concepts and methods of peacebuilding with traditional ways of living and doing things, particularly from Islamic culture, which could result in a training module.²⁰⁸ Some of the issues that kept people from doing so were a lack of time and a lack of willingness on the part of donors to fund such activities.

Research is more likely to get funded when it is for the purpose of early warning for conflict prevention. As recognition grows that preventing conflict is more desirable and cost-effective than curing it, local research leading to risk assessments and information on possibly mounting tensions in a given area gets some donor support. However, gathering information for early warning purposes represents only one area of study in the range of things that NGO staff members want to research. As mentioned, many NGOs would like to study their own work. Many interviewees desire more opportunity to reflect, draw lessons and document experiences. Such documentation would help Southern peace organisations to better contribute to global knowledge exchanges, discussions, and concept development in the field. A Mindanawan peacebuilder said that although he is used to oral exchange, he is now realising more and more the importance of writing, particularly for advocacy purposes. Written information can reach many more people than oral information. So, this peacebuilder has begun to write down experiences, and they have been published in magazines and books.²⁰⁹

Similarly, a West African NGO network has recently begun to retain and write down the stories from its practice. It is also starting up a

²⁰⁶ This includes two Sudanese and one Rwandese organisation; all based in Nairobi, Kenya.

²⁰⁷ See table 5.1.

²⁰⁸ Interview with staff member of a Mindanawan youth NGO, Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.

²⁰⁹ Interview with chairman of a Mindanawan NGO network, Marbel, Philippines, 16 May 2006.

research effort to document conflicts and create a database of narratives on conflict and peacebuilding in the region. This also provides baseline information for interventions.²¹⁰ In another illustration of what may be a beginning trend, the action research Master programme that is analysed in chapter eight represents an effort to support local peacebuilders in Cambodia and elsewhere in their desire to reflect, learn, document, and contribute to theory development based on their practice.

The nine NGOs that already focus explicitly on research as a core activity do so in the following ways.

- In Kenya, SNGO research focuses on various issues. For one Kenyan NGO research is connected to awareness raising and capacity building work. This takes place around security issues, particularly the control of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Kenya and beyond. The organisation has been actively involved in the process leading up to the Nairobi Protocol on SALW, and now helps provide the technical capacity towards its implementation.²¹¹ Another Kenya-based organisation considers itself a resource institution on peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa, providing knowledge based on research and interaction with people who intervene in conflicts. It also engages with governments to try and shape policy. It has formed various partnerships and platforms to deal with issues in the region, including a group working on early warning with governments and NGOs.²¹² The third Kenyan NGO is a network which does research mainly into existing activities and methodologies for peacebuilding and focuses on sharing best practices among its members.²¹³
- In the Philippines, a Mindanawan youth organisation carries out research into the traditional Rido system of feuding families and revenge, and ways of dealing with it. This includes a study of the ways the ancestors resolved Rido issues and what we today can learn from that.²¹⁴ The second Philippine NGO for which research is an important activity is an organisation tied to a university that focuses on peace education.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

²¹¹ Telephone interview with director of a Kenyan NGO. Nairobi, Kenya, 29 November 2005.

²¹² Interview with staff member of a Kenyan NGO. Nairobi, Kenya, 29 November 2005.

²¹³ Interview with director of a regional NGO working in East Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 28 November 2005.

²¹⁴ Interview with staff members of a Mindanawan NGO. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.

²¹⁵ Interview with director of a Philippine NGO. Quezon City, Philippines, 19 May 2006.

- In Sierra Leone, an NGO peacebuilding network listed research as one of its activities. Its coordinator mentioned he was working on a research proposal together with a member organisation on the issue of chieftaincies that have been amalgamated into larger entities²¹⁶, causing disgruntlement among some chiefs and providing a possible potential for renewed conflict²¹⁷. Another organisation did research during the war into the extent of destruction in order to establish a baseline for post-war interventions.²¹⁸
- A Tajik organisation carries out scientific research and surveys on a variety of subjects, including elections, ethnic relations, trafficking, child labour, migration, drugs, political Islam, security and conflict. It wrote the study on Tajikistan for UNDP's Human Development Report for Central Asia.

5.3.5 Concluding 5.3

Section 5.3 has shown that the learning processes of Southern peace NGOs are usually informal and action-based. Written information and – particularly – formal education play very limited roles in the learning of SNGO staff. However, training courses specifically oriented at improving the work of peacebuilding organisations are found useful, both for the new knowledge introduced in them – which is then adapted by participants before it is applied or passed on – and for the interactions with other participants. Knowledge retention within organisations is a challenge due to high staff mobility. This forces NGOs to think increasingly about internal knowledge sharing strategies, which may support organisational learning.

When it comes to using new knowledge and passing it on, its adaptation to local knowledge and circumstances is once again emphasised. Most SNGOs do this in informal ways but some – particularly in the Philippines – increasingly document their own knowledge in the form of training modules, handbooks or articles. Still, many voice a desire to have more time, money and skills for such documentation. While only few Southern peace organisations in the countries visited explicitly focus on research and knowledge dissemination as an organisational strategy, many others do so informally. More significantly, nearly all

²¹⁶ the number of chieftaincies in Sierra Leone went from 400 to 49.

²¹⁷ Interview with coordinator of a Sierra Leonean NGO network. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006.

²¹⁸ Interview with staff member of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Bo, Sierra Leone, 21 February 2006.

local peacebuilders want to do more in this area in order to reflect on work, draw lessons, find out more about the needs and circumstances of local communities, and contribute to global discussions and theory development in the field of peacebuilding.

5.4 Monitoring and evaluation as a tool for learning

Although all SNGOs that work with donor funding (and the large majority of organisations visited does) are required to carry out monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in some form, only few interviewees mentioned M&E as a source of learning. This is surprising as on the face of it M&E seems like a useful tool for information gathering, reflection and adaptation. Through M&E mechanisms, NGOs relate the implementation of their activities back to their original plans and objectives. In doing so organisations try to assess the effectiveness of the inputs that they make and the processes they use.²¹⁹ At a higher level, NGOs may try to assess how their efforts have, or have not, supported the ending of violence or the achievement of justice.

As we will see in this section, these are difficult things to determine, particularly in the shorter term. Trying to do so, however, stimulates reflection and learning by stepping out of daily practice and relating work to the bigger picture of conflict and peace. Below, we will elaborate the link between M&E and learning, examine some of the difficulties that occur when M&E is done in the field of NGO peacebuilding, discuss possible ways to overcome these difficulties, and formulate some characteristics of M&E procedures that support learning. Even though the respondents of my study did not pay much attention to M&E, the fact that they all have to do M&E and combined with its potential use in learning processes makes it worthwhile to devote some space to the issue nonetheless. The section is based on NNGO publications, academic literature, and a few SNGO publications and interview results.

5.4.1 M&E as a tool for learning and knowledge sharing

At least in theory, mechanisms for the M&E of activities constitute an important tool for the learning of NGOs. Activities are monitored and

²¹⁹ This usually includes the project design, the selection of participants, how well the methodology was implemented, how well problems and follow-up were managed, how participants responded, and what the immediate results were.

evaluated with the aim to find out which parts of them have been more and which less successful. This is done for several purposes: accountability towards donors and project users; communication between stakeholders; improving the performance of the organisation by learning from experience; and helping others improve their performance by sharing lessons. (Britton 2005: 12) The last two aims show the contribution that M&E can make to learning processes in and around organisations. In this context, M&E can be a tool that facilitates the learning cycle by keeping track of developments, creating space for reflection on them, generating new knowledge as a result of this process, and feeding this back into practice. From this perspective, learning is a way to close the gap between M&E on the one hand, and project and programme planning on the other. This is important as “[t]here is an impressive body of policy recommendations and lessons learned [but] many practitioners [...] are concerned that these cumulative insights have not led to a more informed and harmonised international response activity” (Salomons 2004: 24).

In addition, M&E processes offer an opportunity for exchanges of views between researchers, policy makers, and practitioners about the usefulness of activities and the future course of action. According to Baud, “this applies more to programme level evaluations than project evaluations; the former are specifically designed to instigate changes for more overall effectiveness, whereas project evaluations often remain within the boundaries of their existing terms of reference.” (Baud 2002: 60) In that sense, programme and project evaluations correspond to second and first order learning, respectively.

Thinking about the depth of learning made possible by different types of evaluations, it is also important to recall the structural constraints described in chapter four. In many ways, the international aid system and the Northern partners of SNGOs set the margins of practice and limit the learning of Southern partners to first order learning – making tactical adjustments within given terms. For more in-depth reflection and learning about the terms themselves an interaction with NNGOs and possibly back-donors is needed. Such deeper learning also requires introspection and learning on both sides – not only on the part of SNGOs.

Within the structural constraints of the aid regime, the specific approach organisations take in their M&E processes determines what opportunities for learning and exchange are created. The process adopted also helps shape the important next step: the incorporation of the results into policy and practice. In how far the results from

monitoring and evaluation, often formulated as ‘lessons learned’, are used depends on other factors as well - most notably the organisation’s capacity for organisational learning.

Unfortunately, the reality of M&E practice contrasts with the ideal picture in which M&E and learning mutually reinforce one another. After all, we saw in section 5.3 that when peace SNGO staff were asked about their sources of learning, project and programme evaluations and monitoring activities were hardly mentioned at all. Indeed, it is an often-heard complaint that in most cases the learning aims of M&E are not served. Lessons learned reports are written on the basis of evaluations, but they are not sufficiently used in future planning and execution. One reason for this is that M&E is often seen as a policing instrument, imposed by donors to keep an eye on the way their money is spent, rather than a system for learning and reflection for the organisation itself. Another reason for the lack of learning on the basis of M&E is said to be that evaluation procedures are inadequate, particularly in the field of peacebuilding. We will now turn to these issues in some more detail.

5.4.2 Difficulties: funding regimes and the special nature of peacebuilding work

Before elaborating on the issue of the adequacy of existing methods for peacebuilding work, we first look at the first issue mentioned at the end of the previous section: the role of funding regimes in constraining learning from M&E. When it comes to monitoring and evaluating their work, SNGOs experience a tension between learning on the one hand and accountability on the other. The NNGO donors determine not only the policies of their SNGO partners but also their procedures for M&E and reporting on results. A lot of emphasis is placed on these results, as NNGOs themselves face discussions at home about the effectiveness of development aid and in turn have to report to their back-donors. This increasing pressure for results-based reporting heightens the climate of competition among NGOs in the field (ALNAP 2003: 55).

SNGOs on their side are highly dependent on the funds of their Northern partners – funds which are often tied to specific projects rather than being part of a long-term, trust-based partnership. At the end of each project they have to write new project proposals to solicit new funds. Success in previous projects increases the likelihood of obtaining renewed or continued funding commitments. As a result, SNGOs have an incentive to obscure failure or partial success and emphasise results –

whether real or not. This clashes with the requirements of learning, which include self-reflection, a willingness to admit mistakes, and an open policy dialogues with donors and other stakeholders about what works and what does not.

Because of the strong emphasis of donors on M&E as a requirement for funding, M&E is primarily seen by SNGOs as a tool for accountability. There is little space to use it also for learning, particularly given the tension between showing results and learning from mistakes. In addition, SNGOs often have little space to develop their own M&E procedures in a way appropriate to their practice and circumstances. This is because donor organisations tend to have their own M&E and reporting formats, which they require their Southern partners to use. To make matters worse, different donors require different reporting formats. This results in a lot of work for SNGOs. Fortunately, the willingness of donor organisations to try different tools and methods, and to the learning needs of their partners more generally, varies. Some are much more open to suggestions for alternative ways of reporting than others. But the many complaints of Southern interviewees show that the constraints described are structurally present in all countries visited.

The funding regime and its consequences for the M&E practices of SNGOs also bears on the second issue introduced at the start of this section – the suggested mismatch between dominant procedures and peacebuilding practice. The logical framework or logframe model mostly used by donors comes in different forms, but generally resembles the following table:

Goal	Objectives	Indicators	Activities / inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact

Table 5.7: Example of a logical framework

The goal is the overall purpose of a project – what it wants to achieve. It is split up into more specific objectives. For each of these objectives, indicators of success are then specified – observable changes that tell us whether an objective has been achieved. Traditionally, such indicators are largely quantitative. In the next column, the activities or inputs that the project plans to carry out in order to achieve the objectives are quantified. There are different understandings of the terms output, outcome and impact, and they are sometimes used interchangeably.

Most people seem, however, to make the following distinction. Outputs are readily observable, measurable results – for example, the number of meetings organised or the number of people attending those meetings. Outcomes are any follow-up developments that resulted from these outputs (the meetings may for example lead to increased interaction or even joint activities by the participants). Impact, finally, is the actual change the project has made in the conditions of the beneficiaries – in other words, the progress towards reaching the overall goal.

This framework is widely used in development and peacebuilding for the planning and monitoring of programmes and projects. Many find it a useful way to help structure their interventions. However, as we have seen, there is also criticism, particularly in the field of peacebuilding. This criticism takes several forms, each having generated new responses. First, the model is criticised for being grounded in a Western, overly structured way of thinking. It is rigid and inflexible and does not capture the complexity and fluidity of conflict situations and peace processes. The Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) methodology described below is one initiative that tries to relate project monitoring explicitly to the conflict context. PCIA is still mostly developed in the West and is rather elaborate and structured, and for that reason might still be subject to some of the above criticism. Other ways of taking this critique into account include participatory evaluation and a more general openness to other, locally or jointly developed methods.

A second, related but more specific point made is that in the practice of implementing logframes, indicators and outputs tend to be defined in measurable and quantitative terms. In Western knowledge systems statistics tend to be highly regarded as evidence, whereas doubts are raised regarding the wider applicability of qualitative information such as personal change stories. This contrasts somewhat with the practice of peacebuilding, which includes activities like organising dialogues, lobbying governments, and advocacy work to draw attention to problems and possible solutions. In response, many – particularly larger – Southern peace organisations work to develop alternative indicators by which to assess the outcomes of programmes. Below, one such initiative is elaborated upon.

Thirdly, it is increasingly argued that interventions aiming to build peace and promote reconciliation cannot easily be assessed in terms of ‘results’ or ‘impact’. Peacebuilding is a long-term change process. Its results often take the form of something *not* occurring (such as conflict escalation or outbreaks of violence). When such a (non-)outcome is observed, it is almost impossible to attribute it to one particular

intervention, given the many factors at play. This is often referred to as the ‘attribution problem’. In response to the attribution problem, new methods are developed to provide an alternative, such as the Outcome Mapping method of the Canada-based International Development Research Centre (IDRC) elaborated in the next section.

A fourth body of criticism relates to the way in which logframes are usually applied, namely at the short-term, project level. Contrasting with the long-term and often intangible nature of peace work, donor funding as we have seen is often tied to a particular project: a time-bound and tangible, result-oriented undertaking. (NPI-Africa and the NCCK-CPBD project 2001: preface) M&E is a requirement at this project level, even though longer-term, programme-level M&E activities may better serve the purpose of learning and knowledge exchange. The project-oriented nature of much funding, monitoring, evaluation and reporting is therefore another facet of dominant M&E procedures that does not match the field of peacebuilding well. After only a short amount of time has passed it is not yet possible to say anything meaningful about outcomes or impact at that point in time. Thus, evaluations should either take place over much longer terms or be less ambitious in what they claim to be able to find.

These and a number of other, more specific characteristics of peacebuilding that present difficulties for evaluation are summarised in Box 5.2 below.

Box 5.2: Difficulties for the evaluation of peacebuilding activities, compared to other development-oriented interventions²²⁰

- Peacebuilding includes activities like organising dialogues, lobbying governments and advocacy work to draw attention to problems and possible solutions. The outcomes of this type of work are more difficult to measure than activities like the building of roads or vaccination campaigns.
- Its results often take the form of something *not* occurring (such as conflict escalation or outbreaks of violence). The results of conflict prevention measures are therefore difficult to evaluate.
- The attribution problem is particularly salient: there are so many factors and actors at play, at different levels, that it is almost impossible to attribute an outcome to one particular action or intervention.
- It is especially difficult to link “project outputs and outcomes on the micro level to changes and thus impact on the macro level of politics and society (an often-cited *influence gap* as well as an *attribution gap*)”. (Schmelzle 2005: 5)
- Peacebuilding is a long-term change process. It takes place in a highly volatile environment in which preliminary successes can be easily overshadowed by subsequent set-backs, - which does not imply that an

²²⁰ Barakat et al. 2006

intervention has not made a positive contribution to the development.

- Peacebuilding is a highly *dialectical process*. The very success of a dialogue process, for example “might lead extremists to take violent action before their political standing is seriously eroded” (Smith 2004: 59).
- Conflicts are over-determined, i.e. even if some of the root causes are taken away, others may still be at work and perpetuate a conflict. Interventions can have been successful in addressing some of the root causes. But their effect will only be visible once other causes are subsequently (or in parallel) addressed as well.
- The causes of conflict can change. Some original causes may fade away, while new causes come up (new grievances, interests of refugees, interest of profiteers). In many cases, the violence itself takes the place of other ‘root causes’ as the main issue that needs to be addressed.
- “[T]he field of peacebuilding is a relatively young one as many organisations only emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. It is therefore not surprising that many strategies, methods and instruments still remain in a test phase and therefore need further elaboration and investigation.” (Schmelzle 2005: 2)

The issues introduced in this section have led to considerable debate in both the North and the South. As a result, thinking about M&E in the area of peacebuilding has developed in recent years. The next section looks at alternative M&E methods that are being proposed in order to deal with the issue of the appropriateness of existing procedures for peacebuilding.

5.4.3 Developing methods and indicators for peacebuilding work

Going back to the criticism about the limited usefulness of quantitative indicators, two African organisations, the Nairobi Peace Initiative-Africa (NPI-Africa) and the National Council of Churches of Kenya Community Peace Building and Development Project (NCCCK-CPBD project), developed a Community-based Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES) in 2001. The system gives examples of suitable quantitative ‘output’ indicators and qualitative ‘impact’ indicators that require a longer narrative. To measure “increased interaction among differing ethnic groups”, for example, a *quantitative* indicator could be the number of “good neighbourliness workshops” held in the community.

Qualitative indicators could be

- new community peace initiatives established;
- confessions by community members;
- sharing of resources like water and pasture;
- agreements reached.

(NPI-Africa and the NCKK-CPBD project 2001) Such indicators could help capture the changes taking place in reality. Indeed, more and more organisations try to include qualitative data in their M&E procedures and there also appears to be growing acceptance on the part of donors of the need to do so.

In relation to the third criticism – about the usefulness of the concept ‘impact’ – the IDRC argues that this concept is too elusive and that it is difficult to assess which factors have contributed to a change in situation, and in how far the intervention was what made the difference (the attribution problem described above). Therefore its Outcome Mapping method limits assessment of programme outcomes to the people the programme interacts with directly, and their direct ‘sphere of influence’. Instead of using concepts like ‘impact’ or ‘result’, the method uses ‘progress markers’ to assess developments. By concentrating on small but observable changes in behaviour, at least some progress towards a programme’s goal may be demonstrated and directions may be provided for continuation (learning from the evaluation) as well as accountability towards donors. (Earl et al. 2001)

Outcome Mapping is valuable in cautioning about claiming credit for changes taking place, and its progress markers represent a useful alternative to ‘impact’ and ‘result’. At the same time it is somewhat limited in that it does not give any picture of the broader, structural situation and the longer-term changes taking place. This is difficult to do but many would at least desire some kind of tentative conclusion about broader impact as well. Indeed, there is some discussion about the *level* of measurement possible (Fischer and Wils 2005: 5-6). The indicators mentioned as examples by NPI-Africa and the NCKK above clearly focus on the project and community level. But how to establish what effects a project has had on a wider conflict? Some argue that impact at this higher level cannot be evaluated at all. Others look for ways to gather information about wider changes. Participatory methods could be of assistance: what are local opinions about whether the programme made a difference? We will return to this in the next section.

Another initiative to link specific projects to the wider context of conflict and peace is a tool called Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA), which has been developed over the last few years through contributions by various NNGOs²²¹. PCIA is designed to better assess

²²¹ According to Hoffman (2005: 3), these include the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP); the Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands; the UK-based organisation International Alert; the UK government’s Department for International Development (DfID); the European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation; and the

“the ways in which the peace and conflict environment may affect an initiative or project” and “the ways in which an initiative or project may affect the peace and conflict environment”, as is depicted in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment²²²

PCIA carries out these assessments at various stages of a project. Before a project starts, a risk and opportunity assessment (on the left side of Figure 5.1) is undertaken to assess the impact the conflict environment could have on a project. At this stage, risks and opportunities are listed with regard to

- *location* (geographical extent of the project; status of territory; level of infrastructure)
- *timing* (current stage of the conflict; current or future developments; increasing or decreasing opportunities to work in the area)
- *political context* (relationship between communities and authorities; level of political support for the initiative; stability of the environment; presence or absence, and inclusiveness, of major peace initiatives; nature of the political system; external conditions)
- *military context* (relationship between armed actors; intensity and patterns of violence)
- *socio-economic issues* (legacies of conflict; relations between communities; cultural factors; economic relations)
- *partners/stakeholders* (capacity of implementing organisation; position of organisation in conflict; choice of beneficiaries and its political implications; ability of stakeholders to make choices and willingness to make changes)
- *other factors* (vary by location).

In addition to listing risks and opportunities for each of these factors, the assessment also lists whether more information is needed and what

Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

²²² Bush 2003: 4

changes or clarifications are necessary before starting the project. (Bush 2003: 11-17)

When the risk and opportunity assessment is completed and it is decided to do the project, a Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (right-hand side of Figure 5.1) is undertaken three times: during the design phase, during implementation, and during evaluation. This assessment lists the potential or actual impact a project has on peace and on conflict through the following factors:

- *conflict management capacities* (of state or civil society)
- *militarised violence and human security* (patterns and levels of violence; the sense of security or insecurity of individuals and communities)
- *political structures and processes* (strengthening or weakening of governance capacities of different levels of government; ability or inability of civil society actors to actively and constructively participate in political processes)
- *economic structures and issues* (strengthening or weakening equitable socio-economic structures, institutions and processes; distortion or conversion of war economies; availability of capital; distribution of resources; income generation; training)
- *social empowerment* (creation of a culture of peace characterised by constructive social communication, tolerance, inclusiveness, justice, gender equity, and participation; confidence and capacity of all members of society to overcome obstacles to a satisfying life). As in the previous phase, the assessment lists not only impact but also looks at additional information needed and possible changes in the project. (Bush 2003: 20-24)

The proponents of PCIA have paid relatively little attention to the development of suitable indicators to measure the impact on the factors listed above, but they do state that both quantitative and qualitative indicators should be used. Initiatives such as those of NPI-Africa and the NCCK-CPBD project, as well as others working to develop relevant indicators, can be useful additions in this regard.

The table below gives an overview of the methodologies discussed in this section and compares their characteristics.

	Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)	Community-based Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES)	Outcome Mapping (OM)
Level of analysis, target groups	The PCIA debate focuses on assessing impact on the macro peace process (Paffenholz 2005: 6)	Community Peace Groups	“Sphere of influence” which each project has: OM aims to assess the observable “behavioural changes” within the boundary partners’ sphere
Kind of activities which are evaluated	Conflict management capabilities, political structures and processes, economic structures and processes, social empowerment	Improvement of interaction between ethnic groups, analysis of root causes; introduction of sustainable early warning system for early action	Programmes identify partners with whom they work & then devise strategies to help equip these partners with the tools and resources to contribute to change.
Methods, tools	Participatory workshops with stakeholders, field research	Log Frames Activity Interviews Case Monitors Participants’ Lists	Shift away from assessing the products of a program (e.g. poverty alleviation, reduced conflict) to focus on concrete changes in behaviour, relationships, actions
Concrete experience	Field testing (of “Aid for peace”) in Rwanda (2001), Bosnia, Burundi, South Africa, Nigeria, Angola, and Nepal (2002) Angola, Sri Lanka, South Kivu, and Nepal (2003)	The Community Peace Building and Development Project in Western Kenya has experimented with CMES since 1999	At a global civil society conference in New York organised by GPPAC in July 2005, Outcome mapping was applied to the Belfast mobile phone project described in Van Tongeren et al. (2005: 435-440).
Weaknesses	(Too) much oriented towards a broad framework for a standardized approach to aid in conflict situations	LogFrames may be too much based on a linear, development project model and do not easily accommodate the flexibility of a dynamic process	Focus on observable behaviour may disregard structural changes (difficult to see); seems to be based on external perspective

Examples of indicators	Proponents of PCIA have paid relatively little attention to the development of suitable indicators to measure the impact of interventions	Ethnic diversity at meetings; new community peace initiatives, confessions of community members; agreements over the use of resources	Number of new ideas shared in the team, number of key informants from which programs seeks feedback, number of requests to share the program's "wisdom"
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Table 5.8: Methodologies for the evaluation of peacebuilding activities

Another ongoing discussion revolves around the way in which M&E is carried out. In particular, attention focuses on the limitations of evaluation by external people of interventions done by external people. Every programme is based on certain values, which may be culturally or ideologically determined. When an evaluation is done by people with the same cultural and ideological background, the programme outcomes are measured against these same values. After all, the word *evaluation* means that value is attributed to a certain set of data. However, the people for whom the programme is intended may cling to different values and from this perspective have a completely different opinion of the impact of the programme. (Barakat et al. 2005) The only solution to this problem would be to allow programmes to be evaluated by the people that they are intended for, using participatory evaluation methods.²²³

Barakat et al. (2005: 8) write that participatory evaluation is underpinned by several core themes:

“1) The importance of harnessing collective knowledge of many stakeholders, especially at the community level, to reflect on the development intervention; 2) the need to adapt the evaluation to the particular circumstance and contexts, thus requiring flexibility and reliance on qualitative rather than quantitative data; 3) the need for participation between evaluators and constituents; 4) the need to ensure that participants become beneficiaries, meaning that the evaluation becomes associated with joint benefits that evaluation participants obtain from taking part, particularly in terms of empowerment.”

Most important in participatory evaluation is that the primary stakeholders or intended beneficiaries of the programme play a role in

²²³ Related to this is the question of what should be evaluated: the actual situation (in so far as this is possible) or local perceptions of the situation. When statistics show that per capita income has grown, but the popular perception is that people are worse off, then there is still a problem – social dissatisfaction - to be solved. By including as many sources as possible that relate local perceptions of reality, an evaluation can help uncover this kind of problem as well.

the planning and management of the process and define the indicators, often helped by a facilitator. Together they determine what for them would indicate success of the project. Thus, participatory evaluation starts at a much earlier phase than one would expect from an evaluation: it starts at the phase of planning a project and its M&E system. Such participatory indicator development could include not only the beneficiaries of a project and the staff of the SNGO carrying it out, but also in as far as possible staff of the financing NGO and a representative of their back-donor (for example, someone working at the embassy of the back-donor government in the country in which the project takes place). In some cases organisations include colleagues from other organisations undertaking similar projects. In East Africa some SNGOs are experimenting with 'peer reviews' in which different organisations participate in the evaluation of each other's activities. This can also have an important knowledge sharing function.²²⁴

5.4.4 A learning approach to M&E

In addition to the development of more suitable indicators and more participatory methods, there has been some discussion about arriving at a learning approach to M&E more generally. A study by the Dutch Inter-Church Development Organisation (ICCO) and the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) has distinguished between traditional approaches to M&E on the one hand and a learning approach on the other. Where traditional approaches tend to look at specific project deliverables only, a learning approach contains the following elements:

- the establishment of clear learning objectives
- the inclusion of qualitative as well as quantitative indicators of success
- participatory evaluation
- evaluation components are embedded in the planning framework from the beginning.
- regular monitoring takes place throughout the life of the project
- a reassessment of the concepts of 'output' and 'impact' : the results of learning processes cannot be described in substantive terms yet can be framed in terms of capacities, process outputs and value added. (ICCO and ECDPM 2004: 14-17)

²²⁴ Interview with director of a regional NGO network working in East Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 28 November 2005.

When we look at the results of evaluations, often formulated as lessons learned, we find that the way they are phrased also plays a role in determining whether they are applied. A lesson learned that takes into account the insights from organisational learning has the following characteristics:

- It contains a generalised principle that can be applied in other situations.
- It is related to the assumptions (hypotheses and existing knowledge) on which the programme or project has been based.
- It does not contain untested or inadequately justified assumptions about what might happen if something is done differently.
- It is neither too general nor too specific to be useful to others.
- It is clear about the audience for whom it might have relevance and is thus articulated in appropriate terms and targeted at intended audiences. (Adapted from Guijt et al. 2002: 11)

Taking such pointers into account could help make M&E not only a tool for reporting to donors, but also a method to facilitate organisational learning and knowledge exchange. It would then help to test assumptions, learn from activities, and feed these lessons back into activities in a cyclical learning process. This cyclical learning model for M&E is depicted in Figure 5.2 below.

Figure 5.2: A learning model for peace evaluation²²⁵

There is, however, an important requirement for such a learning approach to M&E to take root. This is a “culture of transparency and a willingness to share results”. The funding regime can facilitate or obstruct this. “As long as projects are rewarded for good practices only, the willingness to discuss ‘failure’ or negative consequences is reduced – and a learning opportunity missed”. (Fischer and Wils 2005: 8) Willingness on the part of donors to tolerate failure and stimulate honest and critical reflection would help solve the tension between learning and accountability. This brings us back to the importance of longer-term donor-recipient partnerships that are based on trust.

As we discussed in the previous section, another necessity for M&E to become a learning tool is that various stakeholders are involved in it,

²²⁵ NPI-Africa and the NCKK-CPBD project 2001: 23

including those a project is aimed at but also those who help set the structural framework in which action and learning take place – the donors. As became clear in chapter three, an important part of learning is interaction with others - in this case especially with those who help set the structural margins of action. This requires all involved in M&E to take a learning approach and to be willing to look critically at their own role and how it might be improved. Learning donors are just as important as learning SNGOs. Recall the statement by Dutch ministry staff quoted in section 4.3.1: “[w]e 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 [in the past] that we, as donor, did not have anything to learn?” (Wiedenhof and Molenaar 2006: 10)

Thus, a learning attitude by donors and reciprocal, trust-based partnerships help make space for learning and creativity on the part of Southern peace organisations. As a result, they may begin to adapt M&E procedures to their own circumstances and at the same time play a role in global discussions about how these procedures may be improved more generally. One organisation in Mindanao for example took the logframe and added a dimension to it based on theories of change. The new framework asks additional questions such as: how did change happen at the personal, relational and cultural levels? The NGO finds that this makes a deeper analysis possible.²²⁶ Another example, this one more specifically about donor-recipient interaction around M&E formats, comes from Cambodia. There, a local peace organisation organised a meeting with representatives from its various donor NNGOs to discuss the problem that different donors required different reporting formats, which meant an enormous workload for the SNGO. The donors understood, deliberated, and came up with a common framework. Some of them said they had themselves learned a lot from this experience.²²⁷

5.4.5 Concluding 5.4

In theory, the cycle of planning, monitoring, evaluation and renewed planning matches the learning cycle very well and thereby presents a good opportunity for supporting organisational learning processes in NGOs. However, for many Southern peace NGOs M&E procedures do not play a major learning role. There are two main reasons for this. First,

²²⁶ Interview with staff member of a Mindanawan NGO. Davao, Philippines, 15 May 2006.

²²⁷ Interview with staff member of a Cambodian youth NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2006.

the procedures have been created by donors for accountability purposes, rather than developed to fit the learning needs of SNGOs. There is some tension between learning and accountability. SNGOs hesitate to include weaknesses or changes made in programmes – highly relevant information from the perspective of learning - into their monitoring and reporting for fear of losing future funding as a result.

A second reason why M&E does not work well for the learning of Southern peace NGOs is that standard procedures, elaborated for development projects, may not match the realities of peacebuilding practice. More specific tools may be needed for peacebuilding. These tools are indeed being developed, but a problem is that they tend to be rather qualitative in nature, while many donors continue to call for numerical evidence of the outcomes of programmes. That said, understanding grows of the limits of quantitative information in reflecting peacebuilding practice – in the North as well as the South.

In Table 5.8 an overview was given of alternative, more qualitative approaches that are being developed. Given the criticism that most existing M&E tools have been developed in the North, are based on Western knowledge systems, and are generally applied inflexibly without much regard for locally developed alternatives, what would seem to be the best way forward is for organisations to develop their own systems, using elements of these or other approaches, in close collaboration with both their beneficiaries and their donors. This would ensure that M&E tools are as relevant as possible to the context and nature of the work of an organisation. A major difficulty, however, lies in finding ways to fit such a flexible approach into the M&E and reporting procedures and formats that donor NNGOs themselves use. Those procedures are necessarily standardised in order to prevent complete work and information overload in the offices of NNGOs and also as a way to fit the reporting requirements of their back-donors. A joint discussion involving all stakeholders along the chain would be required in order to find creative solutions to deal with these constraints.

More generally, the participatory elaboration of evaluation tools and criteria of success, involving all stakeholders in a programme – donor, SNGO, beneficiaries – would help making M&E more relevant to practice and more useful for learning. This requires similar relational characteristics between Northern and Southern actors as were described in section 4.7 on capacity building. Thus, we come back to the importance of a learning attitude by donors and reciprocal, trust-based partnerships between NNGOs and SNGOs as prerequisites for learning on the part of Southern peace organisations.

5.5 Canyons and bridges. Exchanging knowledge between organisations

We have seen in various places in this book that learning requires interaction with others. While in section 5.3 I discussed interactions within organisations, I now turn to interactions with people outside one's organisation as activities contributing to learning, as knowledge exchange beyond the organisation is the main knowledge strategy used by many Southern peace NGOs.

Local peace NGOs exchange knowledge with...	Lib (10)	SL (16)	Kenya (11)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	Central Asia (15)	Total (76)
Other local NGOs	8	13	7	8	5	3	44
International (non-governmental) organisations	7	5	2	2	5	1	22
Local beneficiaries	5	5	2	6	1		19
Government agencies	5	1	4	2		2	14
Knowledge institutions		1		1			2

Table 5.9: Partners in knowledge exchange of Southern peace NGOs

Table 5.9²²⁸ shows the actors with which local peace NGO staff engage in knowledge exchange and joint learning outside their direct organisational environment. The most widespread are exchanges with other local NGOs. These occur twice as much as with any other actor. Second in importance are international organisations. Exchange also takes place with local beneficiaries and government institutions. Knowledge institutions were mentioned only twice. Below all these interactions are analysed in more detail.

5.5.1 Exchange with other local NGOs

Knowledge sharing with other local NGOs is an activity in which all organisations visited are very active. “[F]ield workers draw heavily on tacit knowledge assets through conversations with colleagues” (ALNAP 2003: 56). Many networks have been set up for this explicit purpose, as

²²⁸ See note 164.

we will see in the next chapter. There also, the reasons why SNGO staff choose this strategy are explored. Prominently among them is the fact, already mentioned repeatedly in this chapter, that the staff of peace SNGOs see exchange and interactions as important ways of knowledge generation and learning. They feel they can learn from the experiences of others and that sharing tacit knowledge leads to new, joint insights and ideas.

In addition to networks, there are also many more informal ways in which knowledge exchange among SNGOs takes place. These include:

- *processes* in which smaller, lower-capacity organisations learn from larger, stronger ones. This impact of large SNGOs on other local SNGOs occurs through mechanisms such as imitation, the setting of standards, formal training provided by the strong SNGO to smaller organisations, and staff moving from one organisation to another.
- *partner meetings* organised by NNGOs to coordinate the activities of their local partners in a specific region or country. In Liberia, a consortium of ICCO partners gets together regularly to coordinate ideas and share experiences. Several partner organisations mentioned finding this very useful. There is an open atmosphere and people are not afraid to talk about their strengths and weaknesses. Together a need was identified to organise training to fill specific knowledge gaps. The ICCO partner network in Liberia is considered a positive example of a donor-initiated (but not donor-driven) network.²²⁹
- *training courses*, which can have an important exchange function. Some programmes explicitly aim at this. For example, the West Africa Peacebuilding Institute (WAPI) set up by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) employs facilitators (coming from various different countries) who ensure that knowledge is exchanged in an interactive way and concepts are continuously related to their practical relevance in the different contexts represented.²³⁰
- *newsletters*: in every country there are some organisations that produce newsletters that are handed out or e-mailed to other organisations. These newsletters give overviews of current events in a region in relation to peace and conflict, relate the activities of the organisation and others, give suggestions for

²²⁹ Interview with Liberia programme coordinator of a regional NGO working in several West African countries. Monrovia, Liberia, 10 February 2006. Interview with staff members of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 14 February 2006.

²³⁰ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

funding sources, announce upcoming events, and/or discuss global developments and what they mean for the region.

- *thematic meetings* for organisations to share experiences around a specific issue. For example, an umbrella of church councils in the Horn of Africa and the African Great Lakes region recently organised a cross-border dialogue event on small arms with Sudanese, Kenyan and Ugandan local church representatives, because these countries face similar issues in their pastoralist areas.²³¹
- *follow-up workshops*: a director of a youth organisation mentioned that after his staff members return from a conference, they are required to hold a workshop for other youth organisations so that they can benefit from the newly gained knowledge.²³²
- *staff exchanges* among organisations in different countries and international internship programmes. Such activities promote knowledge sharing. When taking place within a region, staff exchanges also build regional solidarity. People are strengthened when they discover that others face similar dilemmas and that they can do things together.²³³ Organisations also organise short exchange visits – for example, the above-mentioned church umbrella organisation organised for Kenyan and Ugandan church council members go to Burundi during the election period to assist and share experiences with their Burundian counterparts.²³⁴
- *communication technology*: much exchange takes place face-to-face but internet is also used as well as, in a few cases, videoconferencing.²³⁵
- *informal conversations*: last but not least, much interaction takes place in informal conversations – “at the margins of coordination meetings, in the car park afterwards, in coffee bars, and in restaurants and bars in the evenings” (ALNAP 2003: 56).

²³¹ Interview with staff member of a regional NGO working in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 30 November 2005.

²³² Interview with staff members of a Sierra Leonean NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 February 2006.

²³³ Interview with director of a Mindanawan NGO. Amsterdam, Netherlands, 9 April 2006.

Interview with director of a Cambodian youth NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2005.

²³⁴ Interview with staff member of a regional NGO working in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 30 November 2005.

²³⁵ In Phnom Penh, local NGOs are allowed to use the videoconferencing facilities of Cambodian World Bank office. Interview with director of a Cambodian youth NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2006.

Knowledge shared among SNGOs in these ways tends to have the following content.

- Often, staff members of different peace NGOs exchange tacit knowledge about their programmes and the experiences they have gathered in implementing them. What worked, what did not, and why? What lessons have been learned?
- Updates on the situation are also regularly shared – what are the latest developments with regard to the conflict, and what is the security situation? Box 5.3 below illustrates this.
- Exchange also takes place around organisational strategies. What are the main issues that we should focus on? In which ways should we do so? In this context, meetings often aim at coordinating activities so as to prevent duplication and identify opportunities for joint action. This is hard because of the constraints presented by the funding regime (with donors to a large extent determining the strategies of organisations), and because of competition among NGOs that makes it difficult to openly share strategic information. Still, it is done.
- Exchanges during training courses and network meetings often focus on transferring knowledge of tools and methods for conflict analysis and conflict management. These include concepts that can help to understand and categorise conflict and methodologies for mediation, dialogue and reconciliation.
- Both training courses and network meetings focus on technical knowledge in the sense of ways to run an organisation efficiently. Two West African network coordinators note that in exchanges among members the emphasis is shifting from content knowledge towards technical issues and organisational skills, including M&E, planning, and proposal writing.²³⁶
- Some knowledge sharing activities aim explicitly at bringing together people from different sectors or backgrounds. One West African network runs a programme that explores the tensions between proponents of bringing to justice soldiers who have committed crimes during conflict, and those favouring reconciliation and drawing attention to the fact that calls for justice may impede peace processes. The programme aims to bring together human rights practitioners (who tend to emphasise accountability) and peacebuilding workers (who tend to prioritise reconciliation).

²³⁶ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

Interview with national coordinator of a Sierra Leonean NGO network. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006.

Box 5.3: Report of a meeting of the Eastern regional chapter of the Network for Collaborative Peacebuilding Sierra Leone (NCP-SL), Kenema, 22 February 2006²³⁷

Out of the sixteen member organisations in the region, five were represented at the meeting. Including the visiting researcher, eleven people were present. The meeting was opened with prayer, followed by introductions of those present. Next, the coordinator for the Eastern region gave a report of the 'national visioning process' of the network and the Annual General Meeting that had taken place in Freetown.

- During the visioning process the representatives present had worked on adjusting the constitution of the network.
- It was suggested that the AGM should not always take place in Freetown but rotate between the regions.
- Participants agreed that inactive NCP-SL board members should be replaced.
- It was agreed that the secretariat would write a concept paper on research.
- It was discussed that the network should link up with the organisations dealing with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC has issued recommendations, but these have not been implemented. Here lies a role for civil society.
- The representatives looked at the three-year strategic plan, harmonising ideas and making a concise plan, which was put to the AGM.

A discussion followed, in which the following questions and issues came up:

- People agree that the network should be less Freetown-centred. A member proposes that the next AGM be held in Kenema.
- People are unclear whether the election of board members takes place centrally or in the regions. It turns out to be in the regions. All are dissatisfied with the performance of the board members representing the Eastern region. The Eastern region is highly affected by conflict issues, but none of the board members for the Eastern region attended the visioning process or the AGM.
- It is suggested that the TRC should be asked to join the network.
- Some of the districts in the Eastern region are inactive. Those present who carry out programmes in Kailahun and Kono districts are asked to approach all involved organisations there and ask them to come to the next meeting.

Various practical issues are discussed, including the distribution of a report about whether peacebuilding includes human rights organisations, the suggestion that invitations for meetings should be sent longer in advance, and the problem that many people do not check their e-mails regularly. There is some discussion about funding and the network. It is noted that the network asks the members to solicit their own funding. Finally, someone notes that the meeting was supposed to exchange information about the work of the members and learn from each other's intervention strategies.

The next meeting is set to take place in two weeks.

Box 5.3 illustrates some of the issues discussed at meetings between local NGOs. In this particular meeting practical and organisational matters took prominence over substantive discussions regarding peace

²³⁷ Excerpts of the report I drafted after attending the meeting

methodologies. At least for networks, this seems to occur more often.²³⁸ However, such discussions are also useful. To some extent the Kenema meeting described in the Box was also about organising substantive knowledge exchange (rather than doing so at that moment in time) in that it set the stage for information to be exchanged in written form or in the next meeting.

5.5.2 Exchange with international organisations and government agencies

Next to interactions with their donors, Southern peace NGOs engage in knowledge exchange with other non-local actors, namely international multilateral organisations with a presence in their countries. The main reason for this is that international organisations (IOs) are important players in the field of peacebuilding in all the countries visited. Large NNGOs have offices there and as we have seen play an important role in shaping the policies and practices of local civil society. In some of these countries— particularly Liberia – large UN missions are present and play a large role in day-to-day security, political and socio-economic matters. In all countries, specialised UN agencies are present that focus on development issues. Other IOs include intergovernmental regional organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Southeast Asia and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa.

In addition to intergovernmental actors, NGOs also interact with governmental ones in their country and region. These interactions often take the form of lobbying work in order to get governments and IOs to put specific issues onto their agenda, more strongly support civil society, or respond to specific challenges identified by NGOs. In addition, some organisations advice and training services to advice and training services to governmental employees and the staff of IOs. This type of work is done particularly by stronger SNGOs. The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), for example, provides expertise to IOs by giving advice, organising workshops, and writing manuals.²³⁹ Smaller, weaker NGOs are more localised and do not engage much in such activities. For them, networks are important vehicles to make their voices heard to official institutions as they are not able to do so on their

²³⁸ Based on network meetings attended (see list in sources).

²³⁹ Interview with national coordinator of a Liberian NGO network. Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006.

own. Somewhat surprisingly, in the interviews little mention was made of knowledge flowing the other way: from governments to NGOs.

More horizontal knowledge sharing takes place in policy forums organised by civil society networks. In the run-up to the 2002 Kenyan election, a local civil society network organised policy forums with likeminded institutions, including the government, on issues such as the relationship between the police and the media and the making of a constitution. Unfortunately, due to staff shortages, these forums were not continued.²⁴⁰ In Sierra Leone, a national NGO network regularly organises a National Peace and Development Forum with network members and government representatives from various ministries as well as UN staff. Each person present reports on his activities and a discussion takes place.²⁴¹

In Cambodia there is much less interaction with governmental agencies; in fact, the government is not mentioned as a partner for exchange. Cambodian NGOs interviewed did not elaborate on this, but the lack of responsiveness of the government towards civil society is likely to be a reason. In the Philippine government, a presidential Office for the Peace Process has been established which liaises with civil society, and about a third of NGO staff interviewed mention this office as a partner for exchange. However, other Mindanawan NGOs consider the office to be part of the 'enemy'. In Liberia, organisations speak of organising a large multi-level consultation process that would link up the grassroots level with the governmental level via peace NGOs and culminate in the creation of a two- or three-year plan for peacebuilding in Liberia. This would counter the influence of donors in determining both "the diagnosis and the solution adopted". However, as of yet they have not been able to realise such a process.²⁴² When it comes to interactions with government agencies, the difference between Liberia, in which this is quite common, and Sierra Leone in which it is hardly mentioned, is striking. Although the new Johnson-Sirleaf government (which includes many former civil society members) was not yet established at the time of my visit, it seems that even then there were stronger links between government and civil society. In Sierra Leone by contrast many SNGO staff complained about the unresponsiveness of their government.

²⁴⁰ Interview with staff member of a Kenyan NGO. Nairobi, Kenya, 29 November 2005.

²⁴¹ Interview with national coordinator of a Sierra Leonean NGO network. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006.

²⁴² Interview with Secretary General of a Liberian church-based NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006.

5.5.3 Exchange with local beneficiaries

When asked about knowledge sharing, many local peacebuilders bring up exchanges with the communities in and for which they work as an important activity. The reasons for this have been elaborated in section 5.3.1, where beneficiaries featured as an important source of knowledge for SNGOs because of their unique knowledge of the local context. Exchanges with beneficiaries take the following forms.

- *Community workshops and town meetings* are regularly organised. These aim specifically at the surfacing of local knowledge and information about priorities and needs. In addition, they are intended as exchange forums in which a mutual learning process takes place involving both SNGO staff and community members.²⁴³ For example, a Cambodian NGO organising peacebuilding training programmes for young people emphasises the value of its participants as knowledge resources – whether they have received formal education or not. In line with Freire’s ideas (see Box 4.1 in section 4.1) the courses this organisation provides are based on the knowledge of the youth participants. “They are given the opportunity to discuss and learn by themselves. Our staff members are not teachers but merely facilitate the young people’s learning”.²⁴⁴
- In a similar vein, some youth SNGOs organise *peace camps* in which views are exchanged with local stakeholders.²⁴⁵
- In case of membership organisations – umbrellas of grassroots or church groups – regular *assemblies* are held in which all the members participate to develop policy. This also occurs in most networks. One umbrella organisation notes that “it is necessary to actively extract information from members as they rarely share it on their own initiative”.²⁴⁶
- Some NGO staff members mention *community-level dialogues and mediation activities* as important ways to bring out local knowledge. In this sense knowledge sharing becomes a tool for peacebuilding: “mediation is a process in which knowledge exchange plays an important role. Missing parts of history are rewritten through the exchanges that take place in the mediation process. This completion or rewriting of history makes peace

²⁴³ Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006. Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

²⁴⁴ Interview with director of a Cambodian youth NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2006.

²⁴⁵ Interview with staff member of a Sierra Leonean youth NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006.

²⁴⁶ Interview with staff members of an NGO working in South Sudan. Nairobi, Kenya, 28 November 2005.

possible.”²⁴⁷ More generally, village-based processes of dialogue spur organisational learning from beneficiaries.

- Some organisations explicitly try to *gather local inputs for lobbying* work or for higher-level exchanges. For example, a Nairobi-based fellowship of churches in the Great Lakes region played a role in the process leading up to the government-level International Conference on the Great Lakes region. As part of these preparations it collected inputs from church leaders and women.²⁴⁸
- If SNGOs are able to do so, they conduct *research into the needs* and capacities of local communities, as a basis for the planning of capacity building and other activities.²⁴⁹
- Some organisations engage in a conscious process of *documenting local information*, such as information about the human rights violations for the purpose of human rights reporting, and information about possibly rising tensions in a particular area for the purpose of early warning:

“We have access to local information in areas difficult to reach in a way that others do not. While others face security issues, we have access through our work with the local people, who keep us informed. They consider our staff to be part of them and protect them. This is a functioning early warning system. Indeed we have in the past accurately predicted events such as large-scale population movements. People now tend to listen to us because we have proven to be well-informed and credible.”²⁵⁰

In more general terms, interviewees emphasise that establishing a genuine two-way knowledge exchange with beneficiaries requires an attitude of openness to local information and views. This is helped by a willingness and ability to spend time with communities and listen to them. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of (paid) time to do this. Still, the example quoted below shows the difference it can make.

“[I]n an effort to expand the impact and scope of its health programme, [an Indian NGO]’s staff were ‘mobilised with motorbikes’. They became so focused on meeting quantitative project objectives that they had little time to sit and talk with local people. It soon became apparent that ‘when we walked or went by bicycle, we did much better.’ So [the NGO] introduced slower, more time-consuming ways of working with local communities.” (Hailey and James 2002: 402)

²⁴⁷ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

²⁴⁸ Interview with staff member of a church-based organisation working throughout the Great Lakes region. Nairobi, 30 November 2005

²⁴⁹ Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

²⁵⁰ Interview with staff members of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.

5.5.4 Capacity building by Southern NGOs

Southern peace NGOs engage in the capacity building of various target groups, including grassroots organisations, local government staff, village leaders, elders, and ‘ordinary’ community members. Such activities are part of a strategy of peacebuilding: the aim is to provide local groups with abilities, tools and knowledge that may help them deal with conflict in a peaceful way. In addition, some SNGOs - particularly larger, stronger ones - aim to build the capacity of other – usually smaller and weaker - SNGOs. This is motivated by the observation that many local NGOs are deprived of knowledge and skills:

“there is a knowledge gap among Liberian NGOs in the areas of conflict transformation and the systematic analysis of conflict. There is little skilled manpower with organisations. The majority of organisations working on peacebuilding were founded in the last few years. In earlier years, international organisations and donors focused on supporting ‘hardware’: building schools, agriculture, water, etc. More recently there is recognition of the importance of ‘software’: peacebuilding capacity. This includes advocacy, justice, and good governance.”²⁵¹

The following types of activities undertaken by Southern peace NGOs may be grouped under the heading of capacity building:

- Building the capacity of grassroots groups and smaller NGOs through training and advice. Organisations for example advise such groups on conflict analysis and on how to organise, lobby, and draw attention to a cause. A network organisation working in the Great Lakes region notes that this was successful in Eastern Congo where “people have come together and organised themselves, and lobbied to draw attention to the situation there”.²⁵²
- Building the capacity of local policymakers through training and exchange. For example, SNGOs work to promote understanding of the existence of a rule of law, to increase the skills of local council members, or to help policymakers to integrate peacebuilding into their work. A Kenyan organisation noted that it was only successful in convincing local councils of the need to become aware of conflict transformation concepts and tools once the issue was approached from an economic perspective and the NGO began to emphasise how conflict was affecting

²⁵¹ Interview with national coordinator of a Liberian NGO network. Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006.

²⁵² Interview with director of a regional NGO network working in East Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 28 November 2005.

local revenue collection. This led local government institutions to engage in peacebuilding activities out of their own budget in order to ensure the sustainability of their policies.²⁵³

- Quite a number of NGOs in all countries visited engage in the training of mediators who then mediate in conflicts arising at the local level in communities or schools. These mediators usually participate in training and afterwards in mediation voluntarily in addition to their regular work or education. An organisation aiming to train young people to become mediators has devised a strategy to draw people to its offices in order to become interested in becoming a mediator. It provides table games at the offices, so that youngsters will come to play, hang around for a while and hopefully start to talk to the facilitators present.²⁵⁴
- Some SNGOs enable trained mediators from different places to meet and exchange experiences. A Liberian youth NGO has created peace mediation committees consisting of trained mediators, who meet once a month to share experiences from their own communities. The NGO provides transport and a small allowance to make these meetings possible.²⁵⁵
- Training of trainers is used to broaden the scope of training and mediation is the in various areas within the field of peacebuilding.²⁵⁶
- Some organisations assist others in implementing activities to achieve learning through joint action. An umbrella organisation working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding with church councils in the countries of the Great Lakes region and Horn of Africa aims to empower the councils to implement programmes. If there is a lack of capacity, then the organisation goes into a country to assist. It has supported the joint preparation of civic education material before elections and helped to convene roundtable meetings for knowledge exchange on issues such as small arms.²⁵⁷
- Over a third of all NGOs visited engage in peace education. Through billboards, posters, newsletters, radio programmes, theatre, training school teachers, organising lectures, and other activities, organisations attempt to spread the message of

²⁵³ Interview with Kenyan staff member of the local office of an international NGO in Kenya's North Rift province. Eldoret, Kenya, 1 December 2005.

²⁵⁴ Interview with staff members of a Liberian youth NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.

²⁵⁵ Interview with staff members of a Liberian youth NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.

²⁵⁶ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

²⁵⁷ Interview with staff member of a church-based regional NGO working in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 30 November 2005.

peaceful coexistence and promote basic conflict resolution skills among local populations.²⁵⁸

In capacity building, quite a number of organisations emphasise the importance of starting with the pre-existing knowledge, skills and needs of those whose capacity is being developed. This is in line with the theory of capacity building discussed in section 3.6. For example, interviewees say they aim to strengthen people's traditional ways of dealing with conflict rather than trying to impose alternative approaches. "One should not tell people that they are doing things in the wrong way, but instead support them and influence their actions slowly through positive reinforcement".²⁵⁹ In how far the approaches described match the actual practice of capacity building by SNGOs I have not been able to find out.

5.5.5 Exchange with knowledge institutions

As was already mentioned in 2.3.2 and 5.5.5, little interaction takes place between Southern peace NGOs and universities and research institutions in the countries in which they operate. Some more interaction takes place with knowledge institutions abroad – mainly in the North – as staff members take short courses or degree programmes there. Local universities, however, do not often have departments focusing on peacebuilding or related issues and tend to be rather theoretical rather than practical in their approach.

As we saw in chapter three, knowledge institutions have the potential of functioning as learning 'scaffolds', helping individuals and organisations to take a step back from practice and reflect at a deeper level than they otherwise would. Universities could play a role in the research and documentation activities SNGOs want to develop. They could strengthen the voices of both Southerners and practitioners in global development and peacebuilding debates, which tend to be dominated by Northerners and academics.

The practitioner-oriented action research Master programme entitled Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS), which is offered in Cambodia and other places in cooperation with local universities, is an interesting example in this regard. For that reason it is discussed relatively extensively in chapter eight. But there are a few other

²⁵⁸ Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

²⁵⁹ Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

examples of NGO-university interaction that came up in the interviews and that deserve mention here. In Freetown, Sierra Leone, the local university has created a peacebuilding department. In developing its curriculum it is actively engaging with the local NGO community. Students work with NGOs as interns in order to learn from their practice. As of yet, these interactions seem to benefit mainly the university department and not the NGOs, as the department does not yet have much knowledge and capacity to offer. But in the future this may change.²⁶⁰

Another example is the Centre for Peace Education (CPE) at Miriam College in Quezon City in the Philippines. An academic but practice-oriented institution, it engages with NGOs in order to help develop peace education activities in various countries in Southeast Asia. In the Philippines itself the Centre trains school teachers in peace education in cooperation with the Department of Education. The Centre has three staff of which two are part-time. It is funded in two ways: Miriam College pays for the staff costs, and for all other costs project funding from donors is sought. CPE faculty associates (volunteers from among Miriam college faculty) and the Pax Christi student organisation in college and high school provide volunteer services. The CPE is a member of a global peace education centres network that was created to undertake a joint project on the ethical and spiritual foundations of peace education, which included teacher trainings in Quezon City, Tokyo (Japan) and Seoul (South Korea). The network has four member Peace Education Centres located in Teachers College, Columbia University in New York; the Lebanese American University in Lebanon; Seisen University in Tokyo; and the CPE in the Philippines.²⁶¹

5.5.6 Concluding 5.5

Southern peace organisations engage in various types of knowledge exchange with actors outside their organisation. Exchange with knowledge institutions, particularly local ones, lags behind despite the potential this has for improved research and documentation. But with all other actors involved – other local NGOs, international organisations, governments, and beneficiaries – SNGOs work to establish regular interaction. Stronger, more developed NGOs are able to engage with governments and international organisations in a two-way manner – they

²⁶⁰ Interview with director of a Sierra Leonean church-based NGO. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 20 February 2006.

²⁶¹ Interview with director of the Centre for Peace Education (CPE). Quezon City, Philippines, 19 May 2006.

lobby them for specific policy approaches while at the same time offering them knowledge and training. Stronger NGOs also engage in capacity building activities in order to develop the skills and abilities of weaker NGOs and local communities. Smaller, weaker NGOs participate less in knowledge exchange with governments and international organisations but more so with other NGOs and grassroots groups. These SNGOs are more often on the receiving end of capacity building programmes, but they also try to offer knowledge based on experience and draw from the knowledge of local beneficiaries.

Some organisations complain that knowledge exchange initiatives are sometimes too detached from action. There are “meetings, meetings, meetings” and there is a lot of talk – but not always is sufficient attention paid to planning for concrete action. Neither does follow-up to meetings always receive the necessary attention. “Follow-up should be budgeted from the start” (Huna and Beernink 2005: 12), but this is often neglected. Depending on the needs of organisations involved, such follow-up could entail “mentoring, or training in the tools learnt through exchange, or even a capacity building within the organisation itself. Follow-up can also entail time and space for experimentation.” (Huna and Beernink 2005: 12)

5.6 Obstacles to learning and knowledge sharing

In chapter four we saw that structural constraints that result from North-South inequalities in general, and the aid regime in particular, limit the learning of SNGOs. In addition to these structural constraints, a number of more specific obstacles to the learning of Southern peace NGOs emerge from the interviews. Table 5.10²⁶² portrays these obstacles as they were mentioned by SNGO staff members. Several of these have already been discussed earlier: the fact that knowledge gained needs to be adapted to be relevant to the context, the lack of capacity organisations have to document their knowledge in order to more easily share it with others, the imposition by donors of ways to look at peacebuilding, and the fact that not all SNGOs are necessarily tied to constituencies at the grassroots. Others – mainly the issue of different expectations – will be addressed in the next chapters.

Mentioned most often is a lack of time and money (elaborated in 5.6.1), followed closely by the observation that much knowledge exchanged is not directly relevant and needs to be adapted to the context – an issue

²⁶² See note 164.

discussed in other places in this book. Competition and distrust (5.6.2) among actors in peacebuilding is mentioned third often. Imposition of knowledge and priorities by donors is also considered to limit learning and open exchange, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Limits to the capacity and characteristics of individual organisations (5.6.3) was also mentioned. Factors resulting from the difficult social and political situation in (post)conflict societies (5.6.4) include bad infrastructure, government scrutiny and conflict-related constraints. Related to both conflict and competition are aspects relating to power relations and inequality among participants in knowledge exchange (5.6.5), which play a particularly strong role in Sierra Leone. As Table 5.10 shows, various other issues are mentioned. Further on we will address cultural issues and gender (5.6.6) and the fact that knowledge changes over time (5.6.7).

Obstacles to knowledge exchange	Lib (10)	SL (16)	Kenya (11)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	C-Asia (15)	Total (76)
Time and money	4	9	4	3	4	7	31
Knowledge not relevant, needs adapting	6	9	2	7	5	1	30
Competition and distrust	5	9	2	4	2	1	23
Imposition by donors	6	5	3	4	1	2	21
Organisational capacity	2	3	3	1		5	14
Documentation	4	3		3	2	1	13
Bad infrastructure	4	4	1	1	2	1	13
Power relations within network	1	7	1			1	10
Political context / government scrutiny			1			9	10
Language, illiteracy	2	1	2		2	2	9
Limitations posed by conflict	2	3	1	1			7
Different expectations of exchange initiative	2	2	1			2	7
NGOs lack constituency	1	3	1	1			6
Cultural issues	3	1			1		5
Lack of follow-up, implementation		3	1			1	5
Contested knowledge		2		1	1	1	5
Knowledge changing		1	2			1	4
Initiatives confined to capital		2				1	3
Gender		2			1		3
Different opinions on the role of civil society						1	1

Table 5.10: Obstacles to knowledge exchange for Southern peace NGOs

5.6.1 Time and money

Section 3.4.2 made clear that for NGO staff a lack of time poses a major obstacle to learning processes. This is compounded by pressures for direct impact and to spend resources efficiently, and by the sense of urgency that comes with working in conflict situations. For SNGO staff, the situation is no different. Asked about the main obstacles to learning and knowledge sharing, they mention a lack of time most often. SNGO workers tend to be overwhelmingly busy. They feel that peacebuilding is such a big undertaking and there is so much to be done that there is always a shortage of time. This means that they often have to miss out on knowledge sharing meetings or other occasions in which learning may take place. The business of NGO staff also affects meetings when they do take place:

“if a meeting is organised in Monrovia then it does not work because people will be running around to other meetings and have their phones on all the time. It is better to go far away. Unfortunately, when we propose this to donors they understand it as a selfish desire to take a trip”.²⁶³

The emphasis of donors on short-term impact in order to have something to show for the money spent makes it a challenge for SNGOs to find the resources needed to reflect and share. These activities require time to be allocated to them in budgets so that learning does not become an added activity in addition to the regular workload of staff members. In addition, it sometimes requires resources for travel and accommodation to bring people together for knowledge exchange. As we have seen in chapter four, the preference of many donor agencies for clearly demarcated projects and activities with concrete outputs leaves little space for this.

However - is funding always necessary for learning and knowledge exchange? Could the emphasis on required funding perhaps mean that the inherent value of learning processes is not strong enough to provide an incentive for SNGOs to realise meetings, reflection processes and documentation? Funds are not necessarily required for staff members to take the initiative to discuss lessons and strategies, and indeed, they do this. But more structured processes require time and given the high workload on NGO staff members it is not realistic to expect them to create additional space for learning on top of normal practice. In order to become a part of practice time has to be set aside for it. In any case, “[i]n resource deprived states such as Sierra Leone and Liberia funding

²⁶³ Interview with staff members of a Liberian youth NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.

seems to be an important prerequisite for any NGO activity. Only on rare occasions has civil society mobilised without any external funding” (Douma 2005: 10).

Local NGO workers (and, increasingly, donor organisations) do recognise the importance of learning from experience and of knowledge and lessons from elsewhere. However, learning aims are perceived to be in conflict with other aims (‘direct impact’ in particular) and learning is often seen as an extra activity rather than an integral part of action. Some interviewees said they were not paid to read, reflect or participate in networks. They are paid to act, and this always receives more priority. It makes a difference, however, when NGOs consider learning and networking to be part of their work rather than an extra activity. Organisational policy, culture and capacity are important in that respect.

5.6.2 Competition and distrust

Competition among NGOs is another important obstacle to learning and, particularly, to knowledge sharing. After time and money it the obstacle mentioned most often by interviewees, and it came up in each country visited. NGOs in the same area tend to compete for the same donor funding. In the words of one NGO staff member, “conflict is business now.”²⁶⁴ Such competition can influence people’s willingness to share information beyond their own organisation. This not only applies to information about funding sources, but also to any other knowledge that may be seen to provide an organisation with a strategic advantage over others. As a result, there is a reluctance to share for fear of losing one’s competitive edge. Goodhand found in his study of NGOs working in conflict areas that “[i]n each of the case studies, NGO rent-seeking behaviour was common, with organizations undermining competitors, concealing information and acting unilaterally. Interorganization discord is a predictable result of existing material incentives.” (Goodhand 2006: 144)

As a result, the will to work together, and the acknowledgement that sharing is important, are less strong than considerations of organisational survival.²⁶⁵ This plays a role not only during, but also at the start of knowledge sharing initiatives. Those not already engaging in inter-organisation exchange may not easily be convinced to participate,

²⁶⁴ Interview with staff members of a regional NGO working in several West African countries. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 February 2006.

²⁶⁵ Interview with staff member of a Kenyan NGO. Nairobi, Kenya, 29 November 2005.

thinking there are hidden agendas involved. Such distrust, inherent in the funding regime, is likely to be strengthened by the legacy of the conflicts that have taken place in the countries studied. As was discussed in chapter one, NGOs in conflict-affected regions are not necessarily politically neutral and are likely to have affiliations with one group or another that played a role in the conflict. Even if this is not the case, suspicions in that direction are easily born in others. In Mindanao, for example, a Bangsamoro-based civil society consortium faces regular distrust and accusations of partiality. “It is difficult to optimise knowledge flows, because of distrust and misconceptions among communities. Many non-Moro organisations perceive our organisation as terrorist or criminal, and are unwilling to engage with us”.²⁶⁶

A related aspect that is mentioned about knowledge sharing among NGOs is that cooperative endeavours – such as networks - raise issues of credit, billing and name recognition. People are unwilling to foot the bill for meetings while at the same time eager to get credit for their contributions, which in collective processes they often do not. Interestingly, an NGO staff member noted that “these issues are most salient with NGO leaders. People who are lower in the organisations, those who actually carry out the work, tend to be more open towards one another. They are less occupied with issues of recognition and billing and see the benefits of knowledge sharing directly in their work”.²⁶⁷ Issues like competition and credit recognition are strongest in inter-NGO interactions, as these involve participants that are at the same time direct competitors. With grassroots groups they seem less significant. In addition, in exchanges across borders they are also less important as competition is less direct – people are not competing for funds allocated to a specific country or region.

Solutions for the obstacles posed by competition and distrust are mentioned as well. They include good communication, trust building and emphasising a common goal that overrides individual objectives. This also entails creating a safe space for learning and sharing, in which people feel secure enough to talk openly. For longer-term knowledge exchange initiatives such as networks, agreeing on codes of conduct for the use of information may help, although it is often difficult to claim ownership of a specific piece of knowledge after it has been shared and used by others. Another solution for networks is to agree on a clear division of labour among organisations in which each focuses on its own

²⁶⁶ Interview with Secretary General of a Mindanawan NGO consortium. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.

²⁶⁷ Informal conversation with staff member of a Mindanawan NGO. Davao, Philippines, 15 May 2006.

strong points. This prevents competition and duplication of activities. However, it may be difficult in a situation in which donors are more willing to pay for some activities than for others.

5.6.3 Organisational capacity and characteristics

Among Southern peace NGOs the level of organisational capacity varies widely. Organisations with low capacity face a lack of funds, are understaffed, and have insufficient access to infrastructure such as the internet. Their staff members have a lack of appropriate skills. Most NGOs complain of a lack of knowledge in the areas of conflict transformation and the systematic analysis of conflict. There is little skilled manpower within organisations. The majority of organisations working on peacebuilding were founded in the last few years. “In earlier years, international organisations and donors focused on supporting ‘hardware’: building schools, agriculture, and water supplies. More recently there has been recognition of the importance of ‘software’, such as peacebuilding capacity”²⁶⁸. The need for skills is a priority. With respect to the learning capacity of members, some aspects of organisational learning (such as training and retention of knowledge from training) receive more attention than others (such as learning cycles, reflecting on work, and sharing knowledge within the organisation).

Of course, the aforementioned issue of funding plays a role in limiting the capacity of staff. Qualified staff usually prefer to work with international organisations, because they pay more and because few local organisations are able to guarantee employment between projects. This causes organisational brain drain.²⁶⁹ Language issues also play a role, more specifically in many cases, a lack of fluency in English. Similarly, a lack of proficiency in ‘technical’ terminology, jargon, inhibits the access SNGOs have to available information and their ability to participate in sharing and networking. Thus, these issues present obstacles for learning and knowledge exchange.

Knowledge exchange can itself contribute to capacity building by providing access to tools, training and donors. The knowledge exchanged may include information about whom to see for what, how to frame messages in order to draw attention, and how to raise funds. Where capacity of participants or potential participants is an issue, it

²⁶⁸ Interview with national coordinator of an NGO network, Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006.

²⁶⁹ Interview with staff member of Sierra Leonean NGO. Kenema, Sierra Leone, 22 February 2006.

would help for knowledge exchange initiatives – such as networks - to explicitly include the transfer of this kind of process knowledge. This includes the translation of documents into local languages and jargon-free versions²⁷⁰. What also helps to develop the learning capacity of local organisations is to raise awareness of the importance and requirements for learning and to make instruments for learning and M&E available.

However, organisations need to prioritise the development of their learning capacity if they are to yield any results. Some consider that there is a lack of awareness of the need to learn and share knowledge among people in the field. People go about doing their work without taking the opportunity to reflect, document or evaluate. They themselves could do more to place learning higher on the agenda. It seems to be mostly the larger SNGOs with the means to engage in reflection and research, that emphasise the importance of these activities. As we saw in section 5.3.2, another difficulty SNGOs face is to retain knowledge within their organisation. Organisations are pressed to devise methods to prevent staff from leaving shortly after having received training. Providing job security from one project to another would contribute to retaining staff for longer periods, but the funding regime often prevents this.

A final aspect of the organisation of NGOs relates to the extent to which their decision-making is participatory and their leadership accountable. Although one would expect NGOs to be naturally democratic in nature, this is not necessarily the case. Many SNGOs are highly dependent on a strong leader figure who founded and continues to run the organisation. These leaders are not necessarily authoritarian – in fact they usually are not – but their preponderance in terms of skills and contacts makes them dominant figures around whom the organisation revolves. Knowledge is often concentrated in the head of such a figure, rather than being spread evenly in the organisation. Culture may also play a role in this. In Mindanao, a network coordinator noted that “some participants in training and networking activities are too leader-oriented and follow everything their director says. This is particularly the case with grassroots actors in Mindanao; traditional Moro culture emphasises strong leadership”. The danger is that when such leaders leave – one leader I met during my travels is now in the United Kingdom doing a PhD while several others have moved to government positions – they

²⁷⁰ The Central and Eastern African Peace Tree Network has begun to do this (source: conversation with director of Peace Tree Network, Nairobi, 28 November 2005).

take their knowledge with them and their organisation struggles to survive.

Box 5.4: Issues relating to the capacity of CSOs in Central Asia²⁷¹

According to some network members interviewed in Central Asia, the networking concept is not really understood in the region. Central Asian CSOs are said to lack the knowledge and skills to develop a network. Problems mentioned include the following.

- Central Asian CSOs are relatively weak.
- Most CSOs do not develop their own policy but depend on the policy of donors; they are ‘grant-hunters’. Asian CSOs are dependent on foreign, particularly US, funds.
- Most CSOs engage in multiple tasks instead of specialising in one area (such as conflict prevention); as a result they offer less quality.
- Even if CSOs try to engage governments, they are not sure what their message should be. CSOs have little self esteem and organisations from different Central Asian countries do not easily agree on the right message, because they all have a different focus.
- There is little thinking in Central Asia about the role of civil society beyond the implementation of technical projects. There is also no sense of global solidarity, for example with regard to events in Lebanon – although this may also be related to the dependency on US funds.
- Not all CSOs consider conflict prevention to be the responsibility of civil society. Instead they tend to focus on implementing concrete, ‘technical’ socio-economic projects in a project-driven way. Conflict prevention, however, is more than a project. It is a large and political undertaking. It is also still quite vague and unclear.
- There is an absence of moral motivation; as a result networks work ad hoc, namely only when there is funding.

5.6.4 Limitations posed by politics and conflict

NGOs are involved in interventions to change societies, but they are also part of those societies. Their actions have intentional and unintentional consequences for the context in which they operate – and vice versa. Hilhorst writes that “everything happening in and around NGOs has a bearing on the politics of power within the organizations, the politics of organizational legitimation and, finally, the politics of (local and global) development” (Hilhorst 2003: 4). The room for manoeuvre local actors have, or the social space available to them for their projects, is restricted by the presence of other actors in peacebuilding. State-society-NGO relations make up the context of the actions of NGOs. In many developing countries, family standing and tribal affiliation cut across and help determine state-society relations. Finally, NGOs are fitted into local politics. Local constituents shape their identity and goals. All this

²⁷¹ Interviews in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, 23-29 July 2006.

modifies the idea of a linear, step-by-step policy and implementation model: in reality actions are shaped by personal perspectives, social relations, and everyday politics. (Hilhorst 2003: 106-119)

In Table 5.10 we see that in Central Asia the restrictions placed on civil society by political actors is a major issue that limits their freedom of action – and therefore, the knowledge they are able to gain and share. In chapter seven more attention is paid to this. In the other countries state authoritarianism is a less direct threat, but NGOs do sometimes have difficulty gaining access to official actors. In chapter one and beyond, the limited ability of many peace SNGOs to play an independent political role was linked mostly to the international funding regime. However, governments may also play a role in preventing the involvement of NGOs in political processes. Although this issue is not mentioned in these terms by peace organisations in the countries visited except for Central Asia, it is possible that it plays a role in subtle ways. Moreover, in countries not visited state authoritarianism is certainly a major issue.

Achieving an active interplay between actors is difficult in conflict areas due to high levels of distrust between groups and individuals. In addition, such regions are often plagued by a scarcity of resources, low security and weak or bad governance, none of which provides an enabling environment for open learning and interaction processes. Fear may prevent people from speaking freely, and practical issues such as illiteracy, low Internet connectivity, expensive and intermittent energy supply, and bad physical infrastructure (particularly in West Africa) limits access to information and participation in exchanges. This weak enabling environment also puts local actors in conflict-torn developing countries at a disadvantage in generating and disseminating their own knowledge and lessons. As a result, capacity building programmes and knowledge exchange networks are more likely to revolve around international research agendas and Northern policy concerns. (Stone 2005: 101) As we have seen, this is compounded by the fact that those who control the money to a large extent control the content.

5.6.5 Power relations

A related set of obstacles has to do with power relations and inequality among people involved in, or surrounding, knowledge sharing initiatives. It is mentioned particularly in Sierra Leone. The context in which these remarks were made is the Network for Collaborative Peacebuilding Sierra Leone (NCP-SL), which is analysed in the next

chapter. As will become clear there, this network has been plagued by accusations of power abuse by board members and more generally by a sense that some members try to impose their will on the network. This draws attention to the fact that those who have the capacity, means, experience, or legitimacy to impose their preferred solution upon others determine to a large extent what happens in a knowledge sharing setting. In general, Northern participants will be better positioned to do so than Southern participants, and better-funded actors will be more likely to have power than less well-off ones. Indeed, power issues are strongly related to the control of resources. This means that opportunities to get the most out of knowledge exchange are unequal. In order to understand a knowledge sharing initiative – such as a network - it is important to take this dimension into account by asking questions like: ‘who benefits from the network?’ and ‘who is seeking to influence the network?’.

5.6.6 Cultural issues and gender

Cultural issues are mentioned as obstacles to knowledge sharing in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cambodia. People mean different things by this, including cultural differences between indigenous and external participants in exchanges and differences between organisational cultures. Both are addressed in this section. In addition, a few interviewees mentioned gender issues, drawing attention to inequality between men and women in their countries and the way in which this inequality limited the extent to which women’s knowledge and views were taken up. External actors may not realise that in many countries it is more difficult for women to participate in learning and discussion than it is for men. In Liberia it was mentioned that in some communities women do not talk openly with men present and may need to meet separately in order to get a more active knowledge exchange process going²⁷².

Regarding cultural issues, differences between external and indigenous actors in peacebuilding were mentioned in each country. To the extent that external actors participate in joint learning activities, the differences between Western and other knowledge systems (described in section 2.4 and elsewhere) come into play. It has even been suggested that structured initiatives explicitly organised for knowledge exchange, such as networks, by their very nature emphasise ‘Western’, rationalistic knowledge over other types of knowledge:

²⁷² Interview with staff member of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.

“[n]etworks systematise knowledge generated by diverse individual and organisational knowledge actors and impose a rationality that gives precedence to a particular conception of knowledge – usually of a codified, technocratic, secular, westernised society. Participation is informally restricted through boundary drawing discourses by the network to exclude or devalue indigenous knowledge that does not conform to techno-scientific criteria.” (Stone 2005: 99)

Efforts to exchange tacit knowledge through direct interaction might be less prone to this type of rationalisation. However, such exchanges will be very difficult across cultures as there is less of a shared context that makes the tacit knowledge explainable and understandable. In any case, the above warning seems most relevant for international networks that aim at exchanges across cultures and regions. From what I have seen, local or national-level knowledge sharing among actors involved in peacebuilding, usually taking place in face-to-face meetings, offer sufficient opportunity for the exchange of any kind of tacit or explicit knowledge deemed useful by the participants.

However, for cross-regional exchanges – for example in the GPPAC network discussed in chapter seven – these considerations are quite relevant, as is the more general realisation that cultural issues can be an important constraining factor in achieving successful knowledge sharing and joint learning. In addition, representatives of NNGOs regularly participate in – or even organise – knowledge sharing events among peacebuilders in Southern conflict-affected areas. This introduces a North-South and cross-cultural element into these meetings. In fact, given the knowledge regime and structural inequalities in knowledge production and discourse domination described in the previous chapter, even meetings with only local participation are likely to have knowledge originating outside of the locality play a role in the exchange. As discussed in the third chapter, implicit, cultural knowledge and a willingness to question one’s assumptions and views may help overcome barriers between cultures and knowledge systems.

A West African peacebuilder drew attention to differences Francophone and the Anglophone countries in the regions with regard to how they look at the world.

“People educated in France have a particular sense of ‘civilisation’ and feel closer to France than to their Anglophone neighbours. Cote d’Ivoire feels more affiliation with France than with neighbouring [Anglophone] Ghana. This is despite the artificiality of the border between Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana, which actually separates families. The knowledge that is most recognised in Cote d’Ivoire is knowledge coming from France. The special relationship with France ensures the

commercial influence of French companies in the country. [Our regional network] attempts to foster more of a regional identity by making sure that our Secretariat is composed of people from different countries in the region, Anglophone and Francophone. Its meetings and documentation are bilingual, despite the higher costs that this represents. Documents are also translated into local languages.”²⁷³

Cultural issues posing difficulties for knowledge sharing are impossible to overcome entirely, but it helps to recognise them and make them explicit during exchanges. In doing so it may be necessary to be aware of different kinds of cultural cleavages. Culture is not only geographically bound. Different organisations also have different organisational cultures. In inter-organisational exchange this can lead to misunderstandings. Organisational cultures tend to differ particularly among different categories of organisations – such as government agencies, NGOs and private businesses. In addition, the different backgrounds of participants when it comes to education or profession can lead them to looking at reality in very different ways. One peacebuilder noted that “exchanging with friends who work in government is difficult because they have a different perspective. The same goes for lawyers, who tend not to look at root causes as peace workers do.”²⁷⁴

Sensitivity to cultural differences may lead knowledge exchange participants to think about different ways to package information in order to be most accessible and relevant to a particular target audience. For example, in areas with predominantly oral traditions written information may not be the best way to reach people. Alternative – more visual – ways of documentation may therefore be more useful. Working on such alternatives can be done parallel to activities that support the documentation of knowledge in written form. The latter is still important as internationally as well as within many societies written knowledge is dominant and therefore needed to participate in debates. In Mindanao, for example, “in spite of their oral culture, even the indigenous people are now starting to document things: they are codifying their traditional laws in order to get them recognised and integrated into the justice system.”²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

²⁷⁴ Interview with staff member of a Cambodian youth NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2006.

²⁷⁵ Interview with staff member of a Mindanawan NGO. Davao, Philippines, 15 May 2006.

5.6.7 Knowledge changing over time

Four interviewees, including two in Kenya, drew attention to the rapidly changing nature of much knowledge about conflict and peacebuilding. As circumstances in their locality change, information and methodologies may no longer apply. Groups that were initially willing to enter into dialogue with one another can suddenly become hostile again in response to a particular incident, such as cattle raiding in Northern Kenya. And both the policies of governments and of powerful international actors change the context to such an extent that activities and ideas are no longer relevant. For example, the work of Bangsamoro organisations in Mindanao changed when the 'War on Terror' began and they were suddenly branded as semi-terrorists.

Often, knowledge is implicitly or explicitly considered to be cumulative: it builds up over time. One piece of knowledge adds to another and expands the knowledge base. This is not always the case. Knowledge has a short 'shelf life' and often the knowledge of yesterday is no longer relevant today because the world may look radically different. The paradigm has changed, fashion and language are different, different discourse coalitions dominate, and packaging has changed. In the field of conflict transformation and peace building relevant knowledge has dramatically changed with the end of the Cold War, and partly perhaps again after 11 September 2001, which changed the discourse. Looking at a more local level, relevant and up-to-date knowledge changes all the time in conflict situations due to their fluidity and rapidly changing circumstances, as the following citation illustrates.

“[W]hat we see as the learning need during a field level assignment is for very rapid assimilation of new knowledge assets specific to the immediate task, the key ones of which will be in tacit form. The right sources for these are not always evident so aid workers need skills, partners and tools to be able to smell out and unearth these truffles. Even if these are made explicit efficiently, the fluidity of field conditions is likely to create a demand for new tacit information tomorrow. The explicit is always in catch-up mode. Explicit knowledge from other situations may be of interest (if people know that it exists), but few have the time to plough through others' reports to find the truffles they need. The best form of explicit knowledge in this situation is in the form of highly distilled checklists and methodologies based on a wide range of evaluations and organizational experiences, which can serve as tools for locating more local tacit knowledge.” (Faulkner and Foster 2004, cited in ALNAP 2003: 59)

As a result, saved up, explicit knowledge may become irrelevant more quickly than we might think. It is therefore a continuous challenge to keep databases and other storing tools ‘clean’ of outdated knowledge in order to prevent them from becoming unworkable. In addition, as the citation suggests, paying attention to ways of gaining quick and easy access to tacit knowledge when needed may be more valuable than merely focusing on the creation and storing of explicit knowledge.

5.6.8 Concluding 5.6

Summing up, the following issues make learning and knowledge sharing more difficult:

- a lack of time and funds to engage in knowledge activities;
- low organisational capacity and organisational characteristics – such as a leader who monopolises knowledge and dominates decision-making
- the fact that, particularly in conflict-affected contexts like those under study, knowledge is always contested, which gives knowledge sharing a conflict resolution component;
- the important issue of competition among actors working for peace in a given area, which leads to mistrust and creates incentives to withhold rather than share information;
- in addition to the North-South inequalities discussed in the previous chapter, issues of power and inequality also play a role among local actors. In knowledge sharing forums, more powerful participants may dominate the agenda at the expense of others;
- the social and political situation in (post)conflict societies, which contributes to distrust and tensions but which also leads to many practical circumstances relating to the resources and infrastructure for learning and knowledge sharing;
- cultural differences can inhibit sharing among actors engaging in joint learning, while inequalities between genders create differences in access to knowledge and exchanges;
- the fact that knowledge changes over time, and that particularly in conflict situations relevant knowledge quickly becomes outdated, represents a constraint for ‘classical’ organisational learning tools that focus on making knowledge explicit and storing it for future use.

Possible ways to overcome these obstacles will be discussed in the next chapter when we look at a specific – and common – tool used to

facilitate learning and knowledge sharing by Southern peace NGOs, namely networks. In that chapter these obstacles, as well as other factors discussed in this study that influence the learning of SNGOs, will be translated into factors that influence the success of networking.

5.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter set out to analyse what the knowledge and learning processes of local peace NGOs look like, what their strengths and weaknesses are and what difficulties and gaps exist in their learning practice. Here I will briefly sum up the findings for each element of this question, before moving on to discuss some implications and remaining questions.

Local peacebuilders would like to gain external knowledge but stress the importance of learning in interaction and combining external knowledge with their own, indigenous knowledge. In order to better do so, peacebuilders would like to obtain more time and skills to do research and to reflect upon their practice. In this way they would generate knowledge that might be usefully combined with external concepts and methodologies. Interactive learning involving people from North and South entails translation processes that help bridge cultures and knowledge systems. It requires an open mind and a willingness to question one's assumptions and even world views: the characteristics of 'third-order learning'. However, chapter four has shown that inequalities among the participants in such processes may limit the extent of openness and retrospection on all sides.

In analysing the learning processes of the organisation, the following characteristics emerged. Learning seems to be mostly tactical or first-order: how can we better do what we do? Second- or third- order learning – are we doing the right thing? Are we basing our work on the right ideas and assumptions? – is less done. The staff of local peace NGOs tend to have activist learning styles. They learn from experience and from interaction with others in the field. Workshops and training courses are also found useful, although knowledge gained there needs to be adapted to the circumstances in which people work. Reading to gain knowledge is not a common activity and formal education is hardly seen as a source of relevant knowledge at all. In contrast, exchange with others within and outside the organisation is an important activity. Outside their organisation, staff members of Southern peace NGOs engage in exchanges with the following categories of people and organisations.

- Interactions with other local NGOs take place regularly, despite obstacles that limit this (see below).
- Exchange with international organisations and local and national governments is undertaken particularly by stronger SNGOs. These interactions take the form of lobby, sharing information in policy forums, advice and training.
- Exchange with local communities and the beneficiaries of programmes is deemed an important source of knowledge for SNGOs. Such sharing takes place during the implementation of programmes. In addition, peace organisations undertake specific capacity building activities that attempt to build on local knowledge. However, learning from local communities takes time for immersion into their reality and building trust. Given the project-oriented funding regime, this time is often not available.

Exchange with Southern knowledge institutions hardly takes place, despite the potential this could have for both sides: for knowledge institutions, more interaction with practitioners could help make their research more relevant and practically grounded. For NGOs, knowledge institutions could help meet their need for increased research into the context and modalities of their work. Knowledge institutions could function as ‘scaffolds’ and facilitate deeper levels of reflection and learning. For both, such cooperation could contribute to building a stronger Southern knowledge base and lead to a more prominent Southern, and practitioner, role in global discourse and theory development about peacebuilding.

Research is done by SNGOs themselves, but not very much or structurally. Many organisations would like to be able to do more research to find out about the needs and knowledge of local communities and peacebuilding methodologies, both external and local. In addition, research would help document lessons from people’s own work and facilitate reflection. All this could help Southern peace practitioners to have a stronger position in exchanges with Northern partners and play a larger role in global peacebuilding debates and theory development.

What are the strengths and weaknesses (or gaps) in the knowledge and learning of Southern peace NGOs? As mentioned, interaction with knowledge institutions is a weakness or gap, as is research and documentation. In addition, there is not much learning from monitoring and evaluation. To a large extent this is due to M&E procedures being

embedded in funding regimes that emphasise accountability and results, and limit learning. Strengths include learning by doing – although it is difficult to prove concretely that this has occurred - and the frequent interaction of SNGOs with other SNGOs and beneficiaries. Particularly striking is the prominent place among learning strategies of interactions among SNGOs, often in networks, in order to exchange knowledge and learn jointly. Such inter-SNGO-exchange is clearly a strong point of the peace NGOs visited. This is despite the existence of obstacles to knowledge exchange.

What exactly are the obstacles to learning and exchange by Southern peace NGOs? In addition to the structural issues described in the previous chapter, more specific issues include a lack of time and funds, low capacity and skills to do research and document, the contested nature of much knowledge in conflict areas (and elsewhere), competition and low trust among peacebuilding actors, power and inequality, practical obstacles posed by the social and political situation, cultural differences, and the fact that knowledge changes over time.

Now let us compare these findings to those by Hailey and James (2002: 402-404), who studied successful Indian NGOs and their knowledge strategies. In the introduction to this chapter, where this study was cited, the following learning activities of these Indian NGOs were mentioned.

- The NGOs held regular meetings, retreats, workshops, and seminars. This also goes for the peace NGOs examined in this study.
- One organisation even “moves staff around in the organisation or assigns them to new projects as part of its strategy to encourage cross-functional learning. It transfers staff from research posts to field positions and from specialist to management positions in an attempt to disseminate and institutionalise learning.” This I have not encountered in the organisations visited; however, some do organise exchanges among rather than inside NGOs.
- Other knowledge-related activities of these organisations included sponsoring relevant and applied research and publishing research findings. As mentioned, the NGOs studied are not able to do this as much as they would like.
- The NGOs had “sophisticated internal management information and monitoring systems”, but “[t]he extent to which donor-led evaluation processes contributed to learning was mixed, with the incentive to cover up mistakes in order to maintain funding undermining the learning process.” This is consistent with the

picture emerging from my interviews with local peace NGO staff.

Although in theory the cycle of planning, monitoring, evaluation and renewed planning presents a good opportunity for supporting organisational learning processes in NGOs, for many Southern peace NGOs M&E procedures do not play a major role in learning. One reason for this is the tension between learning and accountability. In addition, many NGOs contend that existing, predominantly quantitative, procedures do not match the realities of peacebuilding practice. However, more specific procedures for peacebuilding are being developed to overcome the limits of only quantitative information in reflecting peacebuilding practice.

The participatory elaboration of evaluation tools and criteria of success, involving all stakeholders in a programme – donor, SNGO, beneficiaries – would help making M&E more relevant to practice and more useful for learning. This requires similar relational characteristics between Northern and Southern actors as were described in sections 3.6 and 4.7 on capacity building. Thus, we come back to the importance of a learning attitude by donors and reciprocal, trust-based partnerships between NNGOs and SNGOs as prerequisites for learning on the part of Southern peace organisations and for joint, North-South, third-order learning.

Chapter 6. Hubs and links

Networking for peace

Given that Southern peace NGOs identify exchange and interaction with other actors as central to the way in which they learn, in this chapter we look at networking as a knowledge strategy. Networking is a major learning strategy for nearly all of the organisations visited as part of this study. The number of networks in the peacebuilding field has risen immensely in recent years. Donor agencies are also beginning to focus on these networks. The Dutch NGO Cordaid, for example, has made the support of peace networks a central part of its peacebuilding strategy.

This chapter builds on the discussion in section 3.7 of networking as a strategy for knowledge exchange by NGOs by providing information about networks encountered during my field visits, drawing on interviews with a large number of NGO staff members involved in those networks. The chapter analyses some of the main characteristics, obstacles and conditions for success of civil society peacebuilding networks. The first section of the chapter discusses the characteristics of peacebuilding networks in the countries visited. 6.2 goes into the potential benefits of networking as seen by civil society organisations, while 6.3 discusses the challenges that peace NGO networks face. 6.4 combines findings about the functioning of networks with earlier findings on NGO learning, knowledge exchange, and obstacles to learning and exchange, in order to formulate a number of factors that influence the success of networks and networking in the field of peacebuilding.

Next, these factors are applied to a case study of a specific network, namely the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) and its member networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone. WANEP is introduced in 6.5, and in 6.6 it is connected to the earlier mentioned success factors in order to achieve a better understanding of what conditions the results of networking for learning in a postconflict context. 6.7 discusses the implications of all this and relates the findings from the chapter back to the research questions guiding this study. Finally, as chapter six concludes Part Two of this book on structure and agency in the knowledge strategies of Southern peace NGOs, 6.8 draws a number of conclusions from this Part.

6.1 Networks and networking in the field of peacebuilding

6.1.1 Networks encountered in the field

Section 3.7 discussed the literature on networking as a strategy for peace NGOs. It emerged that networking can be a useful peacebuilding strategy because it involves making links between different regions and levels, because the dynamic nature of peacebuilding means that rigid structures are not suitable, and because the field is dispersed over a great number of mostly small organisations. Advantages of networking included strengthening the field of peace NGOs as a whole, helping to avoid duplication of activities, and facilitating complementary partnerships.

Indeed, as the lists of networks encountered during my research visits illustrate (see Boxes 6.1-6.4), networks of peace NGOs are widespread in the countries visited. They exist locally (such as the Rural Women Peace Link in North-western Kenya), nationally (such as the Alliance for Conflict Transformation in Cambodia), regionally (such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding or WANEP) and globally (such as the International Action Network on Small Arms or IANSA). Most striking is the abundance of networks in the Philippines. Although some in that country say that there are too many networks, peacebuilders in the Philippines and elsewhere value networks as important venues for knowledge exchange, mutual support, voicing issues and grievances, and joint action.

Box 6.1: Networks encountered in the Philippines and Cambodia or mentioned by interviewees²⁷⁶

Philippines:

- Waging Peace network of the Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute (*organises regular conferences of Philippine peace NGOs and published the conference reports*)
- Peace Education Network
- Mindanao Peaceweavers (*a network of Mindanawan peace networks*)
- Mindanao People's Caucus (*see Boxes 1.1 and 5.1 and section 1.5.2*)
- Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (*a network of Mindanawan NGOs focusing on the empowerment of the Bangsamoro*)
- Catholic Relief Service (CRS) partner network (*regular meetings and capacity building initiatives*)
- Mindanao Emergency Response Network

²⁷⁶ In this and the following boxes, information is provided about the networks to the extent that it is available to me. Some networks were merely mentioned in passing and I do not have additional information about their focus and activities.

- Minnland (horizontal NGO network)
- Mindanao Development Coalition of NGOs

Cambodia:

- Peace Forum (*irregular meetings among Cambodian peace NGOs*)
- Alliance for Conflict Transformation (*network that also engages in various activities as an NGO, including training programmes. Partner in ACTS – see chapter eight*)
- Women Peacemakers Network
- Nericlahan (brave women) forum
- Citizen Action for Development network
- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) network

Regional:

- GPPAC Southeast Asia (*see chapter seven*)
- Action Asia (*network of Asian peacebuilders, made up of individuals rather than organisations. Organises solidarity rallies, exchanges information, supports NGOs during peace processes*)
- International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Southeast Asia Network (*IANSA is a global NGO network focusing on the elimination of small arms, with regional sub-networks*)
- Pax Christi International Southeast Asia Network
- Southeast Asia Conflict Studies Network
- Asia-Pacific Peacebuilding Network (*initiated by the World Bank; exchange through videoconferencing from local World Bank offices*)

Global:

- GPPAC (*see chapter seven*)
- Peace Education Centres Network (*see 5.5.5*)
- Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER)
- Global Campaign to Ban Landmines (*global activist network*)
- International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA; *see above*)
- Hague Appeal for Peace (*global NGO peace network which was founded as follow-up to a conference but has now become largely inactive*)

Most civil society peacebuilding networks encountered were founded relatively recently: in the late 1990s or later. While in Kenya and the Philippines most networks seem to be local in origin, in West Africa most peace networks were created to some extent through outside interventions – by local branches of international NGOs or as national sub-networks of larger regional forums. In Cambodia both are the case. In Central Asia, many networks have been created top-down (by donors, NNGOs or large SNGOs), but there are exceptions, such as the Dolina Mira network in the Ferghana Valley (see Box 6.5) In the Philippines and Kenya the networks appear the most indigenously driven. In both countries there are grassroots networks that aim to strengthen marginalised groups through joint action – such as the Bangsamoro in

Mindanao, which have formed various networks. The women forming the Rural Women Peace Link in North-western Kenya are another example (see Box 4.2 in section 4.1). In addition to such grassroots empowerment networks, both countries witness many networks that have been created for exchange among peace NGOs.

This difference between Kenya and the Philippines on the one hand and Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cambodia on the other appears to correspond with the state of civil society more generally in these countries (see chapter one), which in turn corresponds with the amount of destruction and level of development of the countries concerned. In resource-deprived states such as Cambodia, Sierra Leone and Liberia funding “seems to be an important prerequisite for any NGO activity”, including peace networking (Douma 2005: 10). Networks are also seen as a tool for access to funding. At the same time, participants emphasise the intrinsic value of networking in terms of knowledge sharing, avoiding the duplication of activities, and gaining contacts both within and outside the country. Central Asia is a region that is different due to its Soviet past and present prevalence of authoritarian governments, which make it difficult for civil society to operate independently from authorities. Although many people said that networking is a new and little understood methodology in Central Asia, interviewees and survey respondents also named various networks operating in the region. The Dolina Mira network was identified by many as a successful network (see Box 6.5).

Box 6.2: Networks encountered in Liberia and Sierra Leone or mentioned by interviewees

Liberia:

- Union of Liberian Civil Society Organisations
- Network of Liberian environmental NGOs
- Network for Collaborative Peacebuilding Sierra Leone (NCP-SL; *see case study in this chapter*)

Sierra Leone:

- Sierra Leone Association of NGOs (SLANGO)
- Partners in Conflict Transformation (PICOT; *consortium of three relatively strong Sierra Leonean peace NGOs*)

Regional:

- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP; *see case study in this chapter*)
- Women in Peacebuilding network (WIPNET; *part of WANEP*)

Global:

- GPPAC (*see chapter seven*)
- International Fellowship of Reconciliation (*global spiritually-based movement for non-violence with various members including many peace NGOs and a secretariat in Alkmaar, the Netherlands*)
- Global Family
- Peaceways
- United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY; *global network of youth organisations that work on peacebuilding with a secretariat in The Hague, Netherlands*)
- Women for International Peace and Arbitration (*women's movement advocating the peaceful settlement of international disputes, with chapters in countries including Sierra Leone*)

Networks are formed to extend the reach and influence of members and to gain access to sources of knowledge that could improve practice. They aim at a “cross-fertilisation of knowledge”²⁷⁷ between different actors who learn from each other’s perspectives and experiences. The content focus of the networks varies. Some focus on peacebuilding as a whole, others on sub-issues (disarmament, early warning, the role of women in peacebuilding) or related issues (human rights). Still others are even broader. In most of the networks encountered, civil society organisations make up the members of the network and send representatives (often the director of the organisation) to network meetings. In some cases, individuals not directly aligned to an NGO, but nonetheless considered to be players in peacebuilding, are allowed to join. Central to the activities of most networks are regular meetings. In addition, many engage in online interaction between meetings. This depends on the extent to which members have access to internet. All networks have either appointed an individual coordinator or established a network secretariat. Sometimes one of the member NGOs takes on the role of secretariat, in other cases it is newly created.

Knowledge sharing is considered by most participants to be a networking priority and important benefit, although at the same time it is difficult due to a lack of trust among NGOs and fear that others may take advantage of sensitive information. There is quite some competition and suspicion among NGOs. In Sierra Leone it is said that that politicians use NGOs and networks to “nurture a specific public personality [...]. [NGOs] with a high public profile are useful starting points for political campaigning. Networking in such cases means personal networking to advance the interest of specific individuals.” (Douma 2005: 10)

²⁷⁷ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

In addition to knowledge sharing, many networks engage in joint activities. The network secretariat often raises funds for particular programmes after which it engages relevant members in their joint implementation. In this way networks engage in similar kinds of projects as individual peace NGOs. Networks encountered engage in human rights monitoring, local dialogue and mediation programmes, the ‘training of trainers’ in conflict mediation, peace education, advice and advocacy towards authorities, and early warning. The latter activity may be particularly suitable for networks as it requires a widespread presence and capacity for gathering and disseminating information. Aside from engaging jointly in peacebuilding work, many networks also carry out support functions for their members. They try to assist NGOs in getting in touch with each other and aim to build the individual and organisational capacities of their members through knowledge sharing, training, advice and direct support in activities. Networks do not always succeed in achieving these support aims. WANEP Liberia for example has not been able to implement its capacity building programme, while it does carry out many direct peace programmes – as we will see in the case study further on.

Box 6.3: Networks encountered in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan or mentioned by interviewees

Kyrgyzstan:

- A network of centres for educational policy
- Regional Coordination Councils of government and civil society
- Association of Crisis Centres in Kyrgyzstan
- The UNDP has established a local network in Southern Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan:

- The Public Committee for Democratic Processes (*coalition of Tajik pro-democracy CSOs*)
- Tajik Public Council (*high level body consisting of state and CSO representatives*)

Regional:

- Dolina Mira network (*see Box 6.5*)
- Young Lawyers of the Ferghana Valley network
- Ferghana Valley Lawyers without Borders (*established as a result of a conference on the role of legal specialists in conflict prevention. Members are lawyers, prosecutors and judges based in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Aims at the protection of the rights and interests of citizens and provides free legal consultations.*)
- Central Asian network of human rights protection organisations
- Central Asian development network
- EAWARN, an early warning network for the post-Soviet states based in Moscow
- International committee of CSOs on People’s Diplomacy, Moscow

- GPPAC Central Asia (*see chapter seven*)

Global:

- World Assembly "Movement for democracy"
- Global Centre for Pluralism
- GPPAC (*see chapter seven*)

Networks have sometimes been difficult to sustain. In Cambodia various attempts to form peace NGO networks failed over the past decade. This was because of a lack of time invested in them and in other cases due to disagreements over organisation, representation and management. However, lessons have been learned from these experiences. When the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) was founded in 1997 it was decided to adopt a very loose organisational form in order to avoid governance issues. This has kept the network going. People can join in activities and pull back as they please; there is no set membership.

Leadership is a problematic issue for many peacebuilding networks. Some networks are ruled relatively autocratically and leaders often exercise an exclusive grip on networks. This is noted particularly in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mindanao. Sometimes networks are used as political fronts by important civil society leaders. More generally many are "dominated by few individuals who are important public figureheads. In Sierra Leone and Liberia networks quickly become identified with such an individual. This may have an important political side effect. Networks can easily become associated with a specific party or a political interest group." (Douma 2005: 29) Many networks concentrate resources and staff at the central level. This is particularly the case in West Africa and Cambodia. Phnom Penh, Freetown and Monrovia contain nearly all of the headquarters of peacebuilding networks (or for that matter of all civil society organisations active in these countries). As the report from the network meeting in Kenema, Sierra Leone in Box 5.3 (section 5.5.1) illustrates, the physical and mental distance between network headquarters and members in the provinces is often large.

Box 6.4: Networks encountered in Kenya or mentioned by interviewees

Kenya:

- Africa Peace Forum (*resource institution working for peace and security in the greater Horn of Africa. Carries out research and engages with governments to shape policy. Founded a group working on early warning that includes governments and NGOs.*)
- Peace and Development Network (*PeaceNet Kenya; national umbrella body of NGOs, organisations and individuals supporting human rights, peace and*

<p><i>reconciliation, justice and conflict resolution in Kenya</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Women Peace Link (<i>see Box 4.2</i>) <p>Other country but with secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Sudan Indigenous Network (<i>network of NGOs working in South Sudan to empower civil society and act as a watchdog in order to achieve sustainable peace for the region</i>) • New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC; <i>consists of six member churches. When in the late 1980s the national Sudan Council of Churches ran into increasing difficulties as a result of the war, NSCC was founded to focus on the South of Sudan only. Initially it was a relief organisation, but shifted its focus towards peacebuilding in response to increasing conflicts within the South of Sudan</i>) <p>Regional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace Tree Network (<i>regional network connecting NGOs working for peace in East Africa, the Great Lakes region, and Africa as a whole</i>) • Fellowship of Christian Councils in the Great Lakes region and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA; <i>supports the peacebuilding activities of church councils in the countries of the Great Lakes region and Horn of Africa</i>) • All Africa Council of Churches • GPPAC Central and East Africa (<i>see chapter seven</i>) <p>Global:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPPAC (<i>see chapter seven</i>) • World Council of Churches (<i>global organisation of Christian churches that, among other things, supports its members to carry out peace activities</i>)

Most peace networks face resource constraints and have to focus much of their energy on the acquisition of funds in order to sustain their institutions and pay for salaries of staff, stationery and other running costs. Due to their dependency on donor funding, peace networks in all countries face issues similar to those described for individual NGOs in chapter four. Network coordinators who interact with donors to secure financing for their activities complain of a lack of contextual understanding by donor representatives, and are critical of the programming priorities that donors impose. Like peace NGO employees more generally, network staff members feel that donors should be more aware of the knowledge, priorities, and concerns of themselves and their members. Networks have difficulty securing support for network meetings – particularly for transport and accommodation of members. These are often seen to be overhead rather than project costs or even unnecessary. The hesitancy of donors to fund not only programmes but also core funding and overhead costs represents an obstacle for networks. Costs for staff and logistics are not systematically taken into account. As a result, most secretariats are under-capacitated.

The issues posed by the funding regime may be particularly salient for networks, as they are for learning, given the intangible nature of these activities and their results. They are also generally quite long-term in orientation. As particularly the Southeast Asian interviewees emphasised, networking is not a technical matter but is about building relationships. This takes time. However, unlike technical arrangements, relationships are likely to last, and participants will know how to find each other when they need something. The Action Asia network, for example, is built around a number of key and committed individuals. As these people move to different jobs around the world, they take their network and knowledge – as well as their vision and energy – with them and continue to be of value. These people share resources with one another and because they are so committed they do it in addition to their regular work.²⁷⁸

Box 6. 5: The Dolina Mira network in the Central Asian Ferghana Valley²⁷⁹

The Dolina Mira (“Valley of Peace”) network is a cross-border CSO network in the conflict-stricken Ferghana Valley on the border of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The network aims to address a variety of cross-border issues relating to ethnic tension, resource conflicts, vulnerable populations, customs regulations, legal issues and border crossings in the region. The Dolina Mira network comprises thirty CSOs and has a paid membership. Member organisations often carry out joint activities, such as constructive dialogue and awareness raising activities and training and tolerance building in relation to conflicts originating from border crossing. There is also a small grants programme through which grassroots organisations can carry out socio-economic projects. Through this programme organisations also did a border monitoring project for the improvement of the Ferghana Valley region.

Dolina Mira operates at the micro level. Most members agree that it is practical and working well. In the past year Dolina Mira has been the only functioning network in Uzbekistan – illegally. Even after the bloody shooting of demonstrators in Andijan, Uzbekistan in 2005, Dolina Mira was able to keep the Uzbek CSOs involved by offering them funds and training. What is considered especially important about Dolina Mira is that it provided local civil society groups with knowledge and qualifications and has enabled them to exchange experiences.

The way Dolina Mira was established was truly bottom-up. It was created by locals, unlike many other networks in the region that were founded in response to the availability of donor funds. A concept paper was produced, and a donor found: the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). One interviewee remarked that “Dolina Mira is our baby, who found a tutor”. The donor is not dominating; the decisions are made by the coordinators and General Assembly of the network. People feel there is mutual respect.

There is a strong and competent secretariat, with resources. The coordination board is

²⁷⁸ Interview with staff member of a Cambodian NGO and coordinator of a regional network. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

²⁷⁹ Interviews held in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, 23-29 July 2006.

also considered competent and professional, consisting of well-known persons. The work of secretariat and coordination board is transparent; members can always ask for reports. Members note the possibility to speak openly and freely at network meetings – apparently, this is different in other networks in the region. In the network “democracy is at work. The main goal of a network is changing values and mentality [...]. The way the network is organised gives the right example.”

Money is available, making possible regular meetings, activities, planning, and implementation in clusters of CSOs. At the same time it is felt that “we can do more for less money because we like our network”. Local government officials have also become involved. They have approached Dolina Mira for cooperation, because they know it has the resources to resolve the problems. The members are “real partners in daily work; they are working together practically.”

On the negative side, Dolina Mira is heavily dependent on the funding and staff time of the DRC. This is not sustainable. Another negative point about Dolina Mira is that it works mainly at the concrete level, focusing on socio-economic projects. Some feel that this is not the role a network should be playing and that it should instead aim to change politics and politicians in the Ferghana Valley, so as to change the situation. Considering that authoritarian politics are closely related to many of the conflict issues in Southeast Asia, this is an issue that some say peace organisations and networks need to focus on. However, the members of Dolina Mira have low organisational capacity and prefer to work on small and concrete projects. They are also afraid of running risks by upsetting politicians.

6.1.2 Categorising the networks

Section 3.7 discussed several dimensions that can help categorise networks: their degree of cooperation and organisation, their focus and objective, and issues related to their accountability and exclusiveness. Here, I add some depth to these dimensions using findings from the field research, and add two other dimensions that emerged from the conversations held with network members, namely the mode of exchange and the role of the coordinating body.

Degree of cooperation and organisation

Section 3.7 introduced two extremes in the degree of cooperation and organisation of networks. On the one extreme, there is the ‘spider web model’: a strong centralised network consisting of a central board and secretariat, surrounded by circles of members in various levels of involvement from full to partial membership. At the other extreme is the fish-net or cell-structured network, which is much more loosely organised. In reality, most networks find themselves somewhere in between these two forms, as is the case with the peace networks encountered in my field research. Most have a secretariat but it tends to be small, under-funded and overburdened. Much depends on the

capacities and contributions of individual members. Many networks depend on a few strong member organisations to keep them going.

Focus and objective

Finding the right balance between focus on the one hand, and inclusiveness and diversity on the other, emerges from the field research as an important challenge for peace networks. The GPPAC network in the next chapter will illustrate this. Many of its members argue for more focus in terms of clear objectives, priorities and strategies, noting that networks working toward a specific outcome often function well, because they have a clear focus, their activity is time-bound, and the participants have an obvious common interest. A Cambodian network of student organisations was formed to do an interfaith project. It was explicitly decided that it would last only for the duration of this project. The network worked well²⁸⁰.

At the same time, people see value in having a diverse membership that brings people with different backgrounds and points of view together. A Cambodian NGO staff member stated that “networking usually takes place among like-minded people; networks with people who have diverging interests often fail. However, it is precisely networking with people who are different that has value. People have to get out of their comfort zone.”²⁸¹ Such networking across boundaries may contribute directly to peacebuilding. Still, it is noted that diverse networks need to share a sense of common purpose that overrides individual differences.²⁸² Formulating clear and shared objectives therefore remain important. In addition, various people said that good networks are built around an issue people are interested in and passionate about.

Legitimacy and accountability

We saw in 3.7 that the loose structure of networks raises issue of accountability and ownership. In response, the networks studied devise their own mechanisms of accountability. Often they introduce democratic elements, electing representative bodies of governance. Codes of conduct or constitutions are sometimes developed. Financially, peacebuilding networks are usually accountable to donor organisations that demand transparent practice and reporting. In many cases the coordinating organisation is asked to conduct monitoring and evaluation,

²⁸⁰ Interview with staff member of a Cambodian NGO and coordinator of a regional network. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

²⁸¹ Informal conversation with staff member of a Cambodian NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 23 May 2006.

²⁸² Informal conversation with staff member of a Cambodian NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 23 May 2006.

but the way this is carried out still depends on the cooperation of the partners.

Formal structures do not always correspond with the actual division of power within a network. As mentioned, Southern peace networks are in many cases dominated by a few strong individuals. Often, public figureheads start networks. In Sierra Leone civil society networking starts when “powerful and well known individuals [...] approach colleagues or other important civil society members. They tend to form personal alliances as a first step.” Naturally, networks quickly become identified with such individuals. Douma notes that “[t]his may have an important political side effect. Networks can easily become associated with a specific party or a political interest group.” (Douma 2005: 29)

The influence of donor organisations in networks is often not immediately visible. Networks can be Northern-dominated and donor-driven, but they can also be built from the bottom up, as a result of Southern organisations meeting a shared need. As one donor representative pointed out in a conversation, donor-initiated is not necessarily the same as donor-driven; what matters is who sets the agenda²⁸³. Indeed, some donor-initiated networks are perceived to be very useful by the participants²⁸⁴.

Many networks face internal and external discussions on the legitimacy of their leadership and representative structures. Sometimes the way in which representatives are selected is subject to criticism. The position of network secretariats at the interface of the internal network and external stakeholders presents them with more general issues of legitimacy and representation. On the one hand they represent the interests of their members; on the other, they strive to maintain a particular reputation externally. The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) can serve as an example: it consists of a number of national networks. These networks lend the WANEP secretariat its legitimacy and the secretariat exists to support them. However, the secretariat also demands a certain measure of quality from the national networks in order to maintain its reputation and retain donors. The national networks obtain legitimacy from being a part of the wider WANEP network. Ensuring quality is something they have to do in return. The WANEP secretariat is constantly struggling to find the right balance between maintaining the autonomy of the national networks and ensuring a bottom-up decision-making structure, while at the same time making sure that the national

²⁸³ Conversation with staff members of a Dutch NGO. The Hague, Netherlands, 22 December 2005.

²⁸⁴ Such as the ICCO partner network in Liberia.

networks live up to the quality standards and principles of WANEP.²⁸⁵ The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) of which WANEP is a part faces similar issues at the global level.²⁸⁶

Mode of exchange

The mode of exchange is another characteristic by which networks may be categorised. Most networks encountered in the field depend highly on more or less regular face-to-face meetings, which are considered indispensable to a valuable exchange of tacit and explicit knowledge. However, many networks at the local or national level are connected to regional or global ones, and although large conferences are sometimes organised, much of this exchange takes place via e-mail (and in one case, videoconferencing²⁸⁷). E-mail is also used in local and national networks for exchanges in between meetings. Some networks have e-groups on which all members can regularly post messages. In a Philippines-wide network for example, one member is good at accessing relevant websites, which are then posted on the e-group and mailed to others.²⁸⁸

The role of the coordinating body

Network members interviewed had clear views on the role of the coordinating body. They mentioned the following issues. Successful networks need more than a few committed people and capable institutions to sustain and enhance the process, so that the burden is not borne by one institution only, as often happens. Also needed is a good coordinator or secretariat that people feel comfortable with. The coordinator should be active, have a clearly understood role, and have the time to do his or her job well. One network encountered had five people trying to coordinate it, all of whom were doing so in addition to their regular work. This led to confusion and all coordinators according low priority to the network.

A coordinating party is required for a network to function well. This can range from one person spending a few hours a week on the network to an entire fulltime network secretariat. Some networks visited are coordinated by a member organisation that has been assigned to do so.

²⁸⁵ Interviews with WANEP members in Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, February 2006.

²⁸⁶ Conversation with staff members of the GPPAC International Secretariat. Utrecht, the Netherlands, 25 April 2006.

²⁸⁷ The Asia-Pacific Peacebuilding Network, initiated by the World Bank, has videoconferencing sessions during which peace NGOs from various Asian countries exchange information and experiences. A number of Cambodian NGOs participate in these via videolink from the local World Bank office. Source: interview with director of a Cambodian youth NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 24 May 2006.

²⁸⁸ Interview with staff member of a Philippine NGO. Quezon City, 19 May 2006.

These organisations perform a network secretariat function in addition to their other activities. The coordinating party moderates online interaction, processes information, and facilitates direct contact between members by putting them in touch with each other and by organising face-to-face meetings. In more action-oriented networks, coordinators may also raise funds for the network, initiate common programmes, and take the lead in lobby and advocacy.

The role of the coordinator is crucial. A network needs one or more persons who feel a special responsibility about the forum which they have joined or created, who facilitate exchange, organise events, and start discussions on governance matters where necessary. At the same time, the role of the coordinating body or secretariat can also be problematic. First of all, financing a secretariat is often difficult, because donors are often unwilling to provide anything other than project funding. In addition, it often happens that a secretariat has difficulty finding the right balance between the interests of the network members and their own organisational interest. For example, a secretariat may be tempted to use funds attracted for the network to implement its own programmes. This, we will see below, occurred at WANEP Liberia. Another issue may be that an organisation acting as secretariat fears losing its profile vis-à-vis donors and other potential partners, as NGOs are under continuous pressure to demonstrate their unique contribution to the field. (Galama and Van Tongeren 2002: 35)

The selection of a coordinator may also present problems. There may be competition over this position, particularly when the coordinating party is also the recipient of external funds for the network. Experience shows that where an existing NGO is selected to coordinate the network, this organisation acquires a power position from being the recipient of donor funds for the network. This can have an adverse effect: the coordinating NGO may be reluctant to jeopardise its newfound power and start monopolising rather than sharing knowledge as a result. More generally, the position of power that individuals and organisations derive from being at the funding interface is recognised by practitioners²⁸⁹ and researchers (Hilhorst 2003) alike. This makes democratic governance of networks a priority – but not always a reality.

It is important that the coordinator has the time to do his or her job well. A lot depends on whether this coordinator acts in an authoritarian or an

²⁸⁹ Mentioned by interviewees in Liberia and Sierra Leone in February 2006 as well as during a conversation with staff members of a Dutch NGO that supports networks (The Hague, Netherlands, 22 December 2005).

empowering way. A good coordinator acts as a motivator, has an open mind for everyone, and ensures that everyone is heard. He or she always promotes the network's cause and never forgets who his/her constituency is. It is difficult to find such people, particularly in places where authoritarian styles are common.²⁹⁰ A network coordinator in Cambodia noted that to some degree, the networking methodology defies the participatory principles prevalent in the development community, particularly in peacebuilding.

“Development avoids top-down approaches and emphasises accountability. It tries to empower people at the bottom to take responsibility. By contrast, networks are generally dependent on strong relationships and key people taking certain initiatives forward. Often they are highly centralised and are managed by a small group of people. The differences between networking and ‘regular’ development work should be well understood by donors.”²⁹¹

6.2 Potential benefits of networking for peace

Nearly all the SNGOs visited for this study participate in one or more networks. Table 6.1 shows the kinds of answers given when interviewees were asked about the benefits of networking to their work.

Benefits of networking and knowledge exchange	Lib (10)	SL (16)	Kenya (11)	Phil (10)	Cam (14)	C-Asia (15)	Total (76)
Hear about other ways of doing things, experiences	2	3	1	3	2	6	17
Stronger together vis-à-vis authorities, international organisations		1	2	2	3	7	15
Widens reach, visibility of organisation	1	1	4	3	2	3	14
Build capacity	2	1	1	1	1	7	13
Combine expertise; complement one another	3	6	1		1	2	13
Knowledge creation through interaction	3	5		1	2	2	13

²⁹⁰ Interview with staff member of a Cambodian NGO and coordinator of a regional network. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

²⁹¹ Interview with staff member of a Cambodian NGO and coordinator of a regional network. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

Learn from successes of others and avoid repeating their mistakes	1	1	1	2	1	1	7
Influence policy			2			5	7
Solidarity, moral support		2		2	1	1	6
Prevent duplication	1	3	1			1	6
Build peace: change perceptions and attitudes; counter misinformation; empowerment through knowledge		3	1			1	5
Better analysis of context, issues	1	2			1	1	5
Systematisation /standardisation of approaches; work towards integrated approach	2	1	1			1	5
Collaboration		2				2	4
Keeping one's knowledge up to date	1			1	2		4
Indigenous knowledge accessed and shared				3			3
Access to funds		2				1	3
Create common goal		1	1			1	3
Regional cooperation						3	3
Find new partners		2				1	3
Increase recognition, legitimacy of organisation		2					2
Informing people outside country of what is happening			1	1			2
International partners can decrease isolation						2	2
Provide expertise to external actors	1						1
Be inspired by others		1					1
Intervention in conflict	1						1
Early warning						1	1

Table 6.1: Benefits of networking and knowledge exchange according to Southern peace NGOs

The table shows that knowledge sharing is seen as the most important benefit of networks. It is mentioned in various forms:

- *hearing about other experiences and ways of doing things*
- *combining expertise and complementing one another's knowledge* (particularly in West Africa this is a way of looking at knowledge sharing)
- *jointly creating knowledge through interaction* (when people from different places come together and share, this generates new energy and ideas. A workshop with peace scholar Johan Galtung that was organised in Phnom Penh during my visit to Cambodia generated ideas for three new projects in one of the participating NGOs.)
- *learning from the successes and mistakes of others* (for example, one Cambodian NGO collected the inputs and experiences of many other NGOs and used them for the development of a school curriculum.²⁹²)
- *better analysis of the context*
- *systematisation and standardisation of approaches, working towards an integrated approach* (this point, particularly in combination with the previous one, is important when we think back to the difficulties local peace NGOs have to reflect on the bigger picture of conflict and peace, their role in it, and the extent to which their work complements that of others²⁹³)
- *keeping one's knowledge up to date*
- *accessing and sharing indigenous knowledge* (a point emphasised in the Philippines)
- *informing people outside the country of what is happening*
- *providing expertise to external actors*
- *exchanging early warning signals for conflict prevention.*

Another important benefit of networking is through the power of numbers. It gives individual organisations a stronger position vis-à-vis authorities, which may be used for policy influencing, lobby and advocacy activities. This point, phrased in several ways (being stronger together vis-à-vis governments and international organisations, widening the reach and visibility of an organisation, joint policy influencing, and having international partners, which may decrease isolation) is mentioned everywhere but receives particular emphasis in Central Asia, where civil society is generally weak in the face of authoritarian

²⁹² Interview with staff member of a Cambodian NGO. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

²⁹³ See in particular section 1.6.1.

governments and such strategies are important prerequisites for its survival and impact. Other benefits mentioned include that networks may help build the capacity of organisations (something also related to knowledge sharing) and may coordinate between the activities of member NGOs to prevent duplication, something that is said to occur often. In addition, networks may facilitate NGOs linking up for joint projects and programmes.

Some additional insights about the benefits of networking may be gained from the global survey²⁹⁴ carried out as part of the GPPAC case study, analysed in the next chapter. Asked what the benefits of the global and regional GPPAC networks had been for their organisation, there was little difference between the answers given with regard to the global and regional level. The main benefits mentioned largely confirm the picture arising out of the interviews. They were:

- *exchange of experiences and learning* (127 people); collecting and sharing lessons learned and best practices
- *contacts; expansion of network and partners* (89)
- *access to knowledge and expertise* (83) in the field for an increased understanding of issues that play a role in conflict and peace, particularly those at global level
- *facilitate collaboration and work towards joint goal and strategy* (75); this provides the potential for truly regional and global action.
- *capacity building* (55), increasing understanding of the context, strengthening organisations, providing training
- *lobby and advocacy* (38); more advocacy power through the power of numbers and links with influential players; bridging the gap between governments and civil society; lobbying with the UN
- *increased visibility/legitimacy/influence* (26) of one's organisation through the network
- *raising awareness* (21) of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and the role of civil society
- *fundraising and access to funds* (16)
- *mutual assistance* (13) and practical and moral support
- *unity and solidarity of civil society* (9)
- *link the global to the local* (5)

²⁹⁴ See Annex 2.

Networks can also help overcome divisions within civil society. A West African network coordinator gave the example of Togo, where there are two NGO collectives, one pro- and one anti-government:

“Well-intentioned interventions by NGOs can be counterproductive in such an environment because it is easy to be seen as biased. For that reason it is important that our national network in Togo includes organisations from both collectives, which work jointly to show that it is not a response from one side only. This increases the credibility of actions. Sometimes it can also be important for a neutral outsider to step in; this is a role often played by staff members of the regional network secretariat.”²⁹⁵

Particularly in Southeast Asia, another benefit of networking emerged from many of the interviews held that is not mentioned so often in the networking literature: the sense of solidarity and moral support that being a part of a network provides. The Action Asia network for example organises solidarity events for Burma and East Timor in other Southeast Asian countries.²⁹⁶ The Mindanawan organisation Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) sends a newsletter to organisations throughout the region informing them of developments and activities around conflict and peace in Southeast Asian countries. NGO workers that receive these newsletters say they feel strengthened by knowing that others face similar issues as they do²⁹⁷.

More practical mutual support is also considered an important feature of networks. In addition, networks enable organisations that otherwise have difficulty reaching audiences to voice their issues and grievances and advocate solutions. Speaking as a member of a civil society network gives one a much better advocacy position than as an individual organisation. The Mindanao Peace Caucus, a network of grassroots organisations, lobbied successfully for an international ceasefire monitoring team in Mindanao. The network also contributed to forging the ceasefire agreement through a huge demonstration on a highway²⁹⁸. Such joint activities are another potential benefit of networks.

Of course, networks do not always achieve the potential benefits listed in this section. For one thing, they are affected by the obstacles to knowledge sharing discussed in the previous chapter – as the West African case study further on in this chapter will illustrate. At an even more basic level, whether a network benefits its members and is

²⁹⁵ Interview with director of a West African NGO network. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

²⁹⁶ Several conversations with staff member of Action Asia.

²⁹⁷ Various interviews in the Philippines and Cambodia, May 2006.

²⁹⁸ Interview with chairman of the Mindanao People's Caucus. Marbel, Philippines, 16 May 2006.

conducive to peacebuilding depends on the extent to which it adds value to activities and exchanges already taking place. If there are too many networks operating in a given region, then individual networks are unlikely to add much value. In Mindanao some people consider this to be the case. A donor representative noted for example that “there are a lot of networks in Mindanao, and there is a lot of overlap between them.”²⁹⁹ A member of Mindanawan civil society adds that

“too often in Mindanao, networks are formed. After each conference an organisation is created. This results in many abbreviations [the names of the networks], but usually it is the same people who make up the network. Often the new organisational forms only add to the workload. If the activities aimed at could as well be carried out within one or more of the organisations involved then there is no need to create an organisation”.³⁰⁰

6.3 Challenges for networking

In general, the challenges to learning and knowledge sharing identified in section 5.6 apply to networks. In fact interviewees often mentioned them in the context of discussing networks. Thus, a lack of time and money to participate in networking, the need to adapt knowledge to the context, competition and distrust among actors in peacebuilding, the low capacity of SNGOs, imposition of ideas by donors, the lack of constituency of some SNGOs, the fact that the content of knowledge is often contested, aspects relating to power relations and inequality within a given country or region, constraints resulting from the difficult social and political situation in (post)conflict societies, cultural issues, gender and the fact that knowledge changes over time all play a role. In addition, networks face a number of specific organisational issues, which become clear from the GPPAC survey mentioned earlier³⁰¹ that also asked respondents about the challenges to successful networking. They include most of the factors mentioned above. In addition, the answers included:

- *the difficulty of proving the value of the network by moving towards implementation and concrete activities* (26 people)
- *finding a focus and developing a clear strategy* (16)
- *difficulties with information flows and communication* (18) within the network

²⁹⁹ Conversation with staff member of a Dutch development organisation. The Hague, The Netherlands, 19 April 2006.

³⁰⁰ Informal conversation with staff member of a Mindanawan NGO. Davao, Philippines, 15 May 2006.

³⁰¹ See Annex 2.

- *keeping the momentum, continuity and sustainability* (17)
- *low commitment* (8) on the part of some members. Persuading people to be actively involved is a challenge. Members have to deal with competing demands on their time and energy.
- *governance, transparency and ownership* (6)
- *becoming more rooted at grassroots level* (4)
- *supporting weak members* (4)
- *language barriers* (4)

The regular mentioning of the difficulty of moving towards concrete activities should be seen in the context of GPPAC. Although the question about network challenges was asked in general terms, the survey was held among GPPAC members. As the next chapter will show, the difficulty of becoming concrete is an important issue for this network. The need to find a focus and clear strategy was also mentioned in sections 3.7 and 6.1. There it became clear that this need has to be balanced against the values of diversity and inclusiveness. The challenge of keeping the momentum and sustaining a network over the longer term applies to GPPAC, as well as to many other networks in the field, including the Sierra Leonean WANEP network analysed further on in this chapter, which was dormant for several years before it was revived. Governance, transparency and ownership were also discussed in 3.7 and 6.1. They are important issues to deal with in order to prevent (or overcome) conflicts within networks and to ensure that the interests and views of members are represented in decision making.

Sustaining information flows and communication, particularly in between face-to-face meetings, is an issue for many networks. This is not only related to a lack of access to communication tools on the part of some members, but also to coordinators being overburdened and lacking time and capacity to pass on information. In addition, language barriers (mentioned separately in the above list of challenges) play a role in international networks. Finally, low capacity and commitment of members, and a lack of time to participate in networking, resonate with issues described in the previous chapter.

6.4 Factors influencing network success

Building on the experiences presented so far, what characteristics of knowledge exchange networks are found to be important for successful functioning? Networking is affected by the issues outlined in previous chapters:

- the organisational learning capacity of their members (chapter three)
- the structural constraints posed by inequalities between North and South as well as among actors in (post)conflict countries themselves, most notably donors and recipients, and the way in which these determine the capacity of local actors to generate and disseminate knowledge (chapter four)
- obstacles to learning and exchange such as a lack of time and money, limited organisational capacity and characteristics, the fact that much knowledge in conflict is contested, competition and distrust among civil society actors, power relations and inequality among participants in exchange, the difficult social and political situation in (post)conflict societies, cultural issues and gender divisions that need to be bridged in order to share and learn jointly, and the fact that knowledge changes quickly (chapter five)
- the way in which a network is organised; its activities, focus and objective; the role of its coordinating body; its legitimacy, transparency and accountability; its extent of exclusiveness; and challenges it may face (section 3.8 and chapter six).

The following pages translate all of these issues into a list of twenty-five factors that influence the success of knowledge networking. These factors relate to

- the capacity of the member organisations
- the relationship between members and the network
- general characteristics of the network
- governance, legitimacy and organisation of the network
- coverage and inclusiveness of the network
- the content of the network
- the context of the network
- the funding structure of the network.

6.4.1 Capacity of the member organisations

One basic requirement for the success of a network of NGOs is the extent to which the participating organisations are able to give valuable input and make use of whatever comes out of it. Thus, the organisational capacity of members (as discussed in section 5.6.2) is of significance for networking. As our focus here is particularly on the knowledge exchange function of networks, this means that the knowledge level and learning capacity of the member NGOs are especially important.

Organisations with low learning capacity will be unable to improve their work based on knowledge gained through networking. Networks themselves can also play a role in stimulating the learning capacity of members. This leads to the following success factors for networks at the level of the individual members.

1. *The **participating organisations have the capacity to learn** and to use the network for some purpose. They are able to apply the knowledge gained from network participation to their own work. This requires both the will and space to change work methods and try new things. The members also have a work culture that stimulates learning. The network supports learning processes within member organisations.*
2. *The network contributes to the **capacity building** of its members. This helps to deal with issues of power and inequality and ensures that members can get the most out of their participation in the network. The network also provides **room for discussion and reflection** upon actions.*
3. *Participants have **time** to engage in meaningful exchanges.*

6.4.2 Relationship between the member organisations and the network

Earlier we discussed the need for networks to add value to an existing field. This leads to the following factor in the relation between individual NGOs and their network.

4. *The network has a clear **added value** for the members. The members have a **need** for the network and participants are motivated to participate actively. The network does not exist in isolation but has sustainable links to activities carried out in reality.*

In 3.7 and 6.1 the importance of shared objectives and clarity about its aims and possibilities emerged, leading us to the next two points.

5. *There is a clear **purpose**; a shared mission by all parties involved. This has been translated into a clear set of objectives. Without a specific aim, interaction quickly becomes spurious. However, with a too narrowly defined objective, a community may not survive its own success. It may fall apart once the aim has been realized, without making sure that the accumulated insight is passed on.*

6. *From the outset, there is **clarity** about the limits and possibilities of the network. There has been sufficient discussion about what the network can do, and expectations are not unrealistic. Similarly, there is clarity about the process. Lines of communication and dissemination are clear and systematic, but flexible.*

6.4.3 Characteristics of the network

The organisational learning discussion, covered in chapter three, generates number of factors conducive to learning that can be applied to networks in the following way.

7. *The network is **flexible** and capable of responding to changes in the environment. The network is also flexible in that room is created for **self-organisation** – participants who link up can start all kinds of initiatives together.*
8. *There is an atmosphere of **safety** in which to express doubts and criticisms and manage uncertainties; in other words the network constitutes a safe setting for knowledge exchange.*

Also part of the organisational learning literature, but particularly significant for our area of study, are issues of trust, openness to different views, and cross-cultural sensitivity. These are needed to overcome some of the obstacles formulated in the previous chapters, such as discourse dominance, contested knowledge, competition, (conflict-related) mistrust, and cultural issues and gender.

9. *There is **trust** among the members and between participants and funders. Without the confidence that everyone is in it for the larger good there will be a tendency to withhold knowledge in order to strengthen one's position.*
10. *There is **openness to different points of view**, different values, and different interpretations of reality. The network's knowledge exchange function is not hampered by the constraints of a discourse coalition or hegemonic project. The network may engage in advocacy but its "common voice" does not prohibit the coexistence of different opinions. **Cultural issues** are recognised and discussed in the network.*

6.4.4 Governance, legitimacy and organisation of the network

Power relations and inequality also emerged in chapters four and five as particularly salient issues that can limit the success of knowledge sharing and networking activities. The way in which a network is governed, and specifically the extent to which all participants are accorded an equal say, can make a difference in mitigating such issues.

11. *The network is **democratic and inclusive**. It is not controlled by a single set of interests. Members may have unequal capacity and strength but they have an equal voice. Those who coordinate the network are accountable to the members.*
12. *The network strives to **mitigate power issues**. It has mechanisms in place that regulate conflict and prevent personal issues from taking the foreground. The stronger members have a genuine desire to contribute to open exchange and facilitate the capacity building of other members. They inevitably influence the network more strongly than weaker members do, but they do not impose their own views at the expense of openness and diversity.*
13. *The participating organisations have a sense of **ownership**. It is their process and not something that has been imposed by donors or governments.*

In section 6.1.2, the role of a coordinator or network secretariat emerged as a factor that influences the success of a network, as follows.

14. ***Facilitation and moderation:** sustaining networks requires considerable time, effort and resources. There should be at least one person who is enabled to spend time on the facilitation of the network. Some kind of secretariat needs to coordinate and organise the flows of knowledge, preventing information overload and scatter. It follows that funding is required. However, a network can also be overmoderated, if a moderator has a narrow view of the purpose of the group, takes decisions in an authoritarian way and stifles discussion rather than stimulating it. There is only a narrow space between channelling a discussion smoothly into a constructive direction and pressing people into a straightjacket which would exclude any spontaneous detours, exchanges or personal remarks. The role of the moderator is crucial, since all the other dimensions mentioned in this list depend on a moderator who assures that the group avoids the many possible pitfalls.*

In chapter five a potential obstacle to learning and knowledge sharing was found in the fact that knowledge – particularly knowledge about conflict and peace – changes rapidly. Strategies working today may not work in a few months' time, particularly given the dynamics of conflict situations. In order to deal with that problem, the following factor can be of importance.

15. *Knowledge sharing needs to occur **on a regular basis**, otherwise information provided may already be outdated. As explicit knowledge tends to change more slowly than tacit knowledge, **face-to-face interaction** is important for the exchange of the latest tacit knowledge.*

6.4.5 Coverage and inclusiveness of the network

In sections 3.7 and 6.1 I discussed the difficult issue of finding a balance between focus on the one hand, and diversity and inclusiveness on the other. This leads to the following three factors.

16. *The right **balance** has to be found between **inclusiveness** and diversity on the one hand, and **focus** and direction on the other. This goes for content as well as membership, as points 17 and 18 elaborate.*
17. ***Membership balance**: if only people with a similar background participate, opinions may not differ sufficiently to generate creative ideas. Moreover, if only a small fraction of the potential constituency participates, people will turn to other forums where these people do meet. On the other hand, by asking too many people with different backgrounds to join, communication could also falter. The reasons are that chances increase that individual contributions are beyond the interest of the majority of members; people hesitate to engage themselves because they do not see a common denominator which brings participants together; and there may be an information overload – unless the information is skilfully channelled into different subgroups and discussion threads.*

6.4.6 Content of the network

18. ***Content balance**: if the field of discussion is too narrow, it will not stimulate a broad enough flow of information and interaction may be less creative, since creative ideas often result*

from the combination of hitherto uncombined elements. In addition, a too narrow field would only attract the 'usual suspects' who already know each other fairly well; little cross-fertilization would take place. If the field is too broad, however, then the interaction remains too vague and becomes uninteresting for serious people, and it becomes very difficult to arrive at common products which bind the group together.

The importance for learning of exchanging both tacit and explicit knowledge emerges from chapters two and three, but also from the discussion on quickly changing knowledge in chapter five. It brings us to the following factor.

19. ***Tacit as well as explicit knowledge** is exchanged; the network brings people into contact with each other who can share experiences, but it also attempts to draw experiences together into codified knowledge that can be distributed more easily. A combination of face-to-face and online interaction is probably the best way to achieve this.*

Section 6.3 mentioned the importance for networks of having a clear aim. This is indeed something that is regularly mentioned by network members interviewed. Thus, there has to be some kind of result a network is working towards.

20. ***Results:** networks may generate 'common products'. These could be joint publications containing lessons learned or recommendations, joint projects or programmes, the organisation of an event, a broadening of the community, or the start of a new one in a different field or region. Many communities are created for the exchange of knowledge and experience per se. But there is always an implicit assumption that this exchange will lead to better results, if not through joint activity, then through the improved functioning of the individual participants who are enriched by the exchange.*

A final thing to remember with regard to content is that a network is different from an organisation. As we saw earlier in this chapter, ideally it should be a flexible and easily changing framework that stimulates individual initiative rather than prescribes action. This also goes for the content; the knowledge that is shared. To prevent the dominance of a particular discourse or interest, and be as open as possible to different perspectives, flexibility about content and exchange is important.

21. *The network does not strive to be an overall, comprehensive knowledge system, but aims to offer a **stimulating framework** that facilitates exchange and access to knowledge sources.*

6.4.7 Context of the network

Chapter four has shown that each peacebuilding initiative, including networks, functions within a structural context. Chapter five added to this by discussing how the social and political situation in conflict-affected countries influences the success of knowledge sharing initiatives. Thus, the context of a network is significant, and the way in which networks relate to this context matters for the way they function. This leads us to the following three factors.

22. ***Embeddedness:** any network should be linked in an appropriate way to a wider environment, to neighbouring communities, similar initiatives in other countries or regions. If this is not the case, a network remains isolated. Insights generated in similar networks might not be taken into account, resources will not be pooled, results cannot be compared, and ideas will remain less widespread. At the same time, the network should not be embedded to the extent that it cannot operate autonomously.*
23. *The network establishes **links with existing networks** in order to prevent duplication and maximise knowledge benefits.*
24. *The network operates in an **enabling context**. It is not obstructed by governments, conflict parties or other organisations. The basic infrastructure is present and there is some level of safety and security. The political environment fosters free speech and freedom of movement. If the context is not so enabling, creative ways are found to deal with constraints.*

6.4.8 Funding of the network

Section 5.6.1 showed how important it is to have resources available for knowledge activities – including networking – in order to enable NGOs to make time for, and give priority to, these activities. At the same time we in the back of our minds the discussion in chapter four of the constraints imposed by funding regimes. A combination of these issues leads us to the following characteristics of successful networks.

25. *The **funding structure** of the network has the following characteristics:*

- *There is sufficient funding for networking and knowledge sharing activities, even if the direct impact of these cannot always be shown.*
- *At the same time, the network is accountable financially.*
- *Donors do not impose particular kinds of knowledge or particular modes of knowledge exchange.*
- *The funding structure does not provide a position of power to one organisation at the funding interface, but ensures that the funds benefit the network as a whole.*
- *It does not enhance competition between members.*
- *Donors engage in knowledge exchange with the network, thus contributing to the knowledge processes inside it and linking it up to other networks.*
- *Donors take the knowledge generated in the network seriously and make use of it in their policy formulation as much as possible. This will increase the relevance of the network and give participants an incentive to continue contributing to it.*

Having abstracted the above success factors from the practice of civil society networking peace, it is time to return once more to the empirical reality and compare these factors with a concrete case of a peacebuilding network. In the next section, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) will be introduced, before being linked in section 6.6 to the factors formulated above in order to both apply and illustrate them.

6.5 Case study: the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)

The next two sections provide a case study of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). The network exists in fourteen West-African countries. The data presented here are based on information obtained during a visit to the regional headquarters of the network in Ghana for an interview with its director, and on an analysis of the member networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone by interviewing peace NGO staff members involved in them.³⁰²

³⁰² Out of the 24 WANEP members in Liberia, five were interviewed. This amounts to 20%. In addition, the coordinator of WANEP Liberia was interviewed, as well as four non-members who knew the network. Out of the 72 members of NCP-SL, the Sierra Leonean WANEP network, fourteen were interviewed, which also amounts to about 20%. In addition, the network coordinator

6.5.1 Foundation and development of WANEP³⁰³

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) was founded in 1998. The process that led to its foundation began in 1990, when the relatively peaceful state of the West-African region (not counting numerous *coups d'état*) ended with the outbreak of the conflict in Liberia. The Ghanaian Emmanuel Bombande worked with the Kenya-based NGO Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI-Africa) in East-Africa, through which he met the peace scholar John Paul Lederach, who in turn brought him into contact with Liberian peace activist Samuel Doe. Both Bombande and Doe went to do a Master programme at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in the United States. They struggled with the best ways to apply the concepts introduced there in their own region and had many conversations with the faculty of EMU about this. The idea to set up a West African peacebuilding organisation began to form. The EMU faculty helped Doe and Bombande to obtain a grant from the Winston Foundation that allowed them to conduct research in West Africa in order to test and form ideas about the best structure and nature of such an organisation.

At the time there were no organisations in the region that focused exclusively on peacebuilding. Many development organisations experienced a contradiction between their development work and the conflict, with development activities sometimes unintentionally leading to an escalation of conflicts. Latent issues emerged into violence as development interventions introduced new inequalities and envy. As a result, these organisations overwhelmingly recognised the need to deal with the conflicts more directly.

According to the director, the various countries in the region faced similar problems, creating a need for a common body. At the same time the region was also extremely diverse, calling for a loose organisational form that left room for diverging initiatives and ideas. Therefore the form of organisation chosen for WANEP was a network. A regional secretariat was created and based in Accra, Ghana. Next, the new regional secretariat moved to create national networks in fourteen countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. According to the director, in retrospect this top-down way of

was interviewed here as well, one non-member was interviewed, and a regional network meeting was attended in Kenema.

³⁰³ This section is based mainly on an interview with the director of WANEP. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

developing the network was the wrong way around and led to problems later on (see below).

The Winston Foundation provided another grant, and Cordaid gave three-year support. There was also some EU money granted. After the three-year fund ended, Cordaid gave bridging funds to enable WANEP to restructure and to draft a new three-year plan. In the meantime WANEP also applied for funding from other donors. However, an evaluation in 2003 brought problems to light between national networks and the regional secretariat. As the national networks had been created by the regional secretariat, they remained overly dependent on it. In response, it was decided that the national networks should become more autonomous, while they should continue to recognise the overall mission and values of WANEP and act within these. WANEP's regional staff have difficulty walking the thin line between national autonomy on the one hand, and stepping in when national networks do not act in accordance with WANEP's vision, potentially damaging its reputation, on the other. Some national networks are more dependent on the regional secretariat than others – financially, but also for creative input.

The 2003 evaluation also revealed a top-heavy structure in which the various regional bodies all consisted of representatives of the fourteen national networks. Instead, it was decided to create a professional (rather than representative) executive board. The professional board includes an organisational development expert, a gender expert, a financial administration expert, and two peacebuilding and conflict prevention experts. The annual regional meeting of country representatives nonetheless retained the ultimate decision-making power. The secretariat reports to the executive director, who reports to the professional board, which reports to the annual regional meeting. Each national network has a national board, the chairperson of which is represented in the annual regional meeting.

The restructuring period that followed the 2003 evaluation was a very difficult one in which power issues began to come to the fore and there was a lot of mistrust about the agendas of individuals. The two founders of WANEP found themselves in opposing positions (with Doe more willing to compromise and Bombande more principled). People's positions began to be more about which individual they supported rather than about content. Doe finally left.

6.5.2 WANEP objectives and activities³⁰⁴

WANEP's vision is "a West Africa region characterized by just and peaceful communities where the dignity of the human person is paramount and where the people can meet their basic human needs and decide their own direction." In terms of objectives, WANEP seeks to

- strengthen the capability of peacebuilding organisations and practitioners in West Africa to engage actively in the peaceful transformation of violent conflicts
- increase awareness on the use of non-violent strategies in responding to conflicts in West Africa.
- develop a conflict prevention network in West Africa to monitor, report and offer indigenous perspectives and understanding of conflicts in West Africa
- harmonise peacebuilding activities in West Africa through networking and coordination of WANEP members.
- create understanding of the impact of truth, justice, and reconciliation on peacebuilding in West Africa.
- build the capacity of West African Women to actively participate in peacebuilding processes at all levels.³⁰⁵

WANEP recognises that knowledge is needed to inform practice. The regional network uses the term 'cross-fertilisation of knowledge' between different actors that learn from each other's perspectives and experiences. Each of WANEP's programmes³⁰⁶ is supposed to promote such cross-fertilisation. The most common ways in which knowledge is shared within WANEP are, first, regular meetings of national representatives and second, workshops and seminars in the framework of the West Africa Peacebuilding Institute (WAPI). National network coordinators are regularly asked to propose people from within the national networks for participation in one of the WAPI workshops. WAPI's facilitators, who come from various countries, try to ensure that knowledge is exchanged in an interactive way. Concepts are continuously related to their practical relevance in the different contexts represented.

³⁰⁴ This section is based mainly on an interview with the director of WANEP. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

³⁰⁵ www.wanep.org. Accessed March 1st 2006.

³⁰⁶ Active Nonviolence and Peace Education; Capacity Building Program; Civil Society Policy and Advocacy Program; Justice Lens Programme; Women in Peacebuilding; Early Warning and Early Response; and West Africa Peacebuilding Institute. (Source: www.wanep.org. Accessed March 1st 2006)

Enhancing indigenous knowledge of conflict prevention is one of the priorities of WANEP. The Justice Lens Programme, which explores issues of justice versus truth and reconciliation, and aims to bring together human rights practitioners and peacebuilding workers, wants to help bridge the gap between traditional and modern solutions. National laws in West-Africa are often drawn up inspired by Western examples and do not necessarily reflect common values. The peacebuilding field may facilitate a dialogue between laws and common values. The now increasingly used concept of restorative justice is an outcome of such a process³⁰⁷.

Both content knowledge (characteristics of conflicts and ways to deal with them) and technical knowledge (related to ways of running an organisation) are exchanged within WANEP. The emphasis has shifted recently from the former to the latter. Increasing attention is paid to M&E mechanisms, for example. WANEP is now attempting to better retain and write down its stories. It is also starting up a research effort to map and document conflicts and create a database of narratives. This would provide baseline information for interventions. The director feels that WANEP has been successful in some areas in building local capacity – the number of facilitators has grown significantly. The Women in Peacebuilding (WIPNET) programme in particular has trained many trainers.

6.5.3 The national networks³⁰⁸

The national network coordinators report to the regional secretariat quarterly and have a voice in the annual general meeting. In their view important learning takes place in these meetings as experiences from the national networks are shared. The national network coordinators are responsible for informing their national network members of the knowledge gained at the regional level by feeding reports into meetings held at the national and district levels. The coordinators have a mixed opinion of the way WANEP as whole is functioning. On the one hand, the network is relatively well organised and communication is efficient. All national networks are enabled to give input into WANEP's strategic planning. The coordinators feel part owner of WANEP; their voice in the general meetings is heard and taken seriously. The national networks

³⁰⁷ Interview with the director of WANEP. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

³⁰⁸ This section is based mainly on interviews with the national WANEP coordinators in Liberia (Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006) and Sierra Leone (Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 February 2006). In addition, it uses information from interviews with various other WANEP members in those two countries.

have autonomy. It is also positive that they are asked regularly to propose members to be sent to training sessions. However, the national coordinators feel that WANEP needs to pay more attention to the capacity building and institutional development of the national networks. These can only start acquiring their own funds after their capacity has been developed. They need more money to run their office, afford vehicles, and pay staff. It is feared that WANEP might begin losing members if it does not provide more support in these areas.

WANEP Liberia aims to facilitate knowledge sharing and provide technical assistance to individual members, helping them with strategic planning and finding money. The network secretariat also provides expertise to international organisations, giving advice, organising workshops, and writing manuals. In addition it implements programmes of its own in the areas of peace education, the training of trainers, and early warning. Most of the members of WANEP Liberia are very critical of the fact that the network secretariat implements programmes; they feel that it should limit itself to supporting its members, rather than competing with them.

WANEP Liberia works on knowledge sharing through thematic workshops that bring together a number of members around a particular issue. Exchanges take place around content issues: what are we doing and how well are we doing it? What are the issues, and how can we best deal with them? The regular membership meetings of the network were valued for the things that were discussed. Because of a lack of funding, these meetings no longer occur frequently. Members also appreciated the newsletter and 'from the field' publication of the network; unfortunately these are no longer being produced due to a lack of funding. Little funding is coming from the regional network secretariat that wants the national network to become more autonomous and gather its own funds. But donors are proving hard to find except for individual programmes with clear and visible outcomes. At the time of the visit the network secretariat was financed mainly through income from consultancy work by the coordinator. Soon afterwards the coordinator became a deputy minister in the new Johnson Sirleaf government. It is not clear whether his successor has been able to generate a similar income.

The Sierra Leonean WANEP network is called Network on Collaborative Peacebuilding Sierra Leone (NCP-SL). NCP-SL does not implement programmes but serves purely to coordinate and facilitate the

members. It focuses on five thematic areas: capacity building; institutional development; research³⁰⁹ and advocacy; early warning and early response; and promoting learning and sharing. Until recently the knowledge exchanged in the Sierra Leonean network was mostly content knowledge, focusing on issues and strategies of peacebuilding. Recently a technical component (focusing on issues such as organisational management and M&E) has been added. Meetings are open and anyone can propose a topic for discussion. At the last annual meeting of the national network inadequate communication was identified as a major issue and during my visit in February 2006 NCP-SL was creating an e-mail group and a newsletter (to be called Peaceletter). It is also carrying out a 'Mapping the Field' exercise³¹⁰ to achieve more clarity about the aims and activities of the network and its members.

In 2004 and 2005 the network experienced severe leadership problems and was accused of mismanagement. Some board members wanted to use the network for their own purposes. There was disagreement in the board and some members resigned. It also became clear that intentions and expectations of members differed greatly. As a result, for several years the network was almost dormant. Recently, a new coordinator has taken office. He instituted a 'visioning process' in order to get everyone looking in the same direction again. The process created a new constitution and a five-year strategic plan. The constitution is to prevent board members from personal interference in the future. As a result the network is being reinvigorated. However, this new élan is only slowly taking root, particularly at the local level, and problems still persist. There is still a lack of funding for the running of the secretariat.

The frequency of network meetings varies. At the national level, there is an annual general meeting in addition to thematic workshops every few months (at least in Liberia). In addition, there are provincial network meetings. At the time of my visit to Kenema, Sierra Leone, the network members in that district met once every two weeks. The time spent by members on the networks varies as well. At one extreme, some attend most meetings, exchange knowledge outside of meetings, and participate in joint projects. At the other, some members are largely inactive.

³⁰⁹ At the time of my visit (February 2006) NCP-SL was working with one of its members to write a research proposal on the issue of chieftaincies that have been amalgamated into larger entities (the number of chieftaincies went down from 400 to 49), causing disgruntlement among some chiefs and providing a possible potential for renewed conflict.

³¹⁰ Every member is to fill in a questionnaire detailing its expectations of the network, its added value to the network, its activities and recent developments.

6.5.4 Challenges

The following challenges are identified by people involved in WANEP and its national networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

- At the regional level trust issues are beginning to be repaired, but it still takes a lot of effort to continuously make clear that positions and decisions are not personal but about issues. Avoiding internal conflict remains a priority.
- There is a tension between the maintenance of the regional mission and vision on the one hand, and the autonomy and local flavour of the national networks on the other. Some national network members have taken advantage of the network for their own benefit, forcing the regional secretariat to intervene (this happened in Nigeria). It is important to keep focusing on the issues in such situations, instead of on the people. There has been a lot of unclarity about the operating space of the national networks.
- WANEP invests in its staff and their knowledge. Unfortunately this means that they become quite sought after by other NGOs and sometimes leave for better-paid positions elsewhere.
- WANEP is sometimes seen by international NGOs to be acting as a gatekeeper, warding off contacts with its member organisations. The director emphasises that this is unjustified. It is merely trying to coordinate, optimise contacts, build on local capacity, and find opportunities for synergy.
- At the national level, important issues are the lack of funding and the diverging expectations of members. In addition, not every member is equally active, and there are also sleeping members. One board member of NCP-SL was recently removed because of his inaction. At a network meeting in Kenema, Sierra Leone in February 2006³¹¹ less than half of the members showed up.

6.6 Requirements for successful networking applied: the case of WANEP

In section 6.4 I formulated twenty-five factors that influence the successful functioning of knowledge networks. The following section uses these factors as a framework for analysing the information from

³¹¹ See Box 5.3

WANEP and its members in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as other stakeholders in those countries³¹².

6.6.1 Capacity of the member organisations

The capacity of peacebuilding NGOs in Liberia and Sierra Leone varies widely. A lack of funds plagues almost all of them. As we saw in 5.6.3, NGOs complain of a lack of knowledge in the areas of conflict transformation and the systematic analysis of conflict and there is little skilled manpower within organisations. The capacity building of members is an explicit aim of WANEP, WANEP Liberia, and NCP-SL alike. However, it is also an element that is much criticised by members, whose expectations are not being met in this area. In Liberia, the members are supposed to pay a registration fee of \$50 and an annual fee of \$100, but they have not been doing so recently because they feel WANEP Liberia has not kept its part of the deal: there was supposed to be a capacity building programme for members but no funds have been found for it. In both countries a lack of funds is given as the reason for the limited capacity building offered. The national network coordinators want more support from the regional secretariat. They argue that they cannot engage in capacity building of members until their own capacity, including the capacity to raise funds, has been built first. Although it is sometimes mentioned, a lack of time to participate in networking does not figure prominently on the list of challenges noted by member NGOs in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

6.6.2 Relationship between the member organisations and the network

Despite sometimes grave criticism almost all of the members of WANEP's national networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone saw some measure of added value in the network. This value was found mostly in exchanges of knowledge with other members. These exchanges were seen to have four main benefits for participating NGOs:

- Better knowledge of what others were doing, and where, was considered important. This allowed NGOs to avoid the duplication of activities, identify possibilities for cooperation and information exchange and see 'gaps': areas in which no one yet worked.

³¹² See note 302.

- Practical knowledge was exchanged, ranging from security updates to funding opportunities (although many members felt that the latter should be done much more).
- Exchanging content knowledge about peacebuilding strategies, and experiences with these, was found useful. “Learning from one another” was a phrase that was frequently used.
- Being a member of WANEP and other networks also gives weight to lobbying. Being a member of a network in which many different NGOs working in all regions of the country are represented brings common strength and credibility.

For the WANEP networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone, lack of clarity and disagreements about objectives have led to diverging expectations and dissatisfaction. Some members are not clear about their role as a member. Some are in it only as a way to get funds and have no interest in the objectives of the network. Through its ‘mapping the field’ exercise the Sierra Leonean network is trying to get these different expectations out in the open. The coordinator emphasises that people have to be clear and honest about what they are doing and must subscribe to the, jointly adopted, mission and vision of the network. One of the main issues of contention with regard to the aims and possibilities of the networks was whether they should engage in fundraising for its members. Many members expect this (quite a few interviewees mentioned access to funding as an important potential benefit and were disappointed that little had been forthcoming), but it is not an explicit aim of the networks. The new network coordinator organised a ‘visioning process’ in response to diverging expectations, aiming was to reach an agreement on the objectives of the network. Members formed working groups to formulate recommendations for a new constitution and work plan. All of the representatives present at the network meeting subsequently voted on these recommendations. However, not all members were equally involved in this process and diverging expectations still existed.

In Liberia there was also lack of clarity and disagreement about the role of the network. A few interviewees, including the coordinator, felt it should engage in the implementation of programmes itself, while most other interviewees emphasised it should limit itself to its function as coordinator and facilitator. WANEP Liberia does carry out programmes, and to most members interviewed this runs counter to its aims and brings it into competition with its own members. This dissatisfaction also relates to the way in which the network decides to take on an

activity: these decisions are often taken by the secretariat rather than the members.

6.6.3 Characteristics of the network

This section deals with the flexibility of the network, whether there is an atmosphere of safety and trust, and whether there is openness to different points of view. Regarding flexibility, the structures of the networks are relatively formalised (particularly in Sierra Leone) but this was also necessary to prevent abuse and deal with differences in understanding with regard to the aims of the network. Most interviewees consider the atmosphere in network meetings to be such that participants are not reluctant to raise critical points. Members tend to have an open mind to different points of view and values.

With regard to trust, the picture varies considerably. Some network members claim that trust within the network is high. Others feel that some members take advantage of the network by benefiting without contributing, or that organisations participate that should not because they are not really peacebuilding organisations. Many interviewees refer to competition among NGOs over scarce funds: this competition limits openness of members and their willingness to share information for fear of damaging one's competitive position. In response to this issue, WANEP's annual meeting came up with a rule that members should not duplicate programmes and that the network as a whole only adopts programmes that no one else can do on their own.³¹³ However, as we have seen, at least in Liberia this rule is not followed.

Some network members voiced their distrust of other members and their intentions. In both countries interviewees accused other members of being free-riders. It was noted, for example, that at a meeting of the Sierra Leonean network people suddenly began paying their subscriptions as it became clear that only paying members could vote and be elected into the board. In Sierra Leone, some members pretend to be organisations while they are really only one person. Similarly, in Liberia an NGO representative claimed that some members of the Liberian network were not necessarily real NGOs. These organisations were said to have bribed their way through the government accreditation process for NGOs. They are members only because they hope to gain access to funds and opportunities, and do not really care about the aims of the networks. It happened that after WANEP Liberia had rejected an

³¹³ Interview with director of WANEP. Accra, Ghana, 6 February 2006.

activity proposed by a donor because the funds allocated to it were insufficient, one of these organisations went to the donor and accepted the cheap job – going on to deliver poor results that are bad for the reputation of Liberia civil society as a whole.³¹⁴

There are also trust issues between the national network coordinators and secretariats on the one hand, and many of the members on the other. In Liberia members complain that the secretariat in effect competes with them by carrying out programmes of its own instead of facilitating and supporting the implementation of programmes by members. In Sierra Leone the national secretariat has not performed up to expectations in the past and now has to regain the trust of members. Some interviewees complained that some of the network's founding members, active and capable organisations, have been sidelined. They are never contacted when decisions are made. The board members who represent a particular region select provincial representatives for national meetings based mainly on who they happen to like. In Kenema the regional secretary resigned in protest.

Although not many interviewees mention this explicitly, it is likely that all of these issues of low trust and power play are partly related to the legacy of the conflicts in Sierra Leone in Liberia. These conflicts have eroded social capital and separated communities. The sudden availability post-conflict of large sums of donor funds for NGOs led to a rapid rise in the number of organisations and contributed to discussions about the lack of constituency of many NGOs³¹⁵ and about their intentions. Here as elsewhere, distrust more generally was mentioned as an important obstacle to successful networking.

Regarding the content of exchanges, the stronger organisations, which have more access to training and knowledge, have a large role in determining the knowledge flows inside the network and the positions adopted by the network as a whole. In terms of discourse, some interviewees recognise that terminology used and even issues emphasised depend to some extent on the training courses and materials available and on the discourse and priorities of donors. Indeed, many NGO staff interviewed have experienced that donor priorities rather than the needs in the field determine the activities that are carried out – and as a result, the issues that are discussed.

³¹⁴ Interview with director of a Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 8 February 2006.

³¹⁵ See 1.6.3.

6.6.4 Governance, legitimacy and organisation of the network

As far as their formal structure and regulations are concerned, the networks studied are democratic. In practice, however, some members raise questions about the accountability of the secretariats and boards. In Liberia the secretariat is criticised for starting programmes without consulting the members. In Sierra Leone there is some discussion about who decides which members get to go to national network meetings and training courses. At the district level existing regulations about the election of representatives are not always put into practice and there is discussion about the legitimacy of some people who are supposed to represent a particular region on the board of the network. Some members complain that there is not enough support to networking activities at the provincial level. The network has decentralised, but the structures put in place are not very clear. This also includes the criteria for the selection of representatives.

Because power issues have played a role in the Sierra Leonean network in the past, developing mechanisms that regulate conflict and prevent personal issues from taking over is a priority of the network at the moment, and a major aim of the 'revisioning process'. During this process the constitution was also revised in a participatory way. It remains to be seen in how far these changes will lead to changes in practice. At the level of the regions and districts, there is considerable lack of clarity about procedures and dissatisfaction with the representation of the region or district. It appears that the revisioning process has not yet thoroughly reached and engaged this level. This may simply be due to the early stage in which the process finds itself. In Liberia a 'revisioning' process would also be useful to bring to the fore the diverging expectations and different levels of satisfaction with the network, and to agree on the direction to be taken. Such a process might be easier in that country because the majority of peacebuilding NGOs is based in the capital.

The creation of the networks in Sierra Leone and Liberia has been more bottom-up than was the case in other West-African countries in which WANEP networks were created, though in both countries the regional WANEP network played a large role. Because one of WANEP's founders is a Liberian, he involved some of his colleagues from Liberian NGOs in the initial consultations that prepared the ground for WANEP. Afterwards, a Liberian information sharing group of four organisations was created. At some point these organisations saw the need to form an organisation and organised a retreat where it was decided to create a national network. At the retreat it was also decided to link the new

organisation to WANEP. NCP-SL was founded in 2001 at the initiative of WANEP and a number of Sierra Leonean peacebuilders. The number of peacebuilding NGOs was growing rapidly at that time and there was a need for coordination to avoid duplication of activities. The network started as a peacebuilding collaboration programme hosted by the Campaign for Good Governance. In May 2001 various stakeholders met and decided to make it into a network. It was decided to name the network Network for Collaborative Peacebuilding rather than WANEP Sierra Leone in order to emphasise the indigenous and bottom-up nature of the network. Nevertheless it became Sierra Leone's national network for WANEP and was endorsed by it. WANEP provided expertise in the early phases as well as some seed money to set up an office.

It might be expected that these relatively bottom-up processes have had consequences for the extent to which members feel they own the network. Indeed, most participants do appear to have a sense of ownership. When asked whether they feel responsible for the network and the way it develops most say that they do. Likewise, when asked whether they feel they are able to influence what happens in the network, most members answer positively. It should be noted that this self-image portrayed in the conversations seems in some cases to be at odds with the way in which criticisms are phrased, for example in terms of "they should" when talking about the network. Only few organisations actively contribute their expertise in order to build the capacity of the network secretariats, such as one Sierra Leonean member does in the area of financial management.

In more practical terms, each network has a national coordinator and a secretariat. However in both countries there is not enough money to pay these people. Overmoderation does not appear to be an issue; during meetings participants are able to jointly determine what issues should be discussed. However, between meetings there is hardly any information flow. This is due to low capacity of the secretariats but also to limited internet access on the part of some members. When networks run into difficulties, fewer meetings are organised and networks quickly become dormant. Low turnout at meetings is also mentioned as a issue. After meetings, there is little follow-up. During network meetings plans are made, but not enough attention is paid to their implementation. Some members of the Sierra Leonean network have withdrawn out of disappointment. They had not heard from the network in a long time and felt neglected. The secretariat is not sufficiently proactive in contacting members and communicating with them. However, it is aiming to change that. The secretariat is collecting the contact details of members. A newsletter is in the making.

Many interviewees emphasise the need for face-to-face meetings to share tacit knowledge. This is important because of the volatile and rapidly changing political situations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, the frequency of contacts varies depending on a number of factors, which are mentioned elsewhere in this section in more detail. They include limited access to internet, the condition of roads, and funding issues that sometimes prevent the regular organisation of meetings.

6.6.5 Coverage, inclusiveness and content of the network

Many network members in Liberia and Sierra Leone point towards the extreme variety among network participants in terms of their area of work and their size and capacity. This makes effective networking difficult. When it comes to differences in capacity most network members agree that, though this is problematic, it is precisely part of the aim of the networks to build the capacity of members and it is an obligation of the stronger members to work on the weaknesses of others. Regarding differences in the content of work, there is less agreement. Some participants are happy about the diversity because it means that there is more for them to learn; others are of the opinion that only peacebuilding organisations *pur sang* (and not NGOs whose main focus is on human rights, the reintegration of refugees, or social development) should participate in a peacebuilding network in order to keep the necessary focus.

As we have seen in chapter two, tacit knowledge tends to surface and develop only through direct and preferably face-to-face interaction. In the Western tradition of documenting knowledge, explicit knowledge is easier to come by than tacit knowledge. This is also related to the fact that knowledge tends to be taken more seriously when it has been subjected to scientific standards and written down. The situation is different in West African societies, which have no tradition of writing things down. They also have much less access to modern forms of knowledge dissemination. As a result, most knowledge exchange is verbal and face-to-face. Gaining access to tacit knowledge is not so much an issue here. By contrast, the need for more documentation of knowledge is increasingly recognised. Recorded and codified knowledge after all can spread more widely. Documentation can also help to convince donors of the reliability of local knowledge.

None of the networks studied come close to being an overall knowledge system – even if they wanted to be they would not be able. They aim much more at providing a stimulating framework for knowledge exchange and at supporting members in doing their work more effectively. Both at the regional and national levels the networks have shown some flexibility in adjusting their structures in order to better carry out their objectives. Issues of funding and capacity nevertheless limit the extent and speed with which these adjustments take effect, particularly at the national level.

With regard to the results of networking, diverging expectations play a role. Some members expect concrete outcomes in the form of, for example, funds raised and joint programmes. Others emphasise knowledge exchange. The networks tend to have quite ambitious aims that include the exchange of experiences but also advocacy and capacity building. The latter outcome – capacity building – is recognised by all involved as an important aim of the networks. Unfortunately, it is also identified by most as a shortcoming in practice.

6.6.6 Context of the network

Although the political context does not obstruct the functioning of the networks and the security situation in both countries is improving, practical issues relating to poverty and bad infrastructure play an important role in limiting the efficiency and effectiveness of the networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone. A lack of access to internet for many NGOs, expensive and intermittent energy supplies (which limit the use of computers), and bad roads and bad (or no) vehicles all severely constrain interactions within the network. Illiteracy is an issue when knowledge gained in the network is spread in constituencies. A regional network meeting attended in Kenema, Sierra Leone, showed how members deal with constraints: a hand-written invitation and agenda was copied and driven by motorbike to the members. Less than half of the members appeared, which may have been due to dissatisfaction with the networks but also to bad roads or a lack of transport.

In terms of links to other networks, the national networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone are of course linked to the wider WANEP network. However, this link is not as strong as might be expected. The average national network member does not gain as much from the link to WANEP as he or she would like. They hear about others participating in training in Accra and wonder on what basis those people have been

selected. Members do get briefed on materials and knowledge that has been developed by WANEP, for example on M&E. However, it appears that they are less involved in policy making at the regional level than they might be. For example, not many members at the national level have been involved in the development of a Regional Action Agenda as part of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), of which WANEP is a sub-network.

The networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone work actively to engage governments and other stakeholders in their country. NCP-SL, the Sierra Leonean network, regularly organises a National Peace and Development Forum with network members and government representatives from various ministries as well as UN staff. Each person present reports on his or her activities and a discussion takes place. The fact that the Liberian national network coordinator was recently appointed assistant minister in the government shows that the network is recognised and has links with the government. In Sierra Leone the government does not know where to start with the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and has invited civil society organisations to help. A TRC group will be visiting peacebuilding organisations to discuss the recommendations and collect suggestions for concrete action. In the meetings of the network, these visits are discussed and the report of the TRC is shared. These links to official institutions in both countries do not appear to jeopardise the independence of the networks or their members, or their ability to criticise governments.

Aside from the connection to the regional WANEP network, individual members also have links to other networks, ranging from networks created by donors to bring their partners together to local networks that focus on a specific issue. Both Liberia and Sierra Leone also have civil society forums that bring together NGOs in all fields. The national networks have informal links to these networks through members and in some cases also through the secretariat. Sometimes the secretariat is approached by an organisation or network and requested to provide expertise or consultation. For example, Amnesty International once needed information about the situation in particular Liberian counties, and asked WANEP Liberia for assistance. The network secretariat then put Amnesty into contact with a member actively engaged there.

6.6.7 Funding of the network

A lack of funding severely affects the networks. WANEP regional has been able to secure funds from donors, but the national networks have not had much success in that area. Reasons given for this are both low capacity for fundraising and limited willingness on the part of donors to finance networking and capacity building activities whose direct impact cannot be shown. The national networks recognise that they are too dependent on WANEP, but they criticise the strategy WANEP has adopted in making them more autonomous: in their eyes WANEP is reducing their funding without helping to build their capacity to raise other funds, thereby undermining the future of the national networks. According to some, WANEP is also not living up to promises it has made to support secretariat staff by paying their salaries and building their capacity, so that after some time they would be able to raise funds on their own for the network and its members. The salaries of the coordinators are often paid late and the other staff are not paid at all. Financial accountability is something that the networks are working to improve, but with no funds to pay a financial officer the results are limited as of yet. The members have little interest in meeting the financial commitments of being a network member. This is a serious constraint. Their contributions could provide at least some funding for the network to move forward.

To what extent do donors shape the networks? Based on the available information the donors do not appear to influence the mode and content of knowledge exchange strongly. What does have an impact on the relations within the networks is the provision of funding itself. As mentioned above, in Liberia the secretariat is seen by some to be abusing its legitimacy as a network to raise funding for the implementation of its own programmes, rather than raising funds to improve networking or to support members. On the other hand, the coordinator has also contributed income from his own consultancy work to the network. In Sierra Leone this issue is less prevalent, in part because the secretariat has not been able to raise many funds.

In both countries, the network secretariat is a separately created organisation. This prevents some of the problems that may arise when one member organisation is given the responsibility to function as coordinator, giving that organisation a position of power and access to funding that it may be tempted to take advantage of. Not too much is known about the extent to which interactions around knowledge take place with donors. However, one donor – Cordaid – makes a real effort to establish knowledge exchange with WANEP. It regularly invites the

director to its Dutch office for discussion, not only over accountability but also around policy. In November 2006, I attended a seminar on peace networking organised by Cordaid, in which the WANEP director also took part.

6.6.8 Concluding 6.6

WANEP and its national networks in Liberia and Sierra Leone have all experienced distressing difficulties relating to personal, trust and power issues. In the case of the network in Sierra Leone, these have raised accusations of mismanagement and led the network to be dormant for some time. In particular the regional network and the Sierra Leonean one have taken important steps to get past these problems. But other problems still exist. For example, the members of the networks vary extremely in their capacity and put forward diverging expectations with regard to their participation in the networks. A lack of funding available for networking activities, particularly at the national level, has been another major problem, due partly but not exclusively to limited willingness on the part of donors to fund networking because its impact cannot readily be measured. The limited capacity of the national secretariats to raise funds is another reason for the lack of funding. There is discussion about whether the regional WANEP secretariat should provide more support in building this capacity, as a prerequisite for the achievement of more autonomy of the national networks.

Despite the problems, nearly all members consider the networks to be of added value to their work because of the knowledge that is exchanged and the perception that peacebuilding NGOs are stronger together than they are alone.

The oral tradition prevalent in Africa combined with limited internet access means that knowledge exchange in the networks studied takes place mostly in face-to-face meetings. This means that tacit knowledge gets more of a chance to be shared. However, it also means that available knowledge is documented much less, thereby limiting the possibilities for its wider dissemination and for its serving as 'evidence' that could convince donors and other stakeholders of the validity of local knowledge.

6.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter continued the answering, begun in chapter five, of the following sub-question that was posed at the end of Part One: *What do the knowledge and learning processes of local peace NGOs look like, what are their strengths and weaknesses, and what are difficulties and gaps in their learning practice?* Where the previous chapter outlined the variety of ways in which Southern peace NGOs try to gain, retain, apply and share knowledge, and emphasised once again the importance attached to interaction and exchange in doing so, this chapter zoomed in on one such exchange strategy in particular: networking. Networks are widespread among peacebuilding organisations in Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, the Philippines, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Knowledge exchange is often not their only objective but is always part of their aims and is nearly always mentioned as one of their most important outcomes.

In terms of the strengths, weaknesses and difficulties of these networks, a number of factors determining these emerged in this chapter. These factors, listed in section 6.4, were derived from issues discussed throughout the book that have an impact on learning and exchange by NGOs. They were grouped into the following categories:

- the capacity of the member organisations
- the relationship between members and the network
- general characteristics of the network
- governance, legitimacy and organisation of the network
- coverage and inclusiveness of the network
- the content of the network
- the context of the network
- the funding structure of the network.

These factors were subsequently applied to a case study of the WANEP network in West Africa. Issues that emerged from that application as particularly significant are:

- personal, trust and power issues among the members of the network in a given locality
- the fact that members of the networks vary extremely in their capacity and put forward diverging expectations with regard to their participation in the networks
- a lack of funding available for networking activities, particularly at the national level, and the limited capacity of the network secretariats to raise funds.

Importantly, however, what also emerged was that most of the people involved in networking within the framework of WANEP feel they have gained from it, not least when it comes to access to the knowledge, ideas and experiences of others. This is confirmed by what participants in other networks in various parts of the world have said in their interviews with me. We may conclude that despite the difficulties and obstacles to successful networking and knowledge sharing, it is worthwhile to pursue these strategies, taking into account as much as possible the factors that influence the success of networking as networks are being shaped and re-shaped.

6.8 Concluding Part Two: Connecting structure and agency

At the end of Part One the following questions were raised.

1. What factors constrain and support the learning of Southern peace NGOs?
2. How do power differences, donor relations and North-South dynamic influence the knowledge that is used and the learning that takes place?
3. What do the knowledge and learning processes of local peace NGOs look like, what are their strengths and weaknesses, and what are difficulties and gaps in their learning practice?
4. Given the structural realities in which they operate, what initiatives are undertaken to improve the learning processes of local peace NGOs? What can we learn from these initiatives?
5. To what extent do these initiatives facilitate cross-cultural, 'third-order' learning?

Part Two dealt with all of these, although there is more to be said about the fourth and fifth questions. Because of that questions four and five are taken to Part Three as well, in order to allow more case studies to shed light on it.

In addressing all five questions, Part Two illuminated the issues that shape the knowledge and learning processes of Southern peace NGOs. More specifically, chapter four outlined the structural aspects – power differences, North-South inequality in terms of knowledge production and recognition, and donor-recipient relations – that constrain and shape the possibilities for learning and exchange available to Southern peace NGOs and limit cross-cultural, third-order learning. Chapters five and six focused on the agency of local peace NGOs in developing knowledge strategies as they navigate within this structural context.

Structure and agency are not disconnected. Not only does structure have an impact on agency, but the reverse is also possible. Although the concept of a structure implies a long-lasting context that is difficult to change, no structure is set in stone. What, then, are ways in which the agency of actors can be increased, and how can they use their agency to help change the structure and make it more conducive to learning and two-way exchange? Interaction with those institutions and individuals that help shape the structure – donor representatives, Northern policymakers, researchers, and people in authority in the (post)conflict countries themselves – is important in order to raise the issues Southern peacebuilders have when it comes to the current structure in which they operate. In these interactions the importance of trust-based, long-term partnerships, of untied funding, and of programming flexibility can be emphasised. Best practices of international partnerships conducive to Southern knowledge generation, learning and dissemination can be quoted.

Given the important (positive or negative) role of external support that emerged time and again in Part Two, a new question is raised: *How can international/external/Northern actors support the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs, thereby increasing their agency?* This question will be dealt with in Part Three. Before doing so, however, let us return to Figure 3.5 created at the end of Part One:

Figure 6.1: Knowledge flows in and around Southern peace NGOs³¹⁶

The chapters of Part Two help illuminate and develop this figure in the following ways. Chapter four added depth to this pattern of interactions in the form of inequalities among the actors. It shows that some of the actors – the Southern NGOs themselves but also other NGOs in their countries, beneficiaries, knowledge institutions in the South, and local and national governments in the South – are less able to insert knowledge and ideas than others – donor governments, international NGOs, and knowledge institutions in the North. The result is that the knowledge flows indicated by the blue dotted arrows are not all equally strong, nor do they flow equally in both directions. Schematically, this makes the figure look as follows.

³¹⁶ Copy of Figure 3.5.

Figure 6.2: Strength of different knowledge flows in and around Southern peace NGOs

The pink arrows represent flows this study has not looked at in detail, and although hypotheses may be made it is difficult to make any statements about them. The thick blue arrows depict knowledge flows that are indeed strong. The thin blue arrows indicate weak links – and this is where the structural issues become clear. To a large extent they relate to North-South inequalities, which are expressed in the weakness of Southern knowledge institutions and, most significantly for the Southern NGOs under study, in the donor-recipient regimes of which they are a part. In addition to North-South issues, the weak arrows also show the weaknesses (or absence) of interactions *within* the South. A notable finding in that regard – documented in both chapter four and five - has been the lack of knowledge exchange between Southern peacebuilding practitioners and Southern knowledge institutions.

Chapter five dealt mostly with the blue box: learning cycles within Southern NGOs. However, it showed that these processes cannot be

seen apart from flows that go outside of this Box. Interactions with people outside the organisation – other NGOs, beneficiaries, international actors – are central to the learning processes of Southern peace NGOs. Another thing that emerges from chapter five is that some parts of the learning cycle of peace NGOs in (post)conflict countries are stronger than others. The figure below illustrates this.

Figure 6.3: Reality of learning cycle in Southern peace NGOs

In this version of the central part of the figure that depicts the learning processes of Southern peace NGOs, the steps in the cycle that function relatively well have been made green. The pink-coloured steps do not function so well. NGOs are action-oriented and have difficulty finding time and money to reflect on the implications of their work and do research into their own work and into the situations of their beneficiaries. Thus, they are unable to produce generalised knowledge that could be disseminated to other organisations, knowledge institutions, and donor agencies, and thereby contribute to global debates and policymaking. To some extent Southern peace NGOs are able to gain new knowledge and to compare their experiences with others – often through training programmes and through networking with other NGOs, and the insights gained from those activities are applied into new programmes. But more in-depth reflection and theorising, as depicted in the pink arrows, are often lacking. Chapter three theorised that knowledge institutions could be helpful in facilitating these parts of the learning cycle, functioning as ‘scaffolds’ for deeper-level learning. However, as mentioned, little interaction between knowledge institutions and NGOs takes place in the countries visited. This raises the question, *How can knowledge institutions be better involved in supporting the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace NGOs*

working in (post)conflict countries – and the knowledge base of these countries as a whole?

Chapter six on networking dealt mainly with the box on the extreme left side of the picture: interaction with other SNGOs. Or should networks ideally facilitate not only exchange with other SNGOs, but instead bring in other actors, thereby facilitating all of the blue dotted arrows in Figure 3.5/6.1? Perhaps that can only be achieved by international networks, not by the national and regional ones chapter six looked at. That brings us to a new question: *How can global networks support the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace NGOs working in (post)conflict countries, thereby increasing their agency?*

Thus, we are left with five questions to be dealt with in Part Three:

1. Given the structural realities in which they operate, what initiatives are undertaken to improve the learning processes of local peace NGOs? What can we learn from these initiatives?
2. To what extent do these initiatives facilitate cross-cultural, 'third-order' learning?
3. How can international/external/Northern actors support the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs, thereby increasing their agency?
4. How can knowledge institutions be better involved in supporting the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace NGOs working in (post)conflict countries – and the knowledge base of these countries as a whole?
5. How can global networks support the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs, thereby increasing their agency?

**PART III. FACILITATING THE KNOWLEDGE
STRATEGIES OF SOUTHERN PEACE
NGOS: TWO CASE STUDIES**

Chapter 7. Running a global network

*The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict*³¹⁷

7.1 Introduction

In order to further illustrate the dynamics of knowledge processes in which staff members of local peace NGOs participate, and highlight in particular the role of global knowledge networks and other international, or external, initiatives that aim to support the learning of Southern peacebuilders, Part Three provides two case studies. The first case study, in this chapter, analyses a global network of peacebuilders, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. The second case study, in the next chapter, examines an international action learning Master programme that is offered to peace practitioners in several conflict-affected regions in the world: the Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) programme. The case studies show some of the dilemmas of global cooperation to support local learning in the peacebuilding field, in order to provide answers to the questions posed at the end of Part Two.

This chapter analyses a global civil society network of peacebuilding organisations. In doing so the chapter contributes further to answering the first and second question posed at the end of Part Two - *Given the structural realities in which they operate, what initiatives are undertaken to improve the learning processes of local peace NGOs? What can we learn from these initiatives? To what extent do they facilitate cross-cultural, 'third-order' learning?* An international network is one type of initiative undertaken by peace NGOs to facilitate learning and exchange and to deal with larger global issues and inequalities that single organisations cannot address. Thus, most directly this chapter sheds light on the fourth question: *How can global networks support the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs, thereby increasing their agency?* As the network described is facilitated by a Netherlands-based NGO, the chapter also sheds light on the third question - *How can international/external/Northern actors support the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs, thereby increasing their agency?*

In this section, I first introduce the network and the way it has developed in section 7.1.1, and then explain the approach that has been taken in

³¹⁷ In a different version, this chapter was published in Verkoren 2006b.

carrying out the case study reflected in this chapter in section 7.1.2. There, I will also outline the rest of the chapter.

7.1.1 The global partnership

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a worldwide network consisting of civil society organisations working in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It was initiated by the Netherlands-based organisation European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) in response to a call by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his *Report on Prevention of Armed Conflict* (Annan 2001) in which he urged “NGOs with an interest in conflict prevention to organise an international conference of local, national and international NGOs on their role in conflict prevention and future interaction with the United Nations in this field.”

Annan supported the ensuing proposal of ECCP for the formation of a Global Partnership which would work towards a common action agenda and a global civil society conference on conflict prevention. In a letter written in 2002 the Secretary-General stated that

“I support wholeheartedly your initiative to organize regional preparatory meetings leading to an international conference of local, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the area of conflict prevention [...] Your initiative is a timely and important contribution to engaging civil society in the task of developing a culture of prevention in the international community.”
(Annan 2002)

The Global Partnership was organised into fifteen regional networks, each with a Regional Initiator or lead organisation, also called Regional Secretariat, steering the regional process of network-building. The global process is led by the International Steering Group (ISG), composed of Regional Initiators, a number of representatives of international NGOs and the GPPAC International Secretariat. The ISG meets twice a year. From its midst an Executive Committee has been selected which deals with the governance of the network in between meetings. ECCP acts as the International Secretariat of the Global partnership. The Regional Initiators brought together conflict prevention and peacebuilding organisations in their regions and formed Regional Steering Groups (RSGs) with representatives from the various countries. Each region went on to organise a conference with civil society representatives and, in most cases, government actors. These

conferences formulated Regional Action Agendas, which in turn served as the foundation for GPPAC's Global Action Agenda of 2005.

The Global Action Agenda focuses on promoting human security and making a shift from reaction to prevention through effective partnerships, with guiding principles and values that should be at the core of practice. It gives recommendations for addressing the conditions that give rise to violent conflict and for systems and practices to respond to it more effectively if it emerges. The Global Action Agenda concludes with suggestions for specific mechanisms, activities and resources needed to enhance the capacities of civil society organisations (CSOs)³¹⁸, governments, the UN and regional organisations to pursue prevention and build more just and peaceful societies. The Global Action Agenda served as an input for the Global Conference on the Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict which took place at UN Headquarters in New York from 19 to 21 July 2005, in response to the initial call made by Kofi Annan in 2001. The conference brought together over 900 people from 118 countries to launch an international civil society movement to prevent armed conflict. It was a remarkable achievement and sent an important signal, even though participation by UN representatives was much more limited than had been hoped.

The global conference and the process leading up to it gave many CSOs around the world an important boost; it was inspiring and valuable to be part of such a joint process through which CSOs hoped to be able to make a lasting impact on global policy and practice. CSO staff also gained useful contacts and knowledge about conflict prevention and the work of others in the field. However, after the global conference many people were left with a feeling of 'now what?'. ECCP had managed to raise funds from many different sources for the process leading up to the conference, but these were beginning to run out. People felt it was time to begin implementing the Action Agendas, but were not sure where to start and how to find the necessary funds. Six months after the conference, many people involved felt that the momentum that had been so strongly felt in the run-up to the global conference had been lost. Since then, the Global Partnership has taken important steps, most notably with the development of regional and global work plans. Engagement with the UN has continued, and on behalf of GPPAC ECCP has been involved in activities such as the process around the creation and implementation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission. Despite these steps, there is a sense within the network that it needs

³¹⁸ GPPAC uses the term CSOs rather than NGOs to make clear that its membership covers a broader range of organisational types. See section 1.1 of this study for an elaboration of both terms.

further strengthening in order for it to be able to start implementing the plans and making a real contribution to the prevention of armed conflicts worldwide.

7.1.2 The network strengthening review

It was felt within GPPAC that the needed process of network strengthening would include activities like building the capacities of the Global Partnership and its regional networks to raise funds, create a better structure, increase skills and knowledge of networking, lobby and advocacy, document work, exchange experience and gain muscle for civil society through joint action and coordination. In order to establish a base-line for this strengthening process and gather the views of network members about the needs and priorities for that process, GPPAC's ISG and International Secretariat (hosted by ECCP) commissioned a 'network strengthening review' of GPPAC and its regional networks, which I carried out. This chapter reflects the findings of this review. It was carried out through a combination of surveys, interviews, discussions, and a literature study. The review aimed:

- to collect and share lessons learned and best practices on network strengthening
- to gather views about the state of the global and regional GPPAC networks
- to gather views about the best ways to strengthen the global and regional GPPAC networks
- in a participatory way, to arrive at recommendations to strengthen the global network and the regional networks
- to improve the structure and transparency of the Global Partnership, and the legitimacy of its representation
- to improve networking within the Global Partnership
- to improve the support of International Secretariat to the regional networks.

The review was carried out through a combination of a survey sent to people involved in GPPAC around the world, a literature study, and a number of case studies of regional GPPAC networks. The network strengthening review consisted of five main elements:

1. a compilation of relevant theory on networking and of information on the functioning of other networks³¹⁹

³¹⁹ Most of the findings of that literature study have been integrated into the previous chapter (chapter six) on networking. Combined with general networking lessons formulated by people interviewed and surveyed for the PhD research and the GPPAC review, they led to the formulation

2. conversations with the staff of ECCP (the International Secretariat)
3. a survey sent to all people and organisations involved directly or indirectly in GPPAC worldwide
4. case studies of four regional GPPAC networks
5. collecting ideas during networking seminar

A number of members of the ISG participated in the development of the network strengthening review's terms of reference, planning, and questionnaires during and after the ISG meeting in Nairobi in March 2006. In addition, a wide discussion on an interim version of this paper took place during a seminar on networking that was organised by the International Secretariat of GPPAC. In this seminar, all members of the International Steering Group plus about twenty other experts participated.

A written survey was developed in close consultation with the International Secretariat, in two versions: version A for people directly involved in GPPAC, and version B for people indirectly involved. It was sent to 623 people around the world. 199 surveys were returned. The minimum response of 25% was achieved for most regions³²⁰. The statistics for each region are depicted in Annex 1. Excerpts from the global survey report have been included in Annex 2. The complete global survey report can be found in the network review report produced for ECCP (Verkoren 2006b).

In addition to the global survey, case studies of four regional GPPAC networks were undertaken³²¹. The case studies consisted of interviews held during visits to Central and East Africa, West Africa, Southeast

of a number of factors that influence the success of networking in section 6.4. These factors were taken as the starting point for the organisation of the findings in this chapter.

³²⁰ Two regions did not meet the threshold of 25 per cent of the surveys returned: Southeast Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. In Southeast Asia 24 per cent of the surveys were returned, which is very close to the threshold. In addition, 29 people were interviewed in this region as part of the case study. In Latin America and the Caribbean only two out of 87 surveys were returned. These two surveys cannot be assumed to be representative of the larger population of GPPAC members in this region. However, other information about the regional network has been consulted, notably the preliminary report of an evaluation that was carried out on behalf of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of a programme of the organisation Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES), the GPPAC Regional Initiator for Latin America and the Caribbean. The evaluated programme, "The Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed and/or Violent Conflict in Latin America and the Caribbean", is essentially GPPAC Latin America and the Caribbean.

³²¹ These were selected by the ISG and International Secretariat, using the following criteria: regional spread; the need to include both longer-established and newly created networks; and criterion that the regional and national initiators in the regions selected had to be willing to assist in receiving researchers and in finding and guiding local researchers.

Asia, and Central Asia³²². In the case of Central and East Africa, the results of an earlier evaluation, which I had also carried out³²³, were used and complemented by a telephone interview with the regional initiator. In West Africa and Southeast Asia, the case study research for the GPPAC review was combined with research visits for the PhD more generally. Only in the case of Central Asia a separate trip was undertaken especially for the GPPAC review. As part of each case study, two countries per region were visited, one being the country in which the regional initiator is based. Interviews were held with the regional initiators, regional steering group members in two countries, and others directly or indirectly involved in GPPAC.

This chapter presents the main findings of the survey and of the conversations held with people involved in the network. Section 7.2 discusses the main functions of GPPAC, as seen by its member organisations. From the next section onwards, the findings of the review are related to the success factors that were introduced in chapter six (section 6.4). 7.3 starts by looking at the characteristics of GPPAC members, such as their organisational capacity and the time and priority they are able to give to the network. In connection to this, 7.4 looks at the way the members relate to the Global Partnership. This includes the extent to which they are committed to it and the added value which the network brings to them. Moving on to the network itself, 7.5 addresses a number of characteristics that affect its functioning, including its flexibility, the level of trust among its members, and its openness to different points of view. 7.6 zooms in on the structure and governance of GPPAC, while the content of the network – the knowledge that is exchanged within it – is discussed in 7.7. In 7.8, the chapter discusses the relationship of GPPAC to its context – to the social and political reality in the regions, for example, and to other organisations and networks in the field. 7.9 addresses the issue of monitoring and evaluation. 7.10 discusses the general implications of the case study for peace networking by NGOs and for the questions around which this study revolves.

³²² Initially, two other regions were selected: Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East and North Africa. Unfortunately, the Middle East and North Africa case study had to be cancelled due to the war breaking out in Lebanon and Israel. The Latin America and the Caribbean case study, which was to be carried out by a local researcher, remained incomplete.

³²³ As part of an evaluation of the Dutch Thematic Co-financing (TMF) scheme for the peacebuilding theme, ECCP, the organisation that initiated GPPAC and hosts its secretariat, was evaluated. As part of this evaluation a visit to Kenya was undertaken by the author to interview members of the GPPAC network in Central and East Africa.

7.2 Functions of GPPAC

GPPAC's main functions as drafted by the ISG are:

1. *Promoting Acceptance of Conflict Prevention*: GPPAC supports regional efforts to raise awareness regarding the effectiveness of conflict prevention, and undertakes parallel efforts at the global level.
2. *Mobilising Civil Society Early Response Actions to Prevent Conflict*: GPPAC supports civil society organisations in developing their capacity to contribute to early warning systems and to intervene effectively in impending crises/conflicts. In response to regional requests, the global network will seek to a) mobilise coordinated civil society responses, based on early warning of impending conflict escalation; and b) pressure governments, regional organisations, and the UN system to respond to early warning information.
3. *Promoting Policies and Structures for Conflict Prevention*: GPPAC generates ideas for improving policies, structures and practices of interaction among civil society organisations, governments, regional organisations, and UN agencies for joint action for conflict prevention.
4. *Building National and Regional Capacity for Prevention*: GPPAC strives to enhance the capacity of its regional networks and global mechanisms to undertake collective actions to prevent violent conflict.
5. *Generating and Disseminating Knowledge*: GPPAC engages in processes of knowledge generation and exchange, by learning from the experience of regions and developing mechanisms for regular communication/exchange of such information. GPPAC activities aim to improve our mutual understanding regarding important methodologies and mechanisms for action. (GPPAC 2006a)

Although all five functions have a clear knowledge component, the last two in particular aim to “support the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace NGOs working in (post)conflict countries”, as one of the research questions with which I started this chapter puts it. During the review, the members of GPPAC in the regions were also asked what the main functions of GPPAC were from their perspective. Survey respondents and interviewees from all regions emphasised that generating and disseminating knowledge constitutes an important function of the network. This includes doing research, gathering other research and information, and disseminating research results and working methods. Respondents said the network should provide its

members with access to experts and expertise, but also facilitate the building of expertise within the members and network, and help bring out the knowledge and experience that exists within the network. In the interviews, various people mentioned that helping members build expertise and wider capacities include helping them gain access to funds and training opportunities. The network may facilitate the linking up of this expertise with policy formulation by donor agencies and international organisations. Related to this, an important function of the network according to its members is to facilitate the exchange of experiences among network members. Such experiences may include lessons learned and best practices. Other participants may learn from the successes and mistakes of colleagues and be inspired by the stories of others.

Another common response across the GPPAC regions was that the Global Partnership and its regional networks should go beyond knowledge sharing and generation alone and engage in collaboration around concrete, joint activities. Collaborative activities varied and suggestions ranged from joint grassroots peacebuilding projects to joint high-level advocacy campaigns and lobby. Given the global reach of the network, the latter are deemed particularly important. Nearly all members consulted during the review felt the network should, in addition to knowledge sharing, focus on high-level engagement to change the framework for conflict prevention and peacebuilding and to make the voice of local civil society heard. The work with the UN (see Box 7.1) is considered particularly relevant. It is also important to link these high-level processes to actors and development at the regional, national and local levels.

Box 7.1: GPPAC and the UN Peacebuilding Commission³²⁴

In discussions of the ISG the UN Peacebuilding Commission emerged as an important issue on which to focus GPPAC's lobby. One aim is to monitor the start of the commission and its support office. The ISG decided to focus on the link between the UN headquarters and the field, and on the involvement of civil society. Furthermore, GPPAC sees it as a task to develop proposals and updates on situations in countries relevant for the commission and its support office. ECCP, as the international secretariat for GPPAC, plays an active role in coordinating these processes, in the following ways. It has developed a plan together with the World Federalist Movement to conduct several monitoring activities, produce briefing papers and organise seminars. The first seminar took place in July 2006 in New York. The focus of this seminar was on the Peacebuilding Commission's country-specific working groups and ways to promote their interaction with civil society. Also, the World Federalist Movement has developed, together with New York-based NGOs, a synopsis with recommendations for

³²⁴ <http://www.gppac.org>. Accessed various times in 2006.

civil society engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission. This input is currently being discussed with people involved in the Commission.

Parallel to this effort in New York, GPPAC's regional partners are engaged in setting up meetings with key civil society actors in countries selected by the Peacebuilding Commission (Burundi, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Timor-Leste). The aims of these meetings are to discuss recommendations from civil society to the Peacebuilding Commission, and deliver structured input. In Brussels, GPPAC co-organised a seminar with the British NGO SaferWorld in July 2006 on the EU's contribution to the Peacebuilding Commission. A larger meeting was held in September 2006, involving representatives from the countries selected by the Commission.

7.3 Capacity of the member organisations

In the previous chapter a number of issues were identified that influence the success of networking. With regard to the member organisations these included their organisational capacity, the time they are able to spend on the network, and the extent to which they are linked to domestic constituencies. This section looks at the role these issues play in GPPAC.

7.3.1 Capacity of members and capacity building

Three quarters of the respondents to the survey indicate that they have sufficient capacity to participate meaningfully in the network and to use the results of networking. As evidence they quote having knowledge of and experience with conflict prevention, having the same aim as GPPAC, having experience with networking, and being a network organisation or in some other way being able to mobilise other organisations. Nonetheless, the capacity of participating organisations in GPPAC is a challenge, particularly at the national level. Among the regional networks, the disparity in capacity levels is extreme: "in Latin America, [civil society] can topple governments, while in Uzbekistan, authoritarian regimes more or less stamped out independent activism" (Matveeva and Van der Veen 2005, 8). There is also much variety *within* regional networks. It is a difficult endeavour to try and bridge the gap between strong and weak network members. Many local peacebuilding organisations have little funding and little trained staff. Some organisations have only just picked up the theme of peacebuilding. Lack of infrastructure (roads, transportation, internet, electricity, high office rents) also represents an obstacle in many places. High staff turnover (see 5.1) is another issue that makes networking difficult, as it jeopardises organisational memory of the member NGOs

as well as continuity in networking and relationship building among the people participating in network exchanges.

The Regional Secretariats tend to be strong regional players – which is why they were selected. Nonetheless, they struggle to deal with the demands that come with their position at the interface of the global and regional networks. They tend to have too little time and resources to give the coordination of the networks the attention it requires. Both national-level members and the International Secretariat at the global level complain that they receive too few inputs from the regional level. The International Secretariat (ECCP) itself also has limited capacity in terms of staff hours, experience, and resources. ECCP staff say that they find themselves unable to give the regional networks the support they need. The ambitious plans developed by GPPAC at the various levels do not always take sufficient notice of the limits of the capacity of the networks and their members at all levels. A member of the International Secretariat noted that while ECCP and GPPAC advocate a larger role for civil society, CSOs cannot always deliver due to low capacity. “A sober analysis of strengths and weaknesses may be a more effective advocacy tool than an uncritical belief” (Matveeva and Van der Veen 2005: 9).

Another element of organisational capacity is the capacity to learn – including the capacity for research, reflection, monitoring and documentation. Given GPPAC’s focus on knowledge generation, the documentation of knowledge existing within the network (mostly in the form of stories of successful civil society peacebuilding activities) takes place. This is done mainly by ECCP and has resulted in a number of publications. Promoting learning and research skills among the membership and helping members develop M&E procedures receive less priority. Some of the stronger organisations in GPPAC have done quite a bit of work on M&E in connection to learning³²⁵, while the weaker network members have usually not progressed very far in developing such mechanisms beyond the donor accounting formats they have to fill out.

As a result of the low capacity of many members, strengthening these organisations has emerged as a priority area for GPPAC. As additional capacity needed for organisations to be able to contribute to the network and optimally benefit from it, respondents to the survey as well as case study interviewees most often mentioned training programmes in conflict prevention and peacebuilding methodologies. Expertise and

³²⁵ A notable example is NPI-Africa, the organisation acting as the GPPAC Regional Secretariat for Central and East Africa. See 5.4 for some of the procedures they have developed.

methodologies are needed not only when it comes to conflict prevention but also with regard to practical working skills, such as documentation, proposal writing, fundraising, ICT, staff development, and M&E. In addition to skills and knowledge, many organisations say they need financial support, partly in order to be able to travel to network meetings. Due largely to a lack of funding, in most regions GPPAC is not yet providing structural capacity building support. The West African GPPAC network (WANEP) offers training programmes for national and local CSO staff, but this is an exception. However, GPPAC has contributed to the capacity of its members by providing room for discussion and reflection upon actions. The GPPAC conferences tend to be evaluated positively as opportunities for reflection and exchange.

7.3.2 Time for networking

In order for processes of reflection and exchange to be possible and fruitful, participants need to have time to engage in meaningful exchanges. In line with the general findings of this book, many staff of CSOs involved in GPPAC say they do not have a lot of time to participate in networks. There are some organisations that see networking as part of the toolkit that helps their organisation achieve its mission. For them, GPPAC is not an ‘extra’ activity. Some interviewees emphasise that not only the members themselves, but also their donors need to be convinced to make networking a central activity so that it is not done in extra time, or eats up the overhead budget, but is part of donor grants. For CSOs and donors to prioritise networking and make it part of regular work, they also need to be convinced of its (potential) benefits. As can be read in other sections of this chapter, this is an area in which some work is still needed. Many participants do not yet see concrete benefits and call for more concrete activities. They do not yet ‘own’ the objectives and strategies of the network and feel that more focus is required.

7.3.3 Constituencies

The issue of the limited constituencies of some NGOs (see 1.6.3) also rears its head inside GPPAC, leading one survey respondent to write that “GPPAC is personality-centred rather than socially or politically oriented” (GPPAC 2006c). However, it is also emphasised that in many places the members provide links to various constituencies, including chieftaincy, religious leaders, youth, women, human rights organisations, and the media. More specifically, one may ask about the

extent to which the membership of a network is representative of civil society in the regions in which it operates. During the review many stakeholders raised the issue that GPPAC is not sufficiently linked to the grassroots in the regions. In many regions the network remains limited to a narrow circle around the Regional Initiator. According to International Secretariat staff, there is a tendency among Regional Initiators to protect their position (although it should also be said that in many cases the Regional Initiators are the only organisation around able to carry out such a task). The limited time and resources the Regional Initiators have to spend on the network also play a role, as do personal relations. A lot depends simply on who is available and happens to have heard of GPPAC. In addition, in countries where conditions are particularly difficult it has been hard for GPPAC to find and involve new members.

Another issue is that in many member organisations one person (often the director) is involved in GPPAC, rather than the organisation as a whole. Membership is thus not necessarily carried by the whole institution. This became clear during my visit to Cambodia in May 2006. Two Cambodian people participated in GPPAC on behalf of their organisations, which they later left to work elsewhere. When the organisations in question were visited as part of the review, it became clear that their current management had no knowledge of GPPAC at all, even though their organisations were on a list of Cambodian GPPAC members.

7.4 Added value and aims

7.4.1 Added value

Nearly all the people involved in GPPAC see a need for a global and regional civil society network focusing on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The main reasons they mention include that civil society organisations are stronger together than when they act alone. The conflicts they face cannot be dealt with as individual CSOs. Many conflict issues cross borders. Conflict in one place can have a negative impact on the stability of the region or even the world. As a result, a united, international response is needed, and respondents hope a global network of peace organisations may help facilitate this. Participants hope that the network will unite the strengths of organisations engaging in conflict prevention and increase the voice of civil society as a whole. The latter is needed to bring the issues of participants to the attention of global actors and to achieve successful advocacy and lobby. A large

coalition of CSOs has a stronger position vis-à-vis governments and international organisations. Stakeholders also identify a need for a platform in which to share experiences and learn from others. A network may generate ideas, exchange information and educate people in peace building. It may bring people into contact with each other who could form important partnerships, as is illustrated in Box 7.2 about the Departments of Peace initiative. In addition, a network like GPPAC might help coordinate between the activities of CSOs and facilitate joint projects.

Box 7.2: Departments of Peace initiative and GPPAC³²⁶

Organisations in the US, the United Kingdom, and Canada started initiatives to have Departments of Peace or Ministries for Peace established that would function alongside existing government Departments. These Departments would operate in the realm of foreign affairs as well as at home. Their work abroad would include monitoring the world scene for signs of conflict and taking pre-emptive measures as appropriate in partnership with other nations and world bodies, helping with the non-violent resolution of conflicts that exist, and assisting with rehabilitation and reconciliation work after the cessation of conflicts. Their work at home would involve fostering a culture of peace at all levels of the community by transforming conflict in the home, the workplace, the school, and in all aspects of government.

In October 2005 three organisations, the US Peace Alliance, the Canadian Federal Working Group for a Department of Peace, and the UK ministry for peace, organised the first People's Summit for Departments of Peace in London. This was done to share information and experience within existing groups and also to begin working with those considering setting up similar initiatives in other countries. Forty people from twelve countries attended the two day Summit. These countries were Australia, Canada, Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories, Italy, Japan, Spain, the Netherlands, Romania, the United Kingdom, Jordan, and the United States.

As ECCP - the GPPAC International Secretariat – heard about the initiative, it came up with the idea to bring in the expertise and perspective of Departments of Peace that already exist in postconflict countries such as Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Costa Rica, and Liberia. Through the Global Partnership ECCP was able to put the initiators of the Departments of Peace project in touch with relevant people from the countries mentioned. As a result representatives of the existing Departments of Peace attended an international conference on the initiative. ECCP will do research to find out what other similar government departments exist in the world and hopes that a government level network can be created.

By way of illustration, Box 7.3 describes the potential relevance of GPPAC as seen in Central Asia. Similar points were mentioned in other regions as well.

³²⁶ Interview with staff members of ECCP. The Hague, Netherlands, 18 July 2006.

Box 7.3: Relevance of GPPAC for the Central Asian region³²⁷

Political situation:

- Governments do not act in many instances of local conflicts; NGOs need to act.
- Because of the difficult circumstances for civil society in the region we need international partners.
- Our voice becomes louder if we speak on behalf of a hundred or even a thousand NGOs, making it more likely that our lobby and advocacy efforts are successful.
- Uzbek interviewees emphasised that GPPAC is potentially important for them because “it is connected to the UN institutions”. The UN is respected by the Uzbek government, which does not consider UN agencies to be spies or traitors – as it does other international organisations. GPPAC may get the UN in Uzbekistan to help convince the government that CSOs are important and necessary partners.

Unite strengths and work jointly:

- Central Asian NGOs did not have a culture of cooperating with each other (and with government). Now, thanks to GPPAC, they are thinking more in terms of partnership. People begin to see more possibilities for complementarity and cooperation. The Regional Initiator has begun to use the idea of partnership also in other programmes.
- GPPAC may unite the strengths and resources of the organisations involved and help them to engage in conflict prevention activities in a coordinated or joint way. Now, there is much duplication of activities.
- GPPAC may enable CSOs to jointly address common issues. Globally as well as regionally, conflicts are interrelated and therefore require a joint response. Not only do Central Asian CSOs face similar issues, they also face some of the same issues. Cross-border problems in Central Asia include the conflicts in the Ferghana Valley and religious radicalism.
- A network could decrease competition between NGOs.

Extend reach:

- Because GPPAC is relatively high level it can increase the reach of grassroots networks like Dolina Mira in the Ferghana Valley and help improve their quality.
- A global network may broaden the horizon of CSOs and make their problems known to more people. Interviewees emphasise that is important to get their voices heard, their issues recognised, and their lessons learned by others. They feel they have gained some valuable experiences, for example in the Tajik peace process, that others might benefit from.

Access to knowledge:

- GPPAC may provide access to knowledge and ideas. It could facilitate the generation of new ideas, the exchange of knowledge and contacts, help CSOs keep each other informed about our conflicts, and help them educate themselves in peacebuilding. Networks provide the possibility to combine grassroots experience and knowledge of local conditions on the one hand, and a range of knowledge, information and other resources of global scope. The

³²⁷ Interviews in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, 23-29 July 2006.

exchange of experience could also mean that strong CSOs support weaker ones in their development.

The extent to which GPPAC actually meets the needs identified in this section, and thus provides the added value it potentially could, varies according to the perspective of the respondent. Overall it can be said that potential of GPPAC to fulfil these needs has been met partly. To the extent that people have gained from the network so far, it tends to be in the area of knowledge sharing. Strikingly, this was the case for each of the regions. For those who feel they have benefited from GPPAC, this has been through access to knowledge and expertise in the field, and the opportunity to exchange experiences with others. In addition, participants have gained contacts and partnerships with others in the field. It is important to know who is doing what and to identify opportunities for cooperation; GPPAC has begun to make this possible. Many people³²⁸, also across regions, add that their membership of GPPAC raises the visibility and legitimacy of their organisations. Particularly in Southeast Asia and Central Asia, members noted that the regional and global networks provide a sense of solidarity and moral support. It is also noted that at the global level, GPPAC has been lobbying to gain recognition for the paradigm of conflict prevention and the role of civil society in this. This has yielded some results (see Box 7.4). Particularly the fact that GPPAC is working to engage the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (UN PBC) and other UN bodies is considered important by the people who participated in the review.

Box 7.4: Lobby and advocacy achievements at the global level³²⁹

- A Group of Friends on Conflict Prevention was created through intensive lobbying by ECCP. The group consists of 31 states. It produced an input paper for the Millennium +5 Summit at the UN.
- The July 2005 global GPPAC conference at UN headquarters brought together over 900 people from 118 countries to launch an international civil society movement to prevent armed conflict. This was a remarkable achievement and sent an important signal.
- Making use of the global network, ECCP has contributed to the Departments of Peace initiative that aims to establish peace ministries in the governments of various countries. See Box 7.2 above.
- On behalf of GPPAC, ECCP has been closely involved in the development of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, successfully lobbying for the inclusion of civil society representatives. See Box 7.1 above.

³²⁸ 19% of the respondents of survey version A and 8% of the respondents of survey version B felt that their involvement in the global and/or regional GPPAC network had raised their visibility.

³²⁹ Interview with staff members of ECCP. The Hague, Netherlands, 18 July 2006.

However, there are other expectations that GPPAC has not yet met. Mentioned most often is the need to become concrete and begin implementing all the plans that have been made. As a part of this it would be beneficial for the network to reach out to the grassroots and organise capacity building activities for local organisations. In addition, more transparency and democracy would increase the constituency behind, and legitimacy of, regional- and global-level activities.

More concrete joint work at the various levels of the Partnership would increase the value of the network to its participants and contribute to their commitment. Such collaborative projects would also make the network more sustained and continuous. In addition, they would help to show the value and impact of the Partnership to external parties. The kinds of activities wanted by people surveyed and interviewed vary somewhat across regions, but many point to the action agendas that were created and make clear that these need to be implemented. Some common priorities for concrete activities that emerge are capacity building and engaging governments and international organisations through campaigns and lobby.

Members feel that GPPAC could have particular added value when it engages in activities that mobilise and link the various levels at which it is organised. In the case of lobby, the added value of GPPAC could lie in exercising pressure on decision-makers from two or more sides: for example, governments could at simultaneously be approached by domestic civil society and by international organisations such as the UN, which are also lobbied by GPPAC. Similarly, high-level lobby in New York could be linked to engagement with UN offices in conflict-affected countries.

Box 7.5: Gaining visibility: Kenya³³⁰

In Kenya, being part of the network has increased the visibility and legitimacy of organisations. For example, for grassroots organisations like the Rural Women Peace Link in Eldoret, Kenya, GPPAC represented an important opportunity to gain visibility for the insights and results gained in their work. It is considered crucial that the voices of local stakeholders can be heard more widely, and GPPAC has made this possible. Whether this enhanced visibility has led to any concrete results is not yet so clear – but the women consider it quite an achievement in itself.

³³⁰ Interview with representatives of the Rural Women Peace Link. Eldoret, Kenya, 1 December 2005.

7.4.2 Discussions on aims and political role

The overall vision of the network – to achieve a shift from reaction to prevention – is adhered to by most GPPAC members (although some, notably in Central Asia, raise doubts about whether the prevention of armed conflict is not more a government than a civil society function). Nonetheless, beyond this vision, many people note a lack of a clear, shared purpose, of a focus area and set of objectives commonly arrived at. This was already formulated as an issue by a mid-term review carried out during the global conference in July 2005:

“[n]etworking without a clear strategy and vision may become meaningless, distract energy and resources and undermine credibility of civil society in the eyes of governments and international organisations. [...] *In future, more realistic objectives should be established, for which appropriate capacity in human and financial resources is available.*” (Matveeva and Van der Veen 2005: 3, emphasis in original)

The repeated mentioning of this issue by people consulted for the review contrasts somewhat with the fact that over the past year, GPPAC’s Regional and International Steering Groups have developed work plans in which objectives, planned activities and impacts are formulated. The fact that participants still note the absence of clear and shared common objectives appears to be explained by the fact that participation in the development of objectives and plans has been relatively narrow and many people feel left out of the processes; as a result, there is limited ownership of the plans. In addition, the aims and objectives that have been formulated are broad and the step from there to concrete action is still a large one. More focus is needed (see 7.6.6 for more on this). Some people are concerned about the viability of the action agendas and work plans, which are very ambitious. The International Secretariat makes it clear that it is unlikely that funds can be raised for all of the plans formulated. The action agendas also contain many recommendations to governments, on which CSOs have only limited influence.

As a result, expectations vary to some extent about the kinds of activities GPPAC should engage in. One discussion emerged particularly clearly out of the data gathered for the review. It concerns the extent to which the network should engage in activism. In how far should a network like GPPAC play a politically activist role and act like a solidarity, human rights-oriented movement? At present only part of the ‘peace movement’ is interested in GPPAC because its consensus, engagement, relationship building approach means that it is not very outspoken. Is GPPAC credible if it does not take a position on the ‘War on Terror’, for

example? Or would taking such a position jeopardise its relationship with powerful governments and the UN, which is also important? Where is the balance between activism and building relationships with policymakers? In the GPPAC network in Southeast Asia this discussion was given a cultural dimension: people said that while Philippine CSOs have a political and activist tradition, Cambodian CSOs tend to focus more on consensus, engagement, and achieving subtle change (see Box 7.6). In Central Asia a similar discussion takes place, but here it centres more on fears to make the situation of CSOs worse by upsetting already oppressive governments. More subtle and cooperative engagement is preferred by most in this region, although this risks jeopardising one's principles.

Box 7.6: Opinions about activism in Southeast Asia³³¹

In Southeast Asia, expectations and priorities differ with regard to the extent to which the network should engage in activism. The Regional Initiator is an activist, human rights-oriented, solidarity organisation. In part this reflects a strong tradition in Philippine civil society, which has long engaged in political activism. However, others have different priorities. In Cambodia some say that this activist, rights-oriented approach does not match with their own, which focuses more on dialogue and long-term peacebuilding processes by engaging people, building relationships and finding joint solutions. The difference becomes clear when approaches toward Burma are compared: boycott and human rights advocacy versus engaging all actors to achieve joint transformation.

This discussion illustrates an issue that has come to the fore earlier in this study, namely that of the extent to which peace NGOs are able to play a political role and address the structural, political issues that shape global conflict and peace. In 1.6.2 and 4.4 we saw how the funding structures in which many local peace NGOs operate acts as a disincentive for political action and how their position as implementers of donor policies – rather than independent actors – also means that they do little thinking about the way their activities contribute to the wider aims of peacebuilding. Some people inside GPPAC warn that becoming too political would risk funding by, and policy dialogue with, governments. It is suggested as a possible solution to divide the network in two: first, a loose and open People Building Peace movement that would provide a forum for activism and ad hoc coalitions, and secondly, GPPAC, which would be a professional organisation.

³³¹ Interviews in the Philippines and Cambodia, 14-26 May 2006.

7.5 Governance, politics and power issues

7.5.1 Democratic governance and ownership

Formally, the Global Partnership is democratic and inclusive. However, there are some questions about the criteria and procedures for selecting representatives to the governing bodies of the network, and the ways in which these representatives can be held accountable by other members. So far representatives have been selected in a rather informal way. The ECCP asked organisations they were already working with to become Regional Initiator. In most regions, these Regional Initiators organised initial meetings with a limited number of organisations from their personal and professional network. Either all those present at these meetings became the RSG, or the meetings selected a number of RSG members from amongst themselves. In several regions, such as West Africa and Latin America, a pre-existing regional network became the regional GPPAC network; these networks kept their existing structures intact. For these pre-existing networks the decision to join GPPAC may not have been so broadly carried. For example, West African national-level network members interviewed were familiar with WANEP but not with GPPAC or the Regional or Global GPPAC Action Agendas.

Thus, the process through which the Global Partnership has been created and developed has been largely top-down. Still, people involved in these processes make clear that it was only natural for them that those who had initiated the Partnership would be asked to carry it forward. Indeed, it seems difficult to envision a network starting up in a more democratic way. However, now that the network is moving towards implementation people are starting to ask questions about the legitimacy of procedures and representatives. In particular those who do not have a representative position within GPPAC are increasingly critical. Their criticism also relates to a lack of transparency: to the extent that criteria and procedures do exist for the selection of representatives and for holding them accountable, they are unknown to most members. In recognition of these issues, the International Steering Group is in the process of drafting a GPPAC charter. Unfortunately, this is done with little or no input from the regional networks and few people know about it.

It has only been three years since the network has begun to develop, and in many regions it has not yet expanded much beyond the Regional Steering Group and a small group of other organisations that have some kind of relation with one or more of its members (often mainly in the country in which the Regional Initiator is based). Community-level organisations and other grassroots actors are not yet involved in most

regions. All this means that the sense of ownership of the network itself, and of the priorities and strategies it has formulated, remains limited to a relatively narrow circle of people.

Box 7.7: Ownership in Central and East Africa³³²

In the eyes of NPI-Africa, the Regional Initiator for Central and East Africa, different levels of ownership can be distinguished. For ECCP, GPPAC is its major activity and ownership is therefore high. For NPI-Africa, it is one of many activities, although the sense of ownership is still strong. At the national level, participants often need to be pushed in order to act, although interest usually rises in the run-up to a major event. This is unless GPPAC helps an organisation meet its own objectives, as is the case with network organisations.

7.5.2 Power, competition and conflict

Inequalities, personal rivalries, competition, and power games are omnipresent and as we have seen they can even be found in peace networks. Issues that GPPAC's regional and national networks have dealt with include accusations of nepotism (West Africa) and networks competing for the status of regional GPPAC network (Caucasus). More generally, many stakeholders mention competition among CSOs (over funding, projects, contacts) as an important obstacle to cooperation and networking and as creating a potential for conflicts within the networks of the Global Partnership. It is important for a network to strive to mitigate competition and to have mechanisms in place that regulate conflict and prevent personal issues from taking the foreground.

Power relations outside of the network also shape its functioning. Where the political context in a region is repressive towards civil society, then civil society organising and networking may be seen as a threat by governments. In Central Asia, CSOs tend to stay out of activities relating to conflict because this is seen as too political and therefore as risking government opposition. Instead, many organisations prefer to carry out 'technical' socio-economic projects, in the hope that by doing so they may slowly win the confidence of governments and build relations with them. Through that avenue they hope to be able to subtly influence government policy regarding conflict at a later stage.

In some places, the conflicts the networks aim to resolve themselves inhibit networking. GPPAC's Middle East and North Africa network

³³² Interview with staff members of NPI-Africa. Nairobi, Kenya, 29 and 30 November 2005.

consists of Arab organisations whose opposition to allowing Israeli CSOs to join has led to the exclusion of the latter. Among Israeli peace organisations, but also among members in other parts of the world, there is considerable bitterness about this: how can such an important conflict region³³³ have such unbalanced representation in a network working for peace? As we have seen in the previous chapters, conflict also presents indirect obstacles as it leads to low resources and bad infrastructure. Many national-level members in West Africa have limited access to internet and electricity and cannot move around easily due to bad roads and a lack of available cars. Finding creative ways to involve these members and help build their capacity will be part of attempts to become more rooted at the grassroots.

7.6 Facilitating knowledge sharing

We have seen that knowledge exchange is not only closely connected to all other aims and activities of the Global Partnership, but also represents one of its major aims in itself. Aspects of learning and knowledge sharing were mentioned most often as a function of the network by the members consulted for the review (see 7.2): research, access to external expertise and building internal expertise, disseminating knowledge, linking internal expertise with policy formulation of donors and official actors, facilitating the exchange of experiences among members, learning from one another's successes and failures, and lending inspiration from the stories of others. In 7.4.1 we also saw that knowledge sharing is seen as the function that has been most successful so far. With regard to both of these findings (the importance attached to knowledge sharing as a function and the fact that people say it has indeed taken place) there is little variation among the regions. In this section and the next, we turn to the ways in which GPPAC facilitates knowledge sharing, learning and the dissemination of knowledge by its members.

7.6.1 Knowledge sharing in the regions

Between early 2003 and the fall of 2006³³⁴, the knowledge sharing process in the regions looked as follows. After ECCP approached a strong NGO in each region to help start a network there, this NGO

³³³ Important in that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a high-profile one and has an impact on conflicts in other parts of the world as well.

³³⁴ After this point I have not been able to closely follow the network.

organised a meeting with organisations from different countries in the region, with support from ECCP. At these meetings an initial structure for the network was created (in most cases, those present at the initial meeting became National Focal Points and together made up a Regional Steering Group) and the participants went on to mobilise other organisations to join. Some organised national conferences in their countries. The outcomes of these conferences served as input for a regional conference. These regional conferences were presented explicitly as part of a process leading up to a global conference on the role of civil society in conflict prevention that was to be organised at UN headquarters. They aimed to produce Regional Action Agendas which could not only be of value for work inside the regions, but would also be compiled into one publication³³⁵ and serve as input for a Global Action Agenda, to be presented in New York. Regional conferences indeed took place in each region, and action agendas were developed everywhere. The ISG and ECCP were responsible for the creation of the global agenda and the organisation of the New York conference, which took place in July 2005.

The regional process running up to the global conference was one with clear aims and a clear end point. However, after July 2005 there was a loss of momentum. It proved difficult to raise funds for follow-up processes, specifically the implementation of the action agendas. In most regions, the frequency of interaction decreased after this point, although in 2006 most regional steering groups met to turn the action agendas into more specific work plans which could be used for fundraising. Below, a more detailed account of regional interactions between 2003 and 2006 is given for four regional GPPAC networks: Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Central and East Africa and West Africa.

In *Southeast Asia* GPPAC built on activities that were already taking place in the region. The organisation Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) in Davao City in Mindanao, the Philippines, was asked by ECCP as Regional Initiator because of the networking it was already facilitating. It consulted CSOs in the region, asking whether they were interested in gathering their efforts under the banner of GPPAC. Most answered positively, although some groups were wary and feared they would be used by Northern interests. However, since the regional GPPAC conference in 2003, IID and other regional actors started to feel owner of the process and initially hesitant groups became more involved. The Southeast Asian Regional Steering Group (RSG) consists of National Focal Points (NFPs) and a number of regional organisations.

³³⁵ GPPAC 2005.

Some countries have one NFP; others have two or three, or none. The networking process inside the countries is left up to the focal points, but the regional secretariat (IID) provides support. This support consists of advice, linking with others, and providing materials; no financial assistance is provided. The regional secretariat also coordinates region-wide activities such as lobbying with ASEAN. The GPPAC network in Southeast Asia is linked through IID and other members to other regional networks, such as the Asia Pacific Solidarity Coalition, which is more oriented towards activist pressure politics.

The RSG meets irregularly, about once a year. National-level meetings have particularly taken place to prepare for the 2003 regional conference and to report back afterwards (although in Cambodia, such a report-back meeting never occurred). The same occurred before and after the global conference in 2005. In the Philippines, the NFP stated that since there is already so much networking taking place in the country the national GPPAC network does not have so much added value; she sees more value at the regional level³³⁶. Next to face-to-face meetings there is a lot of e-mail traffic inside GPPAC Southeast Asia, unlike in other regions. It mainly takes the form of messages sent around by IID informing the members of events taking place in the region in relation to conflict and peace in order to keep people informed of current affairs and build regional solidarity. These messages are much appreciated by interviewees.

In *Central Asia*, the Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), which had been asked to be GPPAC Regional Initiator, organised a first GPPAC meeting in Bishkek in 2003 with a small group of CSO leaders from the Central Asian countries. They distributed information on GPPAC in their countries and invited other organisations to join. The initiating organisations became selected as national coordinators. Three of these went on to organise national conferences at which country priorities were elaborated. Such national conferences took place in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In May 2005, a regional conference was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. During this conference a Regional Action Agenda was developed. The May 2005 regional conference also led to the publication of a booklet (GPPAC Central Asia 2005). The regional conference in May 2005 is evaluated positively; it was characterised by wide participation and heated discussions. The action programme created was supported by all. However, it seemed unrealistic to the Regional Initiator who urged for

³³⁶ Interview with GPPAC National Focal Point for the Philippines. Manila, Philippines, 18 May 2006.

some sections to be cut. The slimmed down version still has the support of all involved, but is yet to be implemented.

All the national conferences developed action agendas in preparation for the regional action agenda, but some of the agendas were more concrete than others. In Tajikistan the national conference not only produced an action agenda but also led to more cooperation with government. The expectation in Tajikistan was that there would be a regional conference a few months after the national one. However, the regional conference did not take place until a year later, by which time enthusiasm and commitment in Tajikistan had already faded and people had forgotten about the plans developed. After the May 2005 regional conference there was some renewed interest but no activities have been organised at the national level. This is blamed mainly on the lack of funds. Nonetheless, a regional working group meeting with the regional and national coordinators was held in March 2006, and a work plan was developed there.

Quite a number of people participated in national and regional conferences (most of which also included high level government people), but not all of these consider themselves part of GPPAC or are even clear about what the network entails. The General Assembly of the grassroots Dolina Mira network in the Ferghana Valley voted to become part of GPPAC after the Regional Initiator gave a presentation about it – but this presentation is the only experience the Dolina Mira members have with GPPAC so far.

In *Central and East Africa*, the regional process started in March 2003 with a meeting to which a number of strategic actors from the various countries were invited. During that meeting NPI-Africa was elected Regional Initiator for GPPAC, and the others present more or less naturally became NFPs. Some focal points organised national consultation conferences, other visited organisations in their country to discuss GPPAC, and still others lacked a significant national consultation process. Any organisation involved in peace work could join GPPAC at the national level, but not everyone was able to participate in the regional and global conferences due to limited funds. In October 2004 NPI-Africa organised a Regional Consultation, resulting in a press release and a Regional Action Agenda. The conference also issued specific recommendations that were distributed at the UN-African Union conference on the Great Lakes region that took place several weeks later.

Since New York, some of the Central and East African NFPs used the Global Action Agenda in their own countries, forwarding recommendations to government and getting recommendations included in national documents on peace and security. In addition, an RSG meeting was held in 2006 in which a Regional Work Plan was developed. The focal points consult regularly with NPI-Africa. NPI-Africa sends them e-mails about events taking place in GPPAC globally in order for them to forward it to the members in their country. NPI-Africa does not have a clear picture of the extent to which this has taken place; from the survey and interviews it becomes clear that not all participants are satisfied with the communication and information flows. As elsewhere, all involved are anxious to raise money to implement the work plan, which has not happened so far. Nevertheless, there are some ongoing regional GPPAC activities, including the organisation of a workshop on the UN Peacebuilding Commission in Burundi and the development of joint activities for UN Peace Day.

In *West Africa* ECCP had cooperated with WANEP (see chapter six) before and since that network was already well established its secretariat was asked to become the Regional Initiator for West Africa. WANEP did not need to set up a new network as occurred in other GPPAC regions, but joined GPPAC as a whole. In August and September 2004 a regional conference was organised under the theme 'Consolidating the Role of Civil Society Promoting Good Governance and Preventing Violent Conflicts'. By the end of the conference a Regional Action Agenda had been developed and an RSG, made up of representatives of fourteen West African countries, had been created. The Regional Action Agenda focused on the role that CSOs can play in different phases of conflict. In addition to the prevention of armed conflict, the agenda identified as focus areas human rights, elections, youth, chieftaincy, small arms proliferation, gender, religion, and the media. Since New York, the RSG has held a consultation meeting and developed a framework for 'localising' the Agenda in the various countries. Although during my visit to the region in February 2006 no national- and local level WANEP members had yet heard of the action agenda, this may have changed since then.

7.6.2 Global knowledge sharing

GPPAC members I met who attended the New York conference all considered it largely successful, mainly because they had gained new contacts from around the world and because the scale and location of the conference meant that it could give a powerful signal. It showed the

strength and unity of global civil society working for peace, emphasised the importance of conflict prevention, and advocated more involvement of civil society in achieving this. However, there was also some criticism, which centred mainly around two issues. First, there was little representation from official actors – powerful governments and the UN itself – which could hear the message of civil society. Secondly, as all attention and resources went towards the organisation of the conference, its follow-up received too little attention.

Post-New York the global level of GPPAC has remained the most active. The ISG holds bi-annual meetings. Out of its midst an executive committee has been created, which meets even more often. In addition, the ISG has created several theme groups, also from its midst, which sometimes meet in the margins of ISG meetings. As for the content of such meetings, much of them is taken up by procedural issues, discussions about which activities and themes will receive priority, and planning and fundraising. However, the theme groups focus on content. Exchange of the experiences the ISG members have with peacebuilding in the regions also takes place – as much in the margins of meetings as during formal discussions – and this is found most useful. Several ISG members mentioned to me how surprised they were about the similarity of issues faced in the different regions. The ISG members are leading civil society figures from their regions and tend to be inspiring characters; when they meet they also inspire one another.

About half of the resources that have been raised since the global conference are spent at the global level and go to the organisation of these meetings and the running of the secretariat at ECCP. Fewer resources are available for the maintenance of the regional secretariats, let alone for processes at the national or even grassroots levels. As a result, the knowledge that is shared and the decisions that are made at the global level are not always informed by the stakeholders in the regions, nor do they always find their way towards them. Many members complain that they are not kept up to date and are not consulted when decisions have to be made. They are also insufficiently aware of the structures and strategies of the network.

The bottleneck appears to be at the level of the Regional Secretariats. They do not always forward information to member organisations in the regions and are not forthcoming with information towards the International Secretariat. For some regions, ECCP even has difficulty obtaining the contact details of the Regional Steering Group members. The Regional Secretariats consider the information they receive from the International Secretariat to be too much and as a result do not always act

upon information sent to forward it to members in the region. Regional Secretariat staff often spend time in the field and when they return to the office to find ten or twenty urgent GPPAC e-mails then they do not know where to start.

7.6.3 Stimulating framework

One of the conclusions emerging from the consultation of GPPAC members around the world when it comes to knowledge sharing is that the Global Partnership should not strive to build an overall, comprehensive knowledge system, but instead should offer a stimulating framework that facilitates exchange and access to knowledge sources. The approach towards knowledge sharing that has been decided upon by GPPAC's knowledge generation and sharing task force, and later by the ISG, does not contradict this finding. It takes one topic as a 'pilot' for knowledge sharing, using it to develop a structure for knowledge sharing and collaborative learning. The topic selected is peace education (see 7.7). A peace education reference group has been set up at the global level and a series of conferences and meetings has been planned. The aim is for this pilot process to lead to the establishment of a knowledge generation and sharing framework that could be used for other topics as well.

It is considered important by members of GPPAC that such a framework for knowledge sharing pays particular attention to gathering and mobilising the knowledge that is available at the regional, national, and particularly the local level. Local communities and organisations often have unique experiences and mechanisms for dealing with conflict, but they have difficulty in making this known to others. A global network such as GPPAC is expected by its members to help achieve this.

7.6.4 Flexibility

The fact that the focus area of GPPAC is so broad has the advantage that, at least in theory, it makes the network able to respond to changes in the environment, adjusting its policy or starting new initiatives around these. Indeed, the ISG has the mandate to take far-reaching decisions. However, in practice the consensus structure and consensus-oriented nature of the people involved means that radical decisions are not easily taken and difficult choices tend to be postponed, for example with regard to the activism issue described in 7.4.2. In addition, communication in between ISG meetings does not always run smoothly,

with ISG members in the regions giving priority to other pressing matters and with the International Secretariat sending so much information that it becomes difficult to decide what is important. As a result of all this, GPPAC has not always been able to respond to current events. At the time of my involvement in GPPAC in 2006, for example, many were critical about the fact that GPPAC remained silent during the war in Lebanon that summer. On the other hand, where it concerns more gradual relation-building and lobbying processes at a high level, GPPAC has kept apace with new developments, mainly the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission with which it has been closely involved. In part this may be explained by the fact that ECCP already had experiences with this kind of work.

Individual participants are quite passive in waiting for decisions to come from the centre. In theory a network is not a hierarchical decision-making structure but a framework in which members can organise themselves in varying combinations around varying issues as the need arises. Indeed, in a region like Southeast Asia, campaigns and programmes carried out by the Regional Secretariat are reinforced by using the name of GPPAC as a way of showing the worldwide constituency that is behind the activity undertaken, without first soliciting the agreement of the ISG for doing so. That, after all, would take too long. In this way, participants at national or regional levels could pro-actively organise activities loosely under the banner of GPPAC. However, the amount of attention and resources going to organisational issues and to global-level structures may inhibit such flexibility. In part this is also donor-induced as donor agencies ask detailed work plans that require a high degree of organisation and counter flexibility.

7.6.5 Safe space, trust and levels of learning

All those involved agree that within the networks of GPPAC there is an atmosphere of safety in which people can express doubts, criticisms and uncertainties. Participants are not afraid to speak freely. That said, there is one limitation: language. Not everyone involved is fluent in English. At the ISG that presents difficulties for at least one of the Regional Initiators. At the regional level, more people experience difficulties due to language, particularly in the regions where English is the language used in the regional network. The people who are less fluent in the dominant language – such as the Cambodian participants in the Southeast Asian network - feel disadvantaged and do not speak as freely as others. This language barrier also represents an obstacle when it

comes to the dissemination of information by the International Secretariat. This information is usually in English, and the Regional Secretariats do not have budgets for translation.

At the regional and global levels there is trust among the members of GPPAC. While attending several ISG meetings I observed that its discussions did not appear in any way constrained by rivalry among the members. Generally there is confidence that others are in it for the larger good. Trust is important from the perspective of creating a context for deeper-level reflection and learning, also across cultures, which requires the ability to openly question one's assumptions and values. In a context of low trust this is unlikely to occur. However, at the national level participants note competition over funding as a constraining factor for networking, cooperation and sharing. In addition, the lack of transparency with regard to procedures and representation gives rise to some distrust at the national and regional levels. As we saw in the analysis of WANEP in the previous chapter, in some countries there is even some suspicion of power games, of personal disputes playing too strong a role, and of nepotism on the part of people claiming to represent the network.

An interesting question is whether the different levels of trust at different levels of the network correspond with different levels of reflection and learning. It may be hypothesised that high trust and little direct competition at higher levels of the network lead to deeper-level (second- and third-order) reflection, while lower trust and more competition at lower levels results in more superficial (first-order) learning. Another factor supporting open exchange and reflection at the global level could be that power differences play less of a role: all present lend similar weight and legitimacy from their positions as prominent regional peacebuilders. Checking this hypothesis is not really possible without attending more meetings at the various levels. However, based on the meetings I have attended and the information given about other meetings, it appears to have some substance. In the local-level network meeting in Kenema, Sierra Leone described in Box 5.3, exchange was all at the level of facts and developments and there was little reflection on whether organisations were doing the right thing. In and around ISG meetings such discussions do take place – although there, too, the majority of time is spent on practical matters.

7.6.6 Balance between inclusiveness and focus

An issue faced by GPPAC is finding the right balance between inclusiveness and diversity on the one hand, and focus and direction on the other. This goes for content as well as membership. Many people involved in GPPAC fear that with too broad an aim it will be difficult to continue to rally people around the network and its activities. Members refer to other networks which they feel show that networks function best when they come together around a specific, concrete issue. Examples mentioned include the Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Campaign against Small Arms and Light Weapons. By contrast, GPPAC is huge, has a wide aim, and consists of organisations with a variety of specialisations and objectives. This makes it quite a challenge to come up with workable plans. Even the functions that have now been agreed on are still very broad. Many members feel the network should try to focus on a smaller number of achievable aims. This would make it more effective as its goals would be obtainable and its members committed. It would make the network more concrete and enable it to make a visible impact, leading to more motivation and commitment of members. Finding a focus area would also help GPPAC to find a 'niche' and create a GPPAC 'brand', leading to a clearer message to use in lobby and advocacy efforts.

However, achieving such focus would not be an easy matter in the case of GPPAC because it would entail some very hard choices. There would be disagreements on priorities, and some would lose out. Some members may even have to be left out because they are too far removed from the central aims of the network, as is discussed in the next section. If GPPAC were to become more focused, as many members ask, it may lose one source of strength, namely its size and coverage, broadness, and general message. The question the network is faced with, therefore, is whether it should become more like a professional organisation, or rather provide a kind of general umbrella for all sorts of specific initiatives to emerge. If GPPAC decides to become more focused, that does not necessarily mean that the same focus is chosen for every region. Different regions may have different priorities.

7.7 Content and outcomes of knowledge sharing

7.7.1 Content balance

Positively from the perspective of the call for more focus, the members of GPPAC identify a relatively clearly circumscribed list of issues

around which they would like to exchange knowledge and experiences. The main priorities for knowledge sharing in the network are the following:

- conflict prevention and peacebuilding knowledge (research results, theoretical knowledge, lessons learned) and methods (tools, experiences, skills) in general
- specialised issues and methods, such as peace education, human rights, and early warning and early response
- experiences in the field
- Information about GPPAC: goals, action plans, developments – including follow up to UN activities
- activities undertaken by other members – it is important to know what others are doing because this could lead an organisation to identify opportunities for cooperation or to be inspired by activities taking place in other regions
- lobbying and advocacy methods, in order for members and national and regional networks to become more effective in this area
- the role of civil society: in some regions, there is a lot of unclarity and disagreement over the role civil society in general, and a network such as GPPAC, should play. For example, how political should it be, and how should it relate to governments?
- networking methodologies and lessons, in order to develop and operate networks at the various levels more effectively
- capacity building methods, so people within the network can support each other's skills training and organisational development for more effective operation

At the same time, as can be expected, there are also some differences between the priorities of regions and organisations with regard to knowledge to be shared. These are differences in both the knowledge demand and supply. Some of the regional networks possess expertise of a particular issue (such as the West African network does with regard to early warning and early response), which they could share with other regions that need it.

The ISG has decided to focus knowledge sharing initially on the issue of peace education and conflict resolution in schools. It was the issue most 'alive' among organisations, and indeed, many respondents in the framework of the review mention it. Moreover, peace education activities are mentioned in eleven out of the fifteen Regional Work Plans. In addition, as Box 7.8 shows, initiatives in this field already exist in some of the regions.

Box 7.8: Bottom-up peace education initiatives: Southeast Asia³³⁷

A large conflict resolution education conference is being organised by GPPAC in the Balkans that will bring together civil society and ministries of education. Similar initiatives are undertaken in several other regions. In Southeast Asia, the Centre for Peace Education at Miriam College in Quezon City, Philippines is taking the lead on the theme. The aim is to have three or more trainers per country who would receive training in the Philippines, and to make this group a Southeast Asian peace education network. GPPAC Regional Steering group members would identify the participants in their countries. This would make GPPAC more alive and concrete. At present the Centre for Peace Education is looking for funds. The target is to have the first training in 2007.

The idea is to use the experiences with knowledge sharing around peace education at a later stage when other issues are adopted. However, some (including several, but not all, staff of the International Secretariat) are disappointed with the choice. Conflict resolution education is rather long-term oriented and little operational. They would have preferred it if

- more attention would be paid to urgent and concrete issues: what do we do about Lebanon?
- knowledge sharing would also focus on concrete activities taking place in the network, sharing stories for inspiration (and legitimation) of the network³³⁸.
- more generally, the wealth of knowledge inside the network would be better mobilised.
- knowledge sharing with outside actors had also been prioritised. For example, a Secretariat staff member points out that although about half the members of GPPAC are also members of IANSA, little knowledge is shared with that network. That said, the group working on peace education has linked up with both the International Network for Conflict Resolution in Schools and Peace Education and the Hague Appeal for Peace Global Campaign on Peace Education. Both of these networks have representatives in the peace education reference group.
- more thought would be given to conceptualising knowledge sharing and thinking about the best way to approach it. The GPPAC knowledge sharing task force is working on this through the peace education pilot, but many involved appear to be unaware of this.

This leads to the conclusion that it may be better to allow knowledge sharing priorities to differ according to the region and type of

³³⁷ Interview with director of a Philippine NGO, Quezon City, Philippines, 19 May 2006.

³³⁸ GPPAC's stories database on www.peoplebuildingpeace.org/stories indeed has this ambition.

organisation, and that the Global Partnership could be more flexible in allowing for different groups and coalitions to operate simultaneously without deeming it necessary to get the entire network involved. This would make it possible to exchange around more specific issues, since topics would no longer have to be broad enough to be relevant to the entire global network. Reflecting this conclusion, GPPAC's International Steering Group has set up task forces on specific issues. However, representation in them does not really penetrate the regions (the task forces are composed only of ISG members and in some cases outside experts) and most of them have not set concrete objectives, making it unclear what participants may expect to gain from the exchange.

7.7.2 Outcomes of knowledge sharing

An interviewee in Central Asia remarked that "knowledge exchange meetings can be a waste of time. Often boring meetings are held in which everyone just sums up what they have been doing, without a clear aim for something to come out of the meeting. A meeting needs to have a clear thematic focus, and clear objectives."³³⁹ Participants are more willing to invest in knowledge sharing if it generates common products. Indeed, ECCP has compiled two *People Building Peace*³⁴⁰ books in which stories of civil society peacebuilding efforts are documented, as well as a number of region-specific books. The first book was developed before the Global Partnership came into existence, while the second was compiled making use of the global network to gather stories. According to ECCP, the second *People Building Peace* book has become much richer in terms of the range of experiences and the quality of stories it contains, and this is due to the Global Partnership providing access to people and their stories around the world. Thus, in this sense, the publication of *People Building Peace II* represents a very real and concrete outcome of the GPPAC network. Indeed, the book, which was distributed at the global GPPAC conference in July 2005, is considered useful by the network members, particularly for inspiration: the stories of others bring the moral support of knowing that others all over the world are working for the same goal. Recognising that translation is an issue and dissemination of the book a challenge - it is relatively heavy to send or carry - the book has been translated into French and Spanish and placed on CD-rom.

³³⁹ Interview with staff member of an international NGO. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 24 July 2006.

³⁴⁰ European Centre for Conflict Prevention 1999; Van Tongeren et al. 2005.

In addition to the book, of course, there are many more stories to tell. Stories such as those documented in *People Building Peace II* not only help and inspire other members but are also an important external resource: they provide practical examples for students of peace and conflict studies, and in that sense can also be made of financial benefit by selling publications to an academic public. In addition, the collection of field stories helps the lobby, advocacy and fundraising efforts of GPPAC by providing concrete examples of what happens inside the network and of the positive roles that civil society organisations can play. ECCP would like to collect stories from the field and best practices on a more regular basis for the purposes mentioned above. Its staff regularly ask the Regional Secretariats to collect stories from their region. However, the International Secretariat finds it difficult to get people to submit stories. This may be because people are not sure exactly what is expected of them. It may also be due to other pressing issues getting priority. Supplying stories to a far-away institution without much certainty about what will happen to them is not first on most people's to-do list. ECCP is contemplating ways to deal with this. Regional People Building Peace books, which may be more 'real' to members, are planned for Latin America and the Caribbean and Southeast Asia. Though excluding those without internet access, a website that documents stories may at the same time be more accessible to people inside and outside of the network than a book. In addition, it can be alive and constantly changing and growing. The website www.peoplebuildingpeace.org/thestories has been set up as a tool for this.

In addition to concrete 'knowledge products' like websites and books, knowledge sharing may lead to various other outcomes. Lobby and advocacy are informed by the knowledge of network members and gain weight as a result. To the extent that lobby focuses in achieving more recognition for the role of civil society in peacebuilding, the books and website that document positive examples of CSO activity are also lobbying tools in themselves. From the perspective of lobby and advocacy, knowledge sharing outcomes may include changed policies of official actors as a result of input from GPPAC. At this stage, it is possible to show that GPPAC has reached many such actors, but difficult to assess the final impact of this on their policies.

7.8 Monitoring and evaluation

As we have seen, GPPAC's stakeholders agree that it is time the network starts to prove its relevance and make an actual contribution to

armed conflict prevention. Good M&E procedures are indispensable in this regard: otherwise, how can we know if GPPAC has made a contribution? Different planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems are in use by the various partners in GPPAC. Creating an alternative system for all to adopt in replacement of existing procedures is not necessarily the way to go. Indeed, one survey respondent wrote that “instead of looking to a certain model, we should see how the different models in use could be connected” (GPPAC 2006c). This might include agreeing on some kind of minimum standard. A Regional Initiator interviewed similarly stated that “the regions have systems of M&E in place that seem to work for them; these should not be replaced, but GPPAC globally could find the common elements of these systems and build on those.”³⁴¹

When considering what should characterise an M&E system for GPPAC, various suggestions are made by those surveyed and interviewed. Most importantly, an M&E system for GPPAC should:

- start by setting realistic, attainable, meaningful objectives that are directly related to the prevention of violent conflict
- involve all the members to ensure ownership and a collaborative learning process
- be an ongoing internal monitoring system complemented by regular external evaluations
- be clear about the responsibility of the various network levels in monitoring
- pay attention to building a strong capacity for M&E at all levels.

The International Secretariat favours adopting the Outcome Mapping method (see section 5.4), at least at the global level where it could complement the various systems in place at other levels. Outcome Mapping is seen to be especially appropriate for networks because relationships and behaviours are central to it. The Secretariat introduced this method at the March 2006 International Steering Group meeting in Nairobi and hoped to immediately apply it to joint planning during this meeting. However, this went a little too fast for the ISG members, who had not been sufficiently consulted about this method and had various questions about it. In the end, Outcome Mapping was only partially used in the planning process.

³⁴¹ Telephone interview with GPPAC Regional Initiator, 15 August 2006.

7.9 Concluding remarks

What are the implications of the GPPAC case study for the analytical questions posed in Part Three? Global networks that link together civil society actors across countries and regions are one type of initiative taken to support the learning processes of local NGOs. They may act as learning 'scaffolds' by providing access to external knowledge that may help place individual activities in a larger perspective and make possible learning by comparison, discussion and reflection. Through discussions during network meetings and online exchange, joint learning is facilitated. In addition, a network such as GPPAC potentially gives local NGOs the opportunity to make their voice heard more widely, thereby facilitating their contribution to global discussions on peace and conflict.

Given the difficulty local organisations have to influence macro-level issues that affect their work at the micro-level, global networks make possible joint action in the face of broader issues that individual organisations cannot deal with on their own. In the case of GPPAC, its lobby and advocacy work at the UN and other global forums is therefore deemed valuable by GPPAC members, although their input into these activities could be more direct. In relation to the potential cross-border networks have to facilitate joint thinking and action in relation to the bigger picture of conflict and peace, dilemmas can arise regarding the extent of political activism that civil society should engage in at the risk of jeopardising its relations with (donor) governments and its participation in dialogues about policy.

What can we learn from initiatives such as GPPAC in relation to the way they may facilitate learning and make third-order reflection possible? First, the need to find a balance between focus on the one hand and inclusiveness and diversity on the other is seen very clearly in GPPAC. The GPPAC case shows the difficulty of finding such a balance, of taking clear decisions of direction in a network whose value is that it brings together many different kinds of people and organisations. Diversity is conducive to cross-cultural learning and being confronted with organisations from very different backgrounds can stimulate abstraction and out-of-the-box reflection. To make such processes possible, flexibility and openness to suggestions and change are important assets of networks. However, the need for organisation – if only in order to produce plans required for fundraising – is likely to grow as the network develops, running the risk that it turns into a hierarchical organisation rather than a loose structure facilitating individual and joint action. In response to this dilemma some suggest to

divide into a flexible social movement (with more room for activism) and a professional organisation.

Particularly at the national level, conflict, power differences, and competition among NGOs make networking difficult in conflict-affected areas. The early stage in which civil society finds itself in many of the countries under study also plays a role. Many NGOs are highly dependent on specific individuals, and as a result networks can become either groups of friends or platforms for competition among influential people. To some extent, network structures and procedures can help mitigate such issues by providing transparency about participation, representation and decision making. At the regional and, particularly, global levels, problems relating to personal connections, power relations and competitions are not as strong. As a result, there may be more opportunities at those levels for second- and third-order learning, made possible by higher levels of abstraction and a setting of trust and safety in which to openly question assumptions and even values.

What can we learn from GPPAC about the support that Northern actors may give to the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs and increase their agency? GPPAC was initiated and continues to be facilitated by an NNGO, ECCP. Its previous experience and its geographical closeness to potential donors and global decision makers puts it in a good position to support the members of the network through fundraising, lobby to influence the macro structures that shape the work of the members, and efforts to make their voices heard at higher levels. Such activities are likely to be more effective role now that ECCP acts on behalf of a global network of peace organisations, rather than itself alone. In terms of facilitating the learning strategies of local peace organisations, the funds and organisation provided by ECCP has enabled exchanges that are deemed valuable by the members of GPPAC.

However, many feel that its enabling role ought to more strongly include the capacity building of members and network structures at grassroots, national and regional levels. It would be a remarkable achievement if a network like GPPAC could make it possible that training programmes become more widely offered, particularly at the regional and national levels where the content of training could be more sensitive to regional and local circumstances, knowledge, methods, and traditions. Capacity building may also help correct imbalances among members that give stronger members a dominating position. In part, these imbalances are the result of the top-down manner in which GPPAC was created. Connecting to organisations at the remains very problematic for the network.

Although ECCP provides funds to its partners in the network, the relationship it has with them is one of equals³⁴². The network is governed by these partners and ECCP only has a small voice in its decision-making. This suggests that the networking approach is more conducive to equal partnership than the policy chain approach. Founding an organisation together with one's partners, rather than continuing to work 'through' them, increases the legitimacy of the activities of an NNGO and makes them more reflective of local knowledge and ideas. In the next chapter, we see another example of an NNGO that has taken the step of creating a structure jointly with partners – one that focuses even more explicitly and exclusively on supporting the learning processes of local peacebuilders.

³⁴² See the citation from NPI-Africa in 4.7.3 (page 215).

Chapter 8. Action learning for peace

Applied Conflict Transformation Studies

The Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) programme is another initiative set up by an NNGO together with partners in various conflict regions. Like GPPAC, it has characteristics of a network but it aims more explicitly, and exclusively, at supporting learning processes of local peacebuilders. An interesting facet of the programme is that it does so by involving local knowledge institutions, something which I found to be rare in the countries visited. The case study of ACTS sheds light on all questions posed in this Part Three, giving an example of an initiative to improve the learning processes of local peace NGOs that aims to function as a 'scaffold' to make 'third-order' learning possible, that is supported by a Northern actor, that involves knowledge institutions and that brings actors from different parts of the world together in a network. The international Master programme for peace practitioners aims not only at facilitating the learning of peacebuilders but also at increasing their role in knowledge generation and international debates. The aims this initiative therefore resonate with many of the needs identified in this study. For that reason, it is worth taking a closer look at the way it is functioning to see if it is indeed an approach worth developing in other places.

I have been able to gather information about ACTS through my own involvement in the development of the programme, first as a resource person contributing to the development of the curriculum, and later as a consultant whose task it has been to

- be part of, and facilitate, a process of learning and reflection by those involved in the ACTS programme on M&E and the impact of ACTS as a whole;
- draw together the experiences with M&E practice in ACTS and overall practice in implementing the course; and
- draw together the outcomes of M&E in the regions in order to give a first idea about the impact of the whole ACTS mechanism as a vehicle for change.

I am therefore not a neutral observer but have been, more and less closely in different periods, involved in the programme. I have tried to be conscious of the possible bias that this may bring and will reflect on it at the end of the chapter. The positive side of my involvement in ACTS has been that it has allowed me to attend various meetings, have access to internal documents, and talk to most of the main stakeholders. More specifically, this chapter is based on

- various trips to Birmingham, UK, as well as trips to Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Belgrade, Serbia, where I have had extensive conversations with ACTS staff members;
- participation in a curriculum development workshop in Kampala, Uganda, in September 2004;
- conversations with three course participants in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in May 2006;
- participation in a global ACTS management group meeting in Birmingham in February 2007;
- various internal ACTS documents, including the recent Action Research Review by Diana Francis (Francis 2007), which is a particularly helpful assessment of the current state of affairs of ACTS and on which I will draw extensively.

In this chapter, I will first look at the background, aims and development of ACTS in section 8.1. Next, in 8.2, I will take a closer look at the way in which the programme tries to support the learning of peace practitioners, namely through the use of action research. 8.3 addresses the organisation of the programme, focusing on cooperation between NNGOs, SNGOs and academia in making it possible. 8.4 looks more closely at the way the learning of peacebuilders is supported as the course is taught in Cambodia and Serbia. Does it indeed function as a learning ‘scaffold’? The section deals with the expectations, opinions, capacities and development of the participants; cultural issues; the academic aspects of the course; and the way its content is developing as the programme progresses. 8.5 takes a look at the documentation and dissemination of research outcomes that are needed to start building a local peacebuilding knowledge base in the regions where the programme takes place and to start contributing to global discussions and theory development. Finally, 8.6 addresses learning and M&E by ACTS itself.

8.1 Background, aims and development of ACTS

8.1.1 Background and aims

Responding to Conflict (RTC) is a UK-based NGO working on conflict transformation³⁴³. It was founded by Quakers in 1991. A major field of activity of the organisation has been the provision of training courses to peacebuilders from around the world. In Birmingham, various courses are offered, ranging from short, several week-long courses to the three-

³⁴³ For a discussion of the term conflict transformation, see section 1.3.

month Working with Conflict course. Over the years a specific curriculum has developed. The courses are based on participatory, experiential learning that builds on the experiences and knowledge of the participants. In addition to its UK-based programmes, RTC has supported partners in various conflict-affected regions of the world to develop training programmes there. Its partners include the Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA), which has its headquarters in Nairobi, the Nansen Dialogue Network in the Balkans, and the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) in Cambodia. Often, partnerships began when someone working for these organisations participated in the Working with Conflict course.

During a sabbatical in 2002, Simon Fisher, the director of RTC, spoke with various peacebuilding practitioners in East Africa who had participated in RTC's Working with Conflict course. These people voiced the need for more and extended training of the same kind, preferably linked to a postgraduate degree programme. They emphasised that an academic degree was an important prerequisite for getting ahead in many countries. For that reason, many of the former course participants had gone on to Bradford University in the UK or the Eastern Mennonite University in the US to do a Master course. These courses had been valuable to them – but, they said, not to the communities they left behind. It had been difficult to abandon their work and their families. The need therefore was for a Master programme in the conflict regions themselves, based on the practice-oriented teaching principles of RTC courses. As a result, the Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) programme began to develop.

ACTS is a Master programme for peacebuilding practitioners that is offered in parts of the world that are affected by conflict. It was initiated by RTC but developed together with a consortium of partners – ACT Cambodia, the Nansen network in the Balkans, and COPA in East Africa. In addition, universities were asked to come on board in order to make it a truly academic programme – something RTC and its partners had never done before. ACTS tries to combine academic principles and requirements with practice-based learning. It is based on the principles of action research (AR), which are elaborated in the next section. The idea is that by carrying out research in their own work environments, and comparing their findings with existing thinking in the field of peacebuilding, the participants will not only become more effective in their work but will also contribute to global theory development from a Southern, practitioner perspective. In this way the programme aims to shift the centre of gravity of the peacebuilding field from the ivory towers of universities toward the field, and from the North to the South.

More specifically, the aims of the programme are to:

- provide accessible, affordable, relevant, high quality post-graduate education in the field of conflict transformation;
- create better peace practice through more analytical, reflective, reflexive, critical and adaptive practitioners;
- generate theory from practice and linking practice to theory in order to increase the contribution of practitioners to the global body of theory on conflict transformation and influence policymakers;
- support and promote sustained multi-level and multi-sectoral work for peace and justice within regional areas through improved skills and practice of individual practitioners, and thereby contribute to peace in communities. (ACTS 2007)

In 2005, the first Master course began in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, with participants from all over Asia. Soon after, a second programme began in Novi Sad, Serbia, for participants from different parts of the Balkans. In 2006, both Centres started a second course, while the first was still ongoing. This time, the Centre in Serbia also recruited participants from the Middle East. The set-up of the programme allows students from various countries to attend without abandoning their work and families: as the course is based on research in people's own practice, much of the work is done at home. Over the course of two years, the participants come together in the ACTS Centre six times to attend a ten-day seminar. During these seminars, theory is introduced and AR findings are exchanged and discussed.

The ACTS Asia Centre based in Phnom Penh is run by a consortium of three partners: the local NGO ACT, which coordinates the programme, Pannasastra University of Cambodia, and RTC. ACTS Balkans and Middle East is organised jointly by the Nansen network, Novi Sad University, and RTC. In the coming years, ACTS is also hoping to start programmes for East Africa, in cooperation with COPA, and Western Europe, with a Centre in the UK.

As mentioned, two ACTS courses are currently running in Asia and the Balkans/Middle East. At the time of writing³⁴⁴, the first cohorts are nearing their completion. This means that the programme is at a relatively early stage to discuss outcomes and impact. Nonetheless, some interesting lessons can already be learned at this point.

³⁴⁴ June 2007

8.1.2 Development and implementation of the course

The curriculum of ACTS consists of six modules, taught in six regional seminars over the course of two years. The first four modules contain theory on various aspects of conflict and peacebuilding, while the fifth and sixth module are left open to provide room for discussion on the action research (AR) of the participants. ‘Core papers’ have been developed for each of the first four modules. They depict the main theories and discussions with regard to a particular topic, including references pointing the participant to additional literature. The core papers were written by people with both academic credentials and practical experience, and revised during a curriculum development workshop in Kampala in the fall of 2004, at which all of the NGO partners (but not the universities) were present, and which I also attended. The content of the first four modules, and their corresponding core papers, is outlined below. In addition to these four, a fifth core paper is used throughout the course: the one on AR as a methodology.

- Module One is entitled *Theories of conflict: Its causes and dynamics, and implications for addressing it*. It addresses theories about conflict and violence, and ways of analysing and classifying them. In addition, it deals with various schools of thinking about causes of conflict – psychological, social, political and economic.
- Module Two is called *Conflict, power and change: Engaging with actors, systems, structure and policies*. Its core paper discusses ideas and theories regarding social change, the constraints and opportunities posed by power and structures, and ways in which various actors can relate to each other to bring about change. In the terminology of Part Two, it deals with ways in which the *agency* of actors can affect the *structure* created by systems and power differences.
- Module Three is named *Designing and facilitating conflict transformation processes* and maps a wide array of ways in which peacebuilding processes can be shaped, discussing various methods, designs and approaches. The core paper addresses the peacebuilding activities of CSOs as well as official actors, and includes discussion on mediation, peace negotiation, and postconflict strategies for sustainable peace.
- Module Four focuses on the latter challenge and is called *Building sustainable peace*. It deals mainly with the concept of postconflict reconstruction, looking at various socio-economic and political aspects that come to the fore after violence has

ended and the task at hand is to build and shape political, economic and juridical systems that can sustain peace.³⁴⁵

For modules Five and Six no core papers were designed. These modules were envisioned as follows.

- Module Five was left open in order to make space for a discussion on the AR of the participants, to look at preliminary thesis drafts, exchange findings and experiences, reflect on AR as a methodology and prepare for the finalisation of the theses. It was also thought that this module could be used to discuss any content that the participants felt needed attention but that had not yet been addressed in the previous modules. This could include more region-specific issues.
- Module Six was planned to be a larger conference at which the participants would present their findings. The conferences are to invite various stakeholders from the region – including the organisations of the participants, possibly some of the beneficiaries of these organisations, other peace NGOs, and academics – as well as some people from the other regions in order to facilitate exchange, solidarity and the building of a global ACTS network. The conference of Module Six is seen to be an important element in the strategy to disseminate the results of AR done in the framework of ACTS. In addition, an ACTS Journal is being set up in which the findings of the participants will be published. Section 8.6.2 discusses these dissemination strategies in some more detail.

As the first courses progressed and Module Five came nearer, there was some uncertainty about how to fill it in. However, the regional Centres took the lead to design the fifth seminar for their region. In Asia, where the first Module Five was taught in March 2007, it focused entirely on the AR findings of the participants and their presentation. Significant attention was devoted to preparing the participants for the regional conference of Module Six. Thus, the fifth seminar included feedback on and adjustment of the draft Master theses and certificate papers of the participant as well as sessions on how to present one's findings to a broader audience.

The modules are facilitated by a team of three tutors. Two tutors are from the region and the third is 'international' – often a staff member of RTC, one of the people who took the lead in developing the readers, or a

³⁴⁵ The core papers can be found in the literature list as ACTS 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, and 2005e.

staff member of one of the ACTS coordinating NGOs in the other regions. The tutors tend to be experienced peacebuilding trainers with an NGO background. Staff of the participating universities take part in some, but not all of the sessions.

The ACTS programme aims to attract participants from among peace practitioners – people working for local and international CSOs in various countries in the region. In the first edition of ACTS Asia, sixteen participants from six countries³⁴⁶ participate. The second group consists of fourteen participants, again from six different countries³⁴⁷. The Serbia-based course attracted seventeen participants from various parts of the Balkans for its first edition. The second group, consisting of fifteen students, also includes people from Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Applicants are selected based on their experience, current involvement in peacebuilding, and motivation to take part in the course. Given the aims of ACTS – to help practitioners become more effective in their work and to increase the voice of practitioners in global theory-formation – academic qualifications are not considered particularly important, at least not by the RTC and its partner NGOs in the regions. However, given that it is an academic Master course, the participating universities have added an additional entry requirement: a Bachelor's degree. When it turned out that there were many applicants who did not have a degree but who did seem otherwise very fitting candidates for the course, it was decided after some discussion to allow such people to participate. This group will not obtain a Master's degree but will receive a certificate instead. At the end of the course they produce a final paper instead of a full-fledged Master's thesis.

In addition to the two current Centres in Asia and the Balkans-Middle East, new Centres may be created in the coming years in Africa, the Americas, and Western Europe. Although RTC's partner in East Africa, COPA, has been involved in the development of ACTS from the start, the start-up of an ACTS Centre there has been delayed. The main problem has been to find a suitable university partner in the region³⁴⁸. In 2006, talks began with the organisation Centro para la Paz in Guatemala to begin a centre for the Americas. This organisation is already linked to RTC as part of the ACTION network that RTC established in 1999. Since February it has been discussing the programme with a number of

³⁴⁶ Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, India, Nepal and New Zealand.

³⁴⁷ Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

³⁴⁸ Other issues affecting the programme in Africa are discussed in 8.3.2

universities in the region. In the UK, talks are underway with Huron University about the establishment of an ACTS Centre for peace practitioners who are based in the Western Europe.

In addition to all this, ACTS has talked to various universities in Europe, the US and Australia about gaining global accreditation by a Northern university for the programme in all ACTS regions. The reason for that is that in most of the countries in which the participants live and work, a Master's degree from a European or American institution is regarded more highly than one from a local university. Thus, 'Northern' accreditation of their degree, in addition to the accreditation provided by Novi Sad University or Pannasastra University, would be considered a benefit. Such accreditation could also help in the acceptance of ACTS research findings and their publication by recognised academic journals. However, universities are reluctant to accredit a practitioner-oriented programme that is taught abroad and that has already been developed before they came on board. A problem arises with regard to quality control, as accreditation visitation committees usually do not have the resources to travel around the world in order to assess the quality of the teaching and research taking place. As a result, the efforts to gain global accreditation have not yet yielded any results.

8.2 Improving the learning of local peace NGOs through action research

In chapter three of this study I discussed various ways, or levels, of learning. The most profound type of learning, according to the literature, was third-order or double-loop learning. To recapitulate what I wrote in section 3.1.2: where first-order learning uses a pre-given set of knowledge, second-order learning is the creation of new knowledge by learning in action. It is a cyclical trial-and-error process of action and adaptation and involves asking questions, reflecting, and adjusting while acting. Third-order learning, it was added, goes a step further in that it also includes questioning the validity of the tasks and problems posed. It does not take the structural framework in which the action takes place for granted but questions the ultimate aims and principles that underlie the action. Where second-order learning leads to adjustment at the tactical level in order to meet one's aims more effectively, third-order learning may lead to strategic changes, such as an adjustment of the aims themselves.

Third-order learning adds another cycle to the learning cycle of action, reflection, adjustment, and renewed action; namely the cycle of self-

reflection that involves the questioning of underlying values. In the terminology of ACTS this is the ‘reflexive’ cycle. It entails asking difficult questions about my own role in the activity in which I am engaged. What implicit theories, assumptions and experiences do I bring to this action, and do they lead to any distortions? Should my assumptions be modified? Because third-order learning adds another cycle, it is often referred to as ‘double-loop learning’. In double-loop learning, the values and assumptions underlying my actions are reflected upon and tested simultaneously with the reflection and testing of the actions themselves.

The concept of action learning or action research (AR) builds on this idea of third-order learning. Here, too, learning takes place by doing, reflection, and experimentation – while at the same time there is a reflection on the underlying implicit theories and values of the learner. The action learning cycle is depicted in the following figure, which clearly shows the double loop.

Figure 8.1: Action learning³⁴⁹

The outer circle represents the action cycle, in which an activity is carried out. This starts from an analysis of the situation, followed by the

³⁴⁹ ACTS 2005a: 11

planning of the action and the action itself. Next, a reflection takes place: how did I do? Do the results confirm my original analysis of the situation – or should it be adapted? At the same time, another research (or learning) cycle takes place. It begins by making explicit the understanding of the world (theories, values, assumptions) that underlies my analysis of the situation. This leads to the formulation of a plan to test my theory during the action that I undertake. This testing consists mainly of being aware of my underlying theory during the action and being open to the possibility that it might prove to be inconsistent with the events that take place as a result of my action. In the reflection phase I do not consider only my action and its results, but also the way in which they relate to the underlying theories and assumptions that I have made explicit earlier on in the process. This leads me to adjust these theories and assumptions, and a new learning cycle may begin. (ACTS 2005a, Cummings 2004)

An important difference between AR and ‘traditional’ research is that while “traditional academic research denies the relationships between the investigator and the empirical object”, AR recognises that the presence and actions of a researcher have an impact on the reality he studies, and vice versa. According to AR, “the ambiguous, dynamic and changing world cannot be understood from the detached position of the pure observer”. (Boonstra 2004: 17) Thus, action researchers do not strive to be objective observers who are separate from what is being observed. On the contrary, they study a reality of which they are part and explicitly take into account their own role in shaping this reality. In response to their growing understanding of what they are studying through AR, they may introduce changes to this reality in order to examine the results to which those may lead.

ACTS aims to use AR as a way to help peace practitioners to begin looking at their own work in a more systematic manner, to relate their activities more explicitly to their aims and values, to analyse the effectiveness of their work and ask how it could be improved. In other words, ACTS hopes to create learning practitioners – and through them, perhaps, learning organisations as well. In addition, as mentioned, it is hoped that the outcomes of the AR of ACTS participants lead to the generation of new theories or the adjustment of existing ones in the peacebuilding field. AR is applied in ACTS in the following way. After the principles of the approach are introduced, making use of an especially developed reader, the participants first carry out small AR projects in order to experiment with the method. Next, they decide on a larger project – for example, to study a project they are involved in and find out how it may be improved. This project becomes the ‘red line’

running throughout the two-year Master programme. The participants are expected to relate the theories that are introduced during the seminars to their projects of study and look for additional sources that may shed light on their research questions. They are asked to record their reflections and findings in both learning loops – so both with regard to the project of study and their own role and theories – in a journal. Aided by the journals, they discuss their reflections and progress during the seminars. At the end of the course, the AR projects lead to Master theses, which the students need to obtain their degree and which, it is hoped, may contain new or adjusted theories that can be disseminated and discussed in the wider peacebuilding field.

8.3 North-South and academic-practitioner cooperation to implement the programme

ACTS is implemented by a consortium of organisations, including an NNGO, a number of SNGOs, and academic institutions. As elsewhere in this study cooperation among these groups has been identified as a difficult issue, this section takes a closer look at how this works in the case of ACTS. Is its NNGO-SNGO cooperation shaped by the aid chain model, or have equal partnerships been achieved? And given that so little cooperation takes place between Southern peace NGOs and Southern academia in general, how is this cooperation going inside ACTS?

8.3.1 Global standards and regional variation

At present the ACTS structure looks as follows.

- There is a ‘governance group’ at the top of the decision-making structure which consists of the peace organisation partners: ACT, COPA, Nansen, and RTC. Recently, the participating universities have also been invited to nominate a representative to become part of this group. Its role is to act as the guardian of the vision, engage in risk management, keep an eye on resourcing, and set reporting requirements.
- Accountable to this group is the ‘leadership and management group’ which focuses mainly on the course itself – more specifically content, delivery, quality and standards, and philosophy. It consists of the ACTS coordinators in the regions (employees of the local partner NGOs) and RTC.

- A third group that is in turn accountable to the management group is responsible for ‘on site implementation within agreed parameters’. Until recently the universities were represented only at this level. (ACTS 2006)

The division of labour between RTC and the its partners in the regions appears to be relatively clear to most involved and to be working quite well. The roles and responsibilities of RTC include investigating possibilities for global accreditation, providing international tutors, organising tutor training, and continuing to develop the core curriculum. In addition RTC is responsible for the development of new ACTS centres, the provision of ongoing support and advice to the regional centres, and the facilitation of exchange and joint learning between the centres. The latter includes organising regular meetings as well as developing and implementing a system for monitoring and evaluation. It is also a role of RTC to work on the dissemination of research outcomes to a broader audience. Finally, RTC plays a major role in fundraising for the programme. (ACTS 2007b)

The NGOs in the regions are responsible for the actual implementation of the course in their regions. This includes interacting with the local academic partner, coordinating the organisation of the programme, and recruiting participants and regional teaching teams. The NGOs may also develop regional course materials to complement the core curriculum, as required. Financially, the regional NGOs are responsible for the allocation of scholarships and for regional fundraising to cover local costs and scholarships. (ACTS 2007b)

A question has arisen within ACTS about the global versus the regional characteristics of the programme: what aspects make up the core of ACTS and should be the same for all regions, and what elements may vary according to local conditions and preferences? In ACTS Asia, for example, there has been some discussion about whether the participatory teaching methods of RTC were appropriate in a region where people are much more used to more traditional lecturing. It was not suggested to abandon participant-led methods, but some felt these should be complemented by more lecturing sessions. A recent internal review of the way AR has so far been implemented in the programme, carried out by AR expert Diana Francis who also wrote the methodology reader for ACTS, states that one of the regional coordinators was “concerned about the relationship between the courses being run by ACTS Balkans [and Middle East] and ACTS Asia and felt that it was important to review commonalities and differences and what degrees and areas of difference

were acceptable or desirable.” The coordinator felt that more clarity was required about the extent or “regional autonomy” of the Centres in determining the content and organisation of the course, although she emphasised that such autonomy should not alter the “context of connectedness and a common frame”. (Francis 2007: 16)

This implies a deeper question, phrased as follows in Francis’s AR Review: “[a]re we looking for a family of independent and different institutions and practices or for some greater degree of structural relatedness, common standards and systems, etc?” (Francis 2007: 23) All involved agree that some measure of regional variation is desirable, and that more regional content – like literature written by people from the region – would make the programmes more relevant to their context. After all, not only culture, but also the nature of conflict and peace differs between the regions. Thinking and discussions on this issue within ACTS do not question this, but centre on the issue of finding the right balance between regional variation and adhesion to the main principles of the course. In addition there is the issue of quality control. As I will discuss in the next section, ACTS hopes to acquire accreditation by a Northern academic institution for the whole, global programme. To make this possible, some common standards and content will probably be required.

8.3.2 North-South NGO partnerships in ACTS

In chapter four I discussed North-South partnerships between NGOs in peacebuilding. Despite good intentions, equal partnerships involving two-way exchanges of knowledge and policy ideas are often difficult to achieve due to the inherent inequalities of the funding chain and the weaker knowledge base of Southern actors that results from a lack of recognition of indigenous knowledge and a lack of Southern capacity for reflection, research and documentation. The chapter showed that where more equal partnerships have been achieved this is often due to trust standing relations that have developed over a longer period and that are made possible by long-term core funding rather than short term project funding. Such partnerships are based on the strength and contributions of both sides, each of which brings added value to the relationship. This means that they are possible mainly with stronger Southern organisations.

The NGO partnerships in ACTS tend to reflect this second model of longer-term, equal partnership. Relations were not started as part of the implementation of ACTS, but preceded the programme. Personal

contact and trust had already been established and the partners had worked together in the past. Although the initial idea for ACTS came from RTC, it was based on consultations with partners and together with them it was further developed. RTC emphasises that it wants to avoid being a 'money depot' for the regions but strives for equal relationships in which each partner provides added value.

There is, however, one partnership in which the issues discussed in chapter four do play at least some role. In Africa North-South issues seem to affect the relationship more than in other regions. Between RTC and COPA there have been some difficulties around the question how much freedom of operation each partner has in developing the programme in Africa. After negotiations with several universities in the region faltered, COPA decided to go ahead and start the programme while the search for a university partner continued. RTC disagreed with this course of action, which as it turned out was also not possible due to the terms of a major donor. However, by the time this all became clear (and RTC essentially pulled the plug), the organisation of the course was already quite far progressed and this led to some resentment on the part of COPA. Still, the organisation decided to go ahead with the development of an ACTS Centre and began talking to new potential university partners. However, where in the earlier stage COPA had accused RTC of acting too much on its own, now, the tables turned and RTC feels uncomfortable with the lack of consultation of COPA with RTC as it negotiates with universities. Although RTC does not want to impose anything, it does want to be involved in order to ensure that the vision and reputation of both ACTS and RTC are safeguarded. RTC staff speculate that the colonial history may have something to do with the fact that equal, trust-based partnerships prove more difficult to develop in East Africa than elsewhere.

Another interesting episode in the context of partnership and peacebuilding was the interaction between RTC and COPA on the one hand, and a university in Uganda on the other. In 2004 the parties came quite close to agreeing on the terms of the joint creation of an ACTS Centre with this university. However, it then became apparent that the university only wanted RTC to help them set up the programme, after which it expected the NNGO to leave the programme for implementation by local groups. This showed that there were different visions of partnership. In the university's view, development is about building capacity and then pulling out whereas in RTC's view, all bring something different to the partnership.

In other regions, views of partnership correspond better with one another. Still, thinking takes place about the best partnership model for ACTS in the longer term, once the regional centres become independent financially. RTC speculates that at one extreme, one could conceive the regions becoming independent and RTC pulling out. This does not correspond with the type of partnership most people involved have in mind. At the other extreme, all three partners (RTC, local university, and local coordinating NGO) will continue to play equally strong roles in keeping ACTS running. In between, one could imagine RTC playing a purely coordinating role, or a role that differs depending on the phase and needs of the region.

8.3.2 Cooperation between academia and NGOs

As interactions between NGOs and knowledge institutions hardly take place in the countries analysed, the ACTS model of cooperation between the coordinating NGOs and the universities in the regional Centres provides an interesting exception. In the ACTS model of cooperation, the responsibilities of the local universities include providing advice and support to local NGO partner to ensure that ACTS meets relevant accreditation guidelines, providing a university course administrator, supporting the teaching and provide staff as and when required, and working with the local NGO partner on areas such as marketing, recruitment, assessment, teaching and learning resources (such as rooms and libraries). (ACTS 2007b)

In both regions, cooperation among the partners has made possible the accreditation of the Master's degree by the local universities. It took some puzzling to fit the pre-developed programme into the requirements the universities posed to a Master's programme. At Novi Sad University these requirements include that a programme should consist of fifteen courses and a thesis. The ACTS programme with its six modules was not altered but for the purposes of the application for accreditation, various elements of it, such as assignments, were labelled individual courses. Accreditation in Novi Sad also required that three ACTS tutors officially became visiting faculty of the university, something that was also arranged.³⁵⁰

In Cambodia, as the following citation from the AR Review illustrates, Pannasastra University worked cooperatively with the ACTS tutors to

³⁵⁰ Interview with staff of ACTS Balkans / Middle East. Belgrade, Serbia, 3 November 2006.

ensure that the theses produced by the ACTS participants were in line with what the university expected of a Master thesis.

“At the meeting we held with them, [the dean] outlined what they looked for in MA theses and I told him the structure and elements we were helping the students to plan. He agreed with me that there was a perfect match and assured us all that there should be no problem – if the students could fulfil these requirements. He most generously offered to look at the theses informally as they came in, giving feedback where necessary on what would need to be changed before they were officially handed in for marking, if they were to make the grade.” (Francis 2007: 17)

However, there have also been difficulties in the cooperation between the NGOs and universities. In large part, these difficulties have revolved around AR as a methodology. It clashed to some extent with the more traditional research methods of university staff, who had trouble seeing AR as valid³⁵¹. In at least one of the courses, this led to frustration among the students who received conflicting feedback and advice from the ACTS tutors and the university. (Francis 2007) The differences concerning methodology do not yet seem to have been resolved entirely, or at least not in both Centres. Suggestions are made for ways in which ACTS can raise the awareness of university staff of the use of the methodology, for example by organising a conference on AR with international academics.

There are several deeper issues underlying this discussion. First of all, there is the question of whether to consider the capacity building of the universities – at least with regard to AR – as a positive side effect, or even an aim, of the programme. As the AR Review puts it, “[w]hile we want to ensure high standards and academic recognition for our students, we presumably would also want to honour and strengthen local academic capacities, rather than undermine them, and explore with them the relationship between culture and academic approach.” (Francis 2007: 23) However, as is already implied by this citation, such capacity building requires openness to the ideas and perspectives of the institution whose capacity is being built³⁵². This leads us to the second issue: that of partnership and ownership³⁵³. It is difficult for the universities to be true partners which ‘co-own’ the ACTS programme, because they have not been part of developing it.

³⁵¹ Not all universities necessarily prefer ‘traditional’ research methods over AR. Many European universities in fact use AR. In the US it is less accepted. It may be that the universities in ACTS are modelled after the US system more than the European one. For Pannasastra this is certainly the case.

³⁵² See 4.7

³⁵³ Also discussed in 4.7

One way to begin to build such ownership would be to include them in decision-making about the programme as much as possible. Up until recently the universities did not have a central position in the governance of the programme. This has now changed, and it remains to be seen what effect that will have. An RTC staff member remarked that although the inclusion of the universities in the decision making structure was necessary, it is also risky. It is hoped that university representatives may not push too strongly for traditional research and thereby jeopardise the basic philosophy of ACTS, of which AR is a central part. It is understandable that ACTS staff hesitate to make concessions on the approach that has been so carefully developed and in which they believe so strongly. Still, finding ways to develop a true partnership dialogue over content with the universities seem to be priorities as the programme moves forward. This could also help the Centres to find more regional content, achieve more academic input into tutor teams and the course in general, and become more familiar with the way Master courses are generally taught – all necessary steps identified by the AR Review (Francis 2007).

8.4 Education as a scaffold: teaching the course

In this section I turn to the course itself, asking whether, based on the limited information available at this early stage of the programme, the ACTS course has indeed functioned as a scaffold supporting the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace NGOs.

8.4.1 Expectations and opinions of students

In May 2006 I had conversations in Phnom Penh with three Cambodian participants in ACTS Asia. Among other things, we discussed their expectations of the course and the extent to which these had been met so far. Through ACTS, the participants expected to be able to

- share experiences with participants from other regions
- reflect on their work
- learn new insights from the course
- develop and improve their work further, and find good mechanisms to work towards goals
- test their knowledge and whether they “are doing things right”

- obtain a Master's degree, which means that they have something to show for their knowledge and are taken more seriously³⁵⁴

At the time of the conversations, when the programme had been running for about six months, the participants made clear that so far their expectations were largely being met. They had already learned a lot from the course. To the extent that they were not getting out of ACTS what they had expected, they felt this was due mostly to their own lack of time to spend on it. The participants were generally positive about the content, method, and tutors of the course. In addition, some specific benefits were mentioned.

- The most successful aspect of ACTS was considered to be the knowledge sharing with tutors and participants. The peacebuilding knowledge and AR skills were deemed very useful. Participants also mentioned that ACTS was helping them to document their experiences and reflect and learn.
- The AR element was considered very useful because it was not detached from the work of the participants. One participant was initially confused about AR but said she had now understood that she was supposed to write about her own work, thereby improving the work itself. All three participants planned to use their AR project to improve the way of working of their organisation.
- The course was considered time-intensive but this was also seen as normal for a degree programme and was to be expected. It was generally manageable for the participants. However, the input asked from them was the maximum they were able to give; their organisations would not allow them to do any more. Some participants received time off from their organisation to work on the reading and research; others did so in their free time.
- The atmosphere among the group was considered very good and open. There was high trust and much sharing. People also felt free to challenge each other constructively. One of the international tutors confirmed that the issue of rivalry, which often limits openness in interactions among NGOs (see 5.4.4), plays less of a role within the ACTS courses. The sense of group identity during seminars appears to be stronger than competition. The fact that the participants are recruited from the wider region plays a role in this; there is less direct competition

³⁵⁴ Interviews with ACTS Asia participants. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 22, 23 and 26 May 2006.

over funding than between people working in the same country.³⁵⁵

- Through ACTS the participants felt part of a regional network. Information was shared by e-mail about what was going on in the various countries and useful documents were exchanged. The participants really felt connected to each other and “shared their fears and joy”. Regional solidarity was fostered, for example when a Nepal solidarity event was organised in Phnom Penh. Participants also directly learned from each other. For example, an interfaith peacebuilding initiative, modelled after the one ACT is running in Cambodia, was being started in Burma. There was not yet a similar sense of being part of a *global* ACTS network, however.³⁵⁶

8.4.2 Capacities of the students

In one region in particular, the academic writing abilities of the participants are not as good as expected. In response, a training course in academic writing is being organised by the university. A more general issue, however, relates to the basic abilities of the students to digest texts and understand abstractions. There is no significant difference in this regard between people who are eligible for a Master’s degree and those who are not. Since the participants are used to practical work, abstract thinking and discussion is difficult for some of them. The AR Review reflects on this:

“[t]he vision of this MA course was to enable people doing important work in practice to translate their practice based knowledge into widely useable insights and theory. An assumption was made, I think, that all practitioners would be able to do this. Now we have to assess whether this is our experience. We are not in the business of encouraging people into fields where they are likely to fail.” (Francis 2007: 18)

An issue closely related to this is the language barrier. Particularly in Asia, it is difficult for some participants to express themselves in English and to fully follow the explanations of the tutors. ACTS is struggling with the question whether there may be a way round this problem. Raising entry requirements for English proficiency may close the programme off to some peacebuilders who could otherwise benefit and contribute greatly. The same dilemma applies to tightening entry requirements more generally in order to deal with the issue of the

³⁵⁵ Interview with ACTS international tutor. Birmingham, UK, 10 April 2006.

³⁵⁶ Interviews with ACTS Asia participants. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 22, 23 and 26 May 2006.

academic skills of participants. On the one hand, this seems a necessary step, while on the other, it risks jeopardising the aim of providing opportunities for development and capacity building to motivated peace practitioners.

8.4.3 Learning and development of the students

In ACTS Asia, according to the coordinator, change at the level of the individual participant can be observed in many instances. In one case, two students from the same country but from different religious groups, who at first hardly communicated with each other, became enthusiastic about each other's work, and even began to cooperate in their work back home. Another example is of a certificate student who never received academic education, but began to read books. In addition this participant actively passes the newly gained knowledge on to colleagues, even organising week-long sessions to report back after each module.³⁵⁷

In the Balkans, the course coordinator also observes changes in the participants. They are starting to ask more in-depth questions, particularly regarding AR. Some participants have learned through ACTS to include their target groups more in their planning process. They are also better involving their colleagues and others in reflection, and they now know which questions to ask for such reflection to be valuable. The ACTS Balkans team has also received feedback from some of the organisations in which participants work, albeit only those organisations that are part of the Nansen network that is a partner in the ACTS course. Nansen management, which regularly visits its offices throughout the region, has observed changes in the staff that participate in ACTS. They are more systematic, plan better, think of things more in advance, connect their work with theories, put programmes in a broader framework, and reflect more.³⁵⁸

These individual changes that the coordinators refer to seem to be closely related to the AR approach and its emphasis on reflection – both on activities and the theories and assumptions the participants bring to them. It seems likely that such reflection will lead to the kind of more systematic thinking and improved planning observed by the Nansen network. Similarly, the AR Review found after talking to students that AR had “become a way of doing things. It had opened the way forward

³⁵⁷ Interview with ACTS Asia coordinator. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

³⁵⁸ Interview with staff of ACTS Balkans / Middle East. Belgrade, Serbia, 3 November 2006.

Interview with staff member of Nansen network. Belgrade, Serbia, 3 November 2006.

in conflict transformation and had made them more confident in what they were doing.” (Francis 2007)

Despite these positive signs of learning from AR, however, there have also been some problems in the development of the AR skills of participants. The AR Review revealed these issues after attending the presentations given by participants on their research findings and looking at the first thesis drafts. This is a particularly striking finding in view of the enthusiasm with which the participants talk about AR and the fact that in one region, according to the tutors, this approach in fact came more naturally to the students than traditional research did. When in the Asian course, during an introduction of AR, tutors referred to traditional methods for comparison, this caused confusion among some students. AR to them seemed normal enough but what was meant by traditional research methods was not understood. Still, in both regions the understanding and use of AR by some of the participants has remained limited. The AR Review states that “the students had not entirely understood the way the ‘I’ not only could but needed to be present in the research, or that the research should be done mainly in the course of action rather than after it.” In addition, not all students had clearly understood that “it is the work they do – or some episode or aspect of it – that should be the focus of their action research, and that AR is not some kind of ‘external’ evaluation or impact assessment.”(Francis 2007: 5)

It is possible that the universities have played a role in this by causing confusion about the extent to which the method was actually acceptable in a Master programme. According to the AR Review there is some indication that participants initially used the method, but back-tracked when they were writing their Master theses, for which they felt the method was perhaps inadequate. In fact, in one region the non-Master students were found better able to stick to an AR approach as they were not bogged down by what they felt were the requirements of a Master’s degree.

8.4.4 Cultural issues

Reflecting on the difficulties students have with AR, Francis writes that “there is a fundamental issue here about whose model of academic education we are following. Do we see our current ACTS model as unquestionably the one to follow?” She reflects that AR may be based on Western ways of thinking in the sense that “[n]ot only the kind of scrutiny (particularly self-scrutiny) that we are advocating in AR (as our

Asia colleagues have told us), but also the heavy emphasis on analysis that is particular to the RTC family and also to Western academia, are counter-cultural in many places.” (Francis 2007: 11) Although an emphasis on analysis is not specific to action research, it may be true that Western universities place more emphasis on critical thinking than many non-Western ones.

On the other hand, the way the Asian students felt AR came more naturally to them than traditional research suggests that other elements of it may in fact be quite culturally appropriate in that part of the world. For example, the separation between observer and object of study that is central to traditional research is an alien concept to many non-Western cultures (see 2.5), and AR is markedly different in this regard. The applied nature of the programme was also applauded by the participants I talked to in Cambodia.

8.4.5 The meaning of ‘academic’

Although I have not yet been able to confirm this hypothesis, some of the statements I have read and heard during my involvement with ACTS gives me the sense that there is some unease among people involved with the concept of ‘academic’. They are not sure what it entails and whether it may be threatening to their way of teaching. The picture some ACTS staff have of what makes up an academic course may not always be realistic. The AR Review for example suggests that using readers may be too much spoon-feeding or that handouts summarising literature are not fitting to an academic course. From my own experience at the university, readers and handouts can be very helpful in an academic course, as long as they are not presented as ‘the truth’, sources are referred to, the reading of other texts is stimulated and critical reading is taught. The last point, critical reading, may be an issue in ACTS: the AR Review notes that the readers have in some instances been used in a “painting by numbers way”, rather than “being understood in themselves and so being useful in a flexible and responsive process of research-shaping” (Francis 2007: 5).

Another example relates to staff perceptions of what defines academic teaching relations; some feel the relationship between students and teachers is more distant at universities than it is in NGO training workshops. However, this may be more a cultural difference: hierarchical teaching relations are probably more part of the academic cultures of Serbia and Cambodia than they are in Amsterdam or Birmingham. In any case, it is clear that ACTS continues to look for the

best way to give shape to a programme that is academic but at the same time integrates the positive elements from the interactive training experience of RTC and its partners. An interesting conclusion that emerges from this section, and that may help explain the findings in 8.3.3 regarding cooperation with the universities, is that cultural differences may exist not only between parts of the world but also between academic and NGO cultures.

8.4.6 Development of course content

Over the past few years, various thoughts have been raised with regard to the course content and how it may be further developed. Already mentioned was the issue of using more region-specific content in addition to, or perhaps partly in replacement of, the material that is used in all Centres. Related is the search for an optimal balance between setting standards internationally and ensuring regional ownership. Recently this point was raised again as the Centres developed Modules Five and Six, which had been left largely open to fill in as the course progressed. The question was raised to what extent these modules needed to be the same in each region, and whether general guidelines needed to be developed at the global management level. (ACTS 2006)

Another balance that staff members feel needs to be found is between, on the one hand, being rigorous about assessment tasks, and making this clear to the participants from the start, and on the other hand emphasising self-reflection and learning. It is difficult to assess self-reflection and some people felt they were being subjected to psycho-analysis. This relates to the question of how far one may invade into the personal lives of participants as part of the self-reflection necessary for AR. There are cultural differences that play a role here; Asians may be more private about personal issues than people from other regions. Still, there are ways in which self-reflection can be stimulated without prying too deeply, and the tutors now feel they have begun to strike the right balance. (Francis 2007; ACTS 2006)

As might be expected, people start to see gaps in the content offered as the programme progresses, or perhaps more adequately, areas in which further development would be desirable. Different ACTS staff members have different priorities, including disarmament, reconciliation, reconstruction, and the relationship between religion and

peacebuilding.³⁵⁹ In the Balkans there was mention of the need to bring the development dimension in more explicitly and to address the relationship between conflict, peace and development.³⁶⁰ However, in Asia this feeling was not shared.³⁶¹ This again suggests that it could be good to introduce more variation between the regions as far as content is concerned.

8.5 Strengthening the knowledge base: documentation and dissemination

As we have seen, earlier chapters identified a need to enhance the capacities of peace practitioners to document and disseminate their knowledge so as to increase Southern knowledge bases and achieve more equal North-South and practitioner-academic contributions to global debates. Indeed, as we have also seen, these needs correspond with some of the aims of ACTS. To the extent that any conclusions can be drawn at this early stage of the programme, this section looks at whether and how these aims are being achieved so far.

8.5.1 Research outcomes so far

In Asia, the first Master theses have been produced. The AR Review judges their general quality positively:

“there was some wonderfully cogent and reflective writing in some of the theses, which demonstrated that bright and keen students with sufficient control over their working lives – or at least a match between their research ambitions and work possibilities – had been able to get all they needed from the course and related resources to ‘run with’ action research. I am [...] hopeful [...] that most if not all of the theses will be adequate and that some will be excellent – which for a first round is a very good result. One student’s discussion of AR as an approach [...] is so eloquent that I think it would be very useful to future students.” (Francis 2007: 10)

Still, as was already mentioned in 8.4.4, many of the theses reflect little AR, and the same goes for the preliminary findings presented in the Balkans:

“we could catch glimpses of the action, but in many cases that was all we got, and the self was hardly mentioned and difficult to detect.

³⁵⁹ This was discussed during the Business Meeting of the global management group which I attended in February 2007.

³⁶⁰ Interview with staff of ACTS Balkans / Middle East. Belgrade, Serbia, 3 November 2006.

³⁶¹ Telephone conversation with ACTS Asia coordinator. 8 December 2006.

While in the Balkans plans the ‘own action’ had been largely displaced by interviews and questionnaires, in Asia the space was mostly taken either by context background or by theory, and in some cases the theory was largely undigested and scarcely relevant. [...] Where there was action, there were not often, at this point, clear cycles of research.” (Francis 2007: 8)

8.5.2 Dissemination of outcomes

ACTS aims to generate knowledge through AR by its participants. New theories are to be created based on AR results and patterns emerging – all from the perspective of the practitioner. One of the aims is to shift the centre of gravity of the peacebuilding field from the ivory towers of universities more toward the field. There are various potential audiences that could benefit from the findings. In the following figure, the cylinder in the centre depicts the ACTS program.³⁶²

Figure 8.2: Audiences for ACTS findings³⁶³

Ideally, the AR process itself engages the organisations of participants as well as perhaps the beneficiaries of their programmes and possibly other resource persons, and would naturally spread knowledge through the interactions that take place as part of the research process. At this

³⁶² Perhaps it should be redesigned as different cylinders or columns which stand for the individual regional Master programmes so that the learning relationships between these programs can also be illustrated.

³⁶³ Figure by Gerd Junne

stage it is difficult to say in far this is occurring at present. The ACTS teams in both regions would like more time and money to visit the organisations of the participants in order to make sure they are involved in the research and to build their understanding of the value of the programme. This would help ensure that insights and knowledge gained by participants are applied in their work when the course is finished. In addition, ACTS staff see a need to develop an alumni policy for better follow-up with former participants and a better tracking of the impact of the course.

In addition to knowledge spreading informally through the research process, ACTS aims to actively disseminate its findings in the following ways.

- As we have seen, the sixth module will be a regional conference at which participants present their research results.
- ACTS aims to encourage and facilitate participation by participants in conferences. At the Asian Peacebuilders Conference in October 2006 several ACTS participants participated as keynote speakers.
- It is hoped that the research findings will be fed into the Nansen and ACT networks, and into the Action Asia network in which the coordinator of ACTS Asia is involved.
- Exchanges between ACTS regions are another way to share findings. Some students from Asia are intended to attend the Balkans conference and vice versa. Pictures and poster presentations are already exchanged among the regions. In addition, international tutors coming from the other regions also provide a connection.
- Last but not least, ACTS is in the process of setting up an international ACTS Journal in which the research findings are to be published. A strategy for ensuring that the Journal reaches relevant audiences is being developed.

8.6 Learning by ACTS itself

8.6.1 Learning attitude

A lot of informal reflection and learning takes place by people involved in ACTS with regard to the way the programme is going and how it can be continuously improved. During conversations and meetings people are willing to be self-critical and question the way things are going. Such learning takes place mainly at the tactical level (how can we do

this thing better?) as the following example, from a conversation Diana Francis had with ACTS Asia's second batch tutors, shows:

"The first thing I was told, with heartfelt emphasis, was how much they had been helped by the experience of the first batch tutors – from their detailed records and reflections, from their conversations, responses and reflections about sessions and their outcomes and responses, and from their materials, activities and insights – even photos." (Francis 2007: 17)

Such learning takes place at all levels of the programme. In fact, staff involved in ACTS actively try to learn from their practice. During and in between seminars reflection takes place and changes are made according to what has been learned. ACTS discusses learning points during Business Meetings and actively creates opportunities for feedback by relative outsiders – such as myself. Learning at a strategic level (are we doing the right thing?) is understandably more difficult than tactical-level learning, but even there people appear open to discussion and reflection. However, a member of the governance group mentioned that during their meetings there is not so much opportunity for reflection and that this takes place mostly in the management team.

The trouble with all this learning is in systematising and documenting it. This leads us to the place of M&E in the learning processes of ACTS.

8.6.2 M&E in the regions

Monitoring in the regional centres takes place mostly at the level of the individual participants and their learning and development. Other levels of impact – organisation, work, community – are considered more difficult to assess. It is also felt that it may be too early to look at these levels.

In Asia it has been decided to look at impact at four (overlapping) levels. Indicators are being developed (mainly by the regional coordinator) as the programme progresses.

- Short-term / student level: after one or two modules.
- Indicators:
 - Are students staying in the course?
 - Use of the library
 - Assignments submitted on time
 - Quality of assignments
 - Frequency of e-mail correspondence
 - Keeping of journal (assessed through journal essays)

- Middle level / students when they go back home / organisation: after one year
- Indicators:
 - Personal change, including: students becoming better able to articulate themselves, daring to speak up
 - Students starting to apply concepts in their work
 - Changes made to projects or work
 - New pieces of work starting to be developed
 - New relationships developing between students around work related matters
 - Meetings with organisations of students about the course and AR projects (does the organisation understand what the student is doing, is the organisation involved)
- Long-term / work itself: after one course. Significant shifts in the way people work and strengthening of the way they already work.
 - Indicators yet to be developed
- In so far as possible, impact on peace in the region
 - Indicators yet to be developed³⁶⁴

Information about impact on all these levels is gathered and documented in module reports after each module, which consists of the results of student and tutor evaluations, a record of comments made by students during the seminar, and general reflections by the ACTS coordinator. In addition, the coordinator tries to visit the organisations of participants (combining it with travelling for Action Asia, a regional network for which she also works) to find out if any changes have taken place. Another way of gathering information for M&E purposes is by holding two evaluations after one year: one with the students and one with the university.³⁶⁵

In the Balkans and Middle East programme the levels of impact have been formulated slightly differently. Indicators have not yet been formulated, but ways of information gathering for each level are being studied.

- The individual level is the most developed. It has various elements:
 - A daily reflection during the seminar.
 - Tutor de-briefings – each day and after each seminar.

³⁶⁴ Interview with ACTS Asia coordinator. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

³⁶⁵ Interview with ACTS Asia coordinator. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 25 May 2006.

- Individual tutorials – which are used for two-way feedback. These have proved valuable. Participants speak more openly in a one-on-one setting. At the tutor debriefings tutors discuss which issues that came up in the tutorials are individual issues and which are more general learning points.
- At the end of the first year, a more detailed individual tutorial which serves as an assessment of the student but in which there is also room for feedback on the part of students.
- Evaluation forms after each seminar – in the first year, forms asked people to grade various elements of the course. This provided clear reports with quantified information, but it was not so useful for the students themselves. Therefore, now a new form has been developed, which focuses on the learning of participants: objectives, process, group, etc. It also helps the students to write their learning journal because the questions on the form give some guidance. However, this kind of qualitative information is difficult to process into an overall report. In addition, it may be necessary to have a more ‘traditional’ evaluation once a year in order to collect information about the quality of tutors, materials etc.
- The daily reflections, tutor debriefings and individual tutorials make it possible to apply lessons while a seminar is still ongoing.
- The organisational level.
 - It is easier to follow those who are part of the Nansen network. For other organisations only participants’ own perceptions of organisational changes are available. The ACTS coordinators are trying to cooperate more with the participants’ organisations. However, obtaining feedback from colleagues is sensitive. They may not be willing to give ACTS too much credit for any organisational changes. They may feel that their colleague has participated primarily for his/her own benefit or wonder why they themselves were not allowed to participate in the course. On their part the ACTS participants may feel they are being investigated by their management and colleagues. If they try to introduce changes, these may meet with resistance.
- Programme / community level.

- It is not yet possible to say much about this level. One tool at this level is the sixth module which will take the form of a public seminar to which colleagues, donors, and people from the projects and target groups of participants will be invited. This will also achieve that members of participants' communities of work feel part of the whole endeavour rather than objects of study.
- At the level of the community, the AR projects provide an entry point. The students are reflexively researching their projects and their own role in them. This will hopefully include the extent to which ACTS has improved their approach and impact.³⁶⁶

8.6.3 Development of global M&E framework

A global ACTS management group meeting in February 2006 noted that an instrument for M&E at the global level was lacking and decided to prioritise its development. In response, RTC contacted me to “accompany” ACTS in the development of a global M&E framework that could draw together the findings of regional-level M&E processes already taking place. People involved in ACTS agree that global-level M&E should draw together findings from monitoring taking place in the region in order to stimulate cross-regional learning and begin making statements about overall impact. In addition it should play a role in structural quality control (deciding and checking standards of quality and making sure that ACTS is the same thing everywhere).

At the time of writing the process to develop global M&E mechanisms that meet these aims has been ongoing for a little over a year. Unfortunately, it has largely remained an added activity for people involved in ACTS and has not become an integral part of learning and planning processes that do take place. It has been difficult to get people involved in the process. Other activities seem to have more priority. In addition, ownership of the process by the regions may be an issue. It is possible that it is seen mainly as something required by the Centre. This raises a number of questions:

- how can ACTS make global-level M&E a central part of work rather than an added activity, that receives little priority?
- How can ACTS create incentives for people to become involved in it?

³⁶⁶ Interview with staff of ACTS Balkans / Middle East. Belgrade, Serbia, 3 November 2006.

- How can ACTS ensure that global M&E facilitates and documents, rather than overlaps with, monitoring already taking place in the regions?

As mentioned in the previous section, a lot of reflection takes place during various meetings and during regional monitoring around the seminars. The outcomes of this reflection find their way into various documents. In addition they do often lead to adjustment of practice – so learning does take place. A global framework may help institutionalise / formalise this a bit, identify possible gaps (areas in which no reflection yet takes place) and stimulate reflection on larger, strategic questions ('are we doing the right thing' rather than 'how can we do things better').

Global evaluation has taken place in the area of AR through Diana Francis' AR review. Global monitoring is done by drawing learning points from various sources together into a paper that I have produced. All this is considered very useful. But the attempts to systematise monitoring and the documentation of lessons at a global level has remained a little difficult. Recently it was decided to look at the three larger questions posed above in a small research project that looks at the M&E literature from the perspective of integrating M&E and learning into organisational processes and by gathering some experiences other organisations have in this regard.

In addition, not much systematic thinking has yet been done with regard to what the most suitable evaluation methods for each aspect and level would be – such as participatory methods to gather the input of the participants and other stakeholders. When it comes to involving the participants (and possibly their organisations) in M&E, the AR projects of the participants may provide an opportunity to capture data on the impact the ACTS programme is having in the work of the participants. Intertwining M&E and AR would be an interesting experiment in itself, and it would bring out information on impact that we otherwise would not have access to. It would probably entail building specific questions into the research design of participants. At an even earlier stage, the ACTS participants may be involved in the development (and, for later courses, refinement) of indicators for M&E of ACTS.

Another issue still waiting to be addressed is to plan for the documentation, sharing and utilisation of M&E results globally, so as to ensure that learning is combined and fed back into the programme. Presently learning is documented in various, somewhat scattered ways.

These include the reports of management group meetings, individual module reports by ACTS coordinators in the regions (which draw on evaluations by students and tutors), the reports of annual evaluations done in the regions with the universities and participants, and lessons learned papers produced by Diana Francis and myself. The global M&E framework is envisioned as a way to systematise and combine all of these. Thus, it becomes a priority to make sure that lessons learned in various places are fed into this framework. Technology may be helpful in the future in linking the Centres together through an intranet site and a common database.

8.7 Concluding remarks

What are the wider implications of the ACTS case study for the questions of Part Three (see page 354)? Here the five questions are answered together. ACTS is an initiative that tries to improve the learning processes of local peace NGOs through the participation of their staff members in its action learning programme. It meets a need voiced by practitioners in the peacebuilding field by offering practice-based action learning Master courses in conflict-affected regions. The course is largely relevant to the participants, who praise its action-orientation in particular. Information from the Balkans and Asia suggests significant learning by the participants, although it would be good to document their personal change stories in more detail. The feedback from Nansen also suggests that this learning is having an impact on the work of the participants, who are more systematic in their planning and reflection and placing their activities in a broader framework. Based on the findings of the AR Review, however, it seems that there is room for improvement regarding the extent to which the reflective and critical skills of the participants are developed.

Knowledge exchange among the participants is considered an important additional benefit of the programme. The action research of participants probably facilitates this exchange as it encourages people to reflect explicitly on their work and draw lessons, which can then be shared. An important obstacle to knowledge sharing among NGO staff, mentioned in earlier chapters, is overcome in the case of ACTS by fostering group identity and by bringing together participants from different countries, which means there is less direct rivalry.

A particularly interesting – though as we have seen also difficult – element of the programme is that it is carried out in cooperation with local NGOs and local universities. Since we saw in chapter five that

such cooperation between academia and practitioners, though desirable, is usually lacking, ACTS is meeting another need in that regard. However, this cooperation entails overcoming some obstacles which relate to issues with regard to research methodology (the universities involved have some trouble accepting AR) and cultural differences between academia and NGOs. The cultural differences are reflected in the fact that the NGOs view academic teaching as more hierarchical and formal and less participant-centred than their own approach. They have a rather rigid, perhaps not entirely justified perception of academic requirements for good teaching and research.

Another need that this study has identified is to find ways to increase the voice of practitioners and Southerners in global knowledge development and exchange regarding peacebuilding. This, too, is something the ACTS programme aims to do. The extent to which this aim is being reached is difficult to assess given the early phase in which it finds itself. It is after all too soon to say anything about the outcomes of the research and the dissemination of these outcomes – required to begin contributing to global theory and debates.

Some difficult issues remain for ACTS, which may serve as points of consideration for similar initiatives elsewhere. One set of issues relating to capacity building is the importance of building on existing knowledge and create ‘ownership’. The experience of ACTS and its participants raises the question: should already capable individuals and institutions be selected for capacity building, or should the focus be on providing opportunities for development and capacity building to weaker actors – or both? Another unresolved issue emerging from the ACTS experience so far is the difficulty of tying the development and implementation of M&E processes into general learning and organisational processes, and how to better involve the various stakeholders in them.

All of the issues mentioned here are recognised and openly discussed by ACTS staff members. Although M&E remains a difficult issue, the learning attitude of those involved in the programme is a positive factor. Changes are constantly made in response to observations and reflections. This is already a promising start. In drawing this conclusion I am aware that my personal involvement may colour my view. It will be good to compare it with more independent studies that are likely to be undertaken as part of M&E in the future. However, from my perspective both the extent to which the aims of ACTS match the needs identified over the course of this study, and the open learning approach with which those involved in the programme continue to work towards meeting these aims, remain highly interesting. It will be worthwhile to examine

the programme again in some years' time and see what progress towards them has been made.

8.8 Concluding Part Three: Global initiatives to support learning

At the end of Part Two, the following questions were formulated for discussion in Part Three.

1. Given the structural realities in which they operate, what initiatives are undertaken to improve the learning processes of local peace NGOs? What can we learn from these initiatives?
2. To what extent do these initiatives facilitate cross-cultural, 'third-order' learning?
3. How can international/external/Northern actors support the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs, thereby increasing their agency?
4. How can knowledge institutions be better involved in supporting the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace NGOs working in (post)conflict countries – and the knowledge base of these countries as a whole?
5. How can global networks support the knowledge and learning strategies of Southern peace NGOs, thereby increasing their agency?

Starting with the first two questions regarding initiatives to improve learning: in Part Two we already saw that networking is a strategy widely used by local peace NGOs. At least in theory, networks may help to facilitate the various interactions depicted in Figure 3.5 (page 153). However, the findings discussed in chapter six gave rise to the perception that networks at the local, national and regional levels tend to focus mostly on interactions with other NGOs – depicted on the left side of the figure. At the end of Part Two, it was suggested that global-level networks may be better able to cover exchanges with a broader range of actors – and thereby to start addressing the 'structural realities' to which the first question refers (and which have been elaborated in chapter four) that shape the action radius of local NGOs.

This leads us to the fifth question on the potential role of global networks in increasing the agency for learning of Southern NGOs. More concretely, is GPPAC, the global network examined in chapter seven, facilitating all the interactions depicted in Figure 3.5? Like the national and regional networks looked at earlier, GPPAC focuses primarily on the facilitation of interactions among civil society groups – and as the chapter shows this can have clear added value in itself. However, the

network does so with the aim not only to exchange knowledge, but also to jointly have a stronger position in interactions with other actors, particularly states, regional organisations (ECOWAS, ASEAN) and international organisations (UN). In its more externally-oriented activities, then, GPPAC focuses mostly on powerful actors that help create and maintain the structure which shapes the agency of civil society. In this sense it is similar to most individual peace NGOs and networks, although, because of its scale, it has access to higher level policy forums, such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

However, thinking back to the finding of the Reflecting on Peace Practice project in chapter one³⁶⁷ that peace NGOs need to better link their individual activities to the larger goals of ending war and building peace, this is also something that emerges as a clear issue for the Global Partnership. Joint priority setting, identified by members as a shortcoming, would require structured reflection on the larger, structural issues affecting conflict and peace, and the way in which the variety of individual activities of NGOs and networks involved in GPPAC may add up in addressing these issues. Thinking about individual and joint impact is closely tied to this. However, impact assessment, agreeing on priorities for action and achieving a division of labour are very difficult for any diverse group of organisations coming together in a network.

Although knowledge generation – through the dissemination of stories from civil society peacebuilding practice – is a GPPAC activity, it does not actively engage knowledge institutions. An initiative that does so is the ACTS programme, analysed in chapter eight. Linking back to the first question posed above, this programme fits into another common category of initiatives to support learning: training courses. However, ACTS goes further than regular NGO training programmes in several ways. First, it does not aim merely to introduce new concepts but focuses on the implementation of these concepts in the practice of NGOs. Through action research, ACTS hopes to contribute to organisational reflection and learning and thereby to facilitate the learning cycle portrayed in the light blue square at the centre of Figure 3.5 (page 153), as well as exchanges with others around this square. At the current stage of the programme it is difficult to establish the extent to which organisational learning cycles have improved, but some indications of individual learning and fruitful exchanges can already be observed. Space is created for third-order learning by the emphasis of AR on self-reflection and by the ‘safe space’ the seminars provide. (As is mentioned below, there is little direct competition among the

³⁶⁷ See in particular section 1.4.5

participants and comparing across countries makes it possible to reflect on a more abstract level.)

A second difference between ACTS and other training initiatives for peace NGOs is that ACTS aims to help diminish North-South inequalities in knowledge recognition and generation, and strengthen the voice of practitioners in global debates. In this sense it focuses explicitly on changing structural inequalities. It is too soon to say anything about how this is working, except that for research outcomes to reach their intended audience, they need to be of a certain quality. For a programme that aims to help peace practitioners develop the learning capacity of themselves and their organisations it is difficult to set entry requirements to guarantee the intellectual quality of participants, while at the same time aiming to support those who may otherwise be marginalised. ACTS is searching for the right balance in this regard.

A third difference between ACTS and other NGO training programmes is that ACTS is an academic programme leading to a Master's degree. This is also where the universities come in. The cooperation between NGOs and universities is an interesting facet of the ACTS programme, because despite the potential of such cooperation in terms of developing the overall capacity and role of Southern actors in knowledge generation, it is very rare in the countries studied. In that sense, the ACTS case sheds light on the fourth question above: how can knowledge institutions be better involved in supporting the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace NGOs working in (post)conflict countries – and the knowledge base of these countries as a whole? The fact that ACTS has managed to involve universities in its programme, which they have accredited as a Master course, is promising. However, the case study shows that such academic-practitioner cooperation can also be difficult. There are differences in organisational culture between NGOs and academia, which lead to partly real, partly perceived differences in teaching and research approaches. These differences may help explain why such interactions are so rare in the countries studied. It will therefore be interesting to continue to follow ACTS to see how the cooperation between NGOs and universities develops.

Another reason why it would be interesting to revisit ACTS in a few year's time is to see in how far the action learning experience of ACTS participants has indeed led to better 'third-order' learning, reflection and documentation of knowledge on the part of these people and their organisations. Interesting in this regard is that one of the obstacles to learning and exchange by peace NGOs, competition and distrust (see chapter five), seems to have been overcome at least partly in ACTS,

where these issues do not play a large role due the fact that participants come from different countries and are therefore in less direct competition. In addition, participants are bound together by a sense of joint identity. The two-year length of the course helps to develop group solidarity. AR as a method may also be a binding force in that it explicitly recognises the knowledge people have, which may create mutual respect and stimulate discussion about experiences. Such an atmosphere of high trust and safety stimulates third-order learning, which involves the questioning of the assumptions and world views of the learned, thereby also facilitating learning across (organisational and geographical) cultures.

In addition to local factors that inhibit learning, such as inter-NGO competition, earlier chapters emphasised that more structural factors constrain the agency of Southern NGOs as well. These structural factors are intimately tied to global power structures and a discourse that is dominated by 'the North', external, Northern actors need to be involved in changing them. Thus we are led to the third question, regarding the role Northern actors may play in supporting the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace NGOs. The case of GPPAC shows that one of the potential benefits Southern NGOs see in being part of a global network is the access that this gives them to global, and Northern, policy forums. In the case of ACTS, the importance of engaging Northern actors is illustrated by the need identified by people involved in the programme for additional accreditation of the Master programme by a Northern institution. Another illustration of the importance of linking initiatives in the South to actors in the North is the hope of ACTS that it will gain access to North-based knowledge forums and journals for the dissemination of its research results, so as to reach the people shaping discourse, debates and policy. The fact that one of the partners in ACTS is based in Europe may prove very helpful in this regard. As with ECCP in GPPAC, this Europe-based partner has also been best able to secure funding for the programme. More on the role of funding, and on that of external actors more generally, can be found in the overall conclusions and recommendations below.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 9. Conclusions and recommendations

9.1 Overall conclusions

9.1.1 The role of local non-governmental organisations in peacebuilding

The literature on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and peacebuilding theorises that they have an added value because of their closeness to local communities. As a result they are able to complement high-level peace processes with peacebuilding and reconciliation work among middle-level leaders and in communities at the grassroots. In addition, NGOs are seen as important elements of civil society, which in turn is considered vital for democracy building as it organises civilians and acts as a check on government. From this perspective the support of civil society in postconflict, developing, democratising societies has become increasingly popular among Northern donors.³⁶⁸ Civil society and NGOs are also considered to help people develop civic skills and 'social capital'. Social capital comes about through increased links among people and leads to relationships, trust and joint action. (Putnam 1993) All of these are important for peacebuilding.

Indeed, local peace NGOs bring people together, particularly at the community level, for dialogue and reconciliation and in this way they contribute to social capital. The majority of their activities consists of activities like community dialogue, mediation training and peace education. Particularly the larger, stronger Southern NGOs (SNGOs) engage in advocacy and lobby towards policymakers as well. However, in most cases little attention is paid to thinking and work on a more macro and political level. Considering that many see the added value of NGOs particularly at the 'lower' levels of society this is in itself perhaps not surprising, but there are two problems. First, there is a lack of reflection on how individual activities add up and relate to the larger aim of building sustainable peace in a society, and this means that in the final instance, the work of peace NGOs may not systematically contribute to peacebuilding. Second, the political, pro-democratic 'check' role that NGOs play according to the theory is often absent in reality.

There are various reasons for this. In many conflict-affected countries governments are unwilling to give NGOs much political space. In

³⁶⁸ Kaldor 2003, Barnes 2001, Pishchikova 2006

addition, the way in which SNGOs are funded plays an important role. Civil society support by Northern donors does not tend to stimulate an independent civil society that is able to play a political role. Rather, the funding chain through which money flows from Northern governments and international organisations via Northern NGOs (NNGOs) to SNGOs makes SNGOs implementers of Northern policy. They focus on projects asked for by donors and do not think autonomously about what is needed and how projects relate to larger aims. As SNGOs are often founded as a consequence of the availability of external funds for certain activities, rather than through a bottom-up process, many organisations have limited local constituencies. More indigenous, independent groups do exist – but the dilemma is that groups that are rooted in society are often also rooted in conflict and aligned with one of the warring parties. In response, donors have made neutrality a condition of funding. But this may have gone too far. Neutrality is never entirely possible, and building sustainable peace entails addressing unequal power structures. Doing so is an inherently political activity. Depoliticising civil society groups and forcing them to focus exclusively on micro-level policy implementation prevents them from addressing the wider structural issues that obstruct peace in the long run.

The dependency of many SNGOs on short-term project funding and their related lack of capacity for reflection on wider, more long-term issues make it even more possible for them to pay attention to macro issues affecting conflict and peace and to reflect on the way in which their activities fit into this larger picture. As a result some question their overall impact. (Anderson and Olsen 2003) More attention to learning strategies – by organisations individually as well as together with other actors in peacebuilding – is therefore important. Such joint reflection could also contribute to peace directly (see below). However, it is only possible in a structural context that creates space for independent, open-ended learning.

Southern peacebuilding NGOs were the original unit of analysis for this study. However, in the course of the project it became increasingly clear that these organisations and their learning processes cannot be considered apart from the context in which they operate, particularly the relationship with their donors but also the structural differences between North and South regarding research capacity and knowledge recognition, and political issues both within the countries in which the SNGOs operate and internationally. This growing insight, informed to a large extent by interviewees from SNGOs who drew attention to these issues, contributed to a widening of the focus and needs to be included in future analytical models.

9.1.2 Forms of peace and conflict knowledge

Theoretical discussions about types of knowledge distinguish between tacit, explicit and implicit knowledge³⁶⁹, between academic and practitioner knowledge³⁷⁰, and between indigenous and external knowledge³⁷¹. This study has linked each of these to the field of peacebuilding by NGOs. Table 2.4 at the end of the second chapter mapped the forms these types of knowledge take in the field of NGO peacebuilding and the challenges that each form brings when it comes to learning and sharing. Explicit knowledge, often in the form of publications, websites or databases, brings challenges of access, translation to the context, application, and renewal and adjustment as a result of it being tested and of situations changing. In rapidly changing conflict situations explicit knowledge is quickly outdated and tacit knowledge is particularly important. Not all knowledge can be documented easily and tacit knowledge often only emerges through interaction –when people become aware that they have knowledge that others may benefit from. Tacit knowledge brings challenges of wider sharing, which often involves turning it into explicit knowledge (and requires specific strategies like networking). Implicit knowledge of norms and culture may facilitate knowledge sharing in peacebuilding, where people from various different backgrounds interact. It involves openness to the values and world views of others and willingness to question one's own assumptions and views – in other words, it involves joint third-order learning.

Both practitioner and academic knowledge are important in peacebuilding. Practitioners – NGO staff members – possess vital knowledge of local circumstances, of the way these change, of the way methodologies work out in practice, and of local ideas, priorities and tools for peacebuilding. Academics are able to compare such knowledge to knowledge and theories produced elsewhere, helping practitioners to abstract from their concrete experience and reflecting on larger questions – such as ‘am I doing the right thing’? In this way, academic institutions can function as ‘scaffolds’ of learning (Smid and Beckett (2004). However, communication difficulties exist between practitioners and academics. They have different organisational cultures and different ideas about what constitutes valid knowledge generation methods (see chapter eight). It is suggested that dynamic knowledge networks could

³⁶⁹ Smit 2006, Sauquet 2004, Ramalingham 2005

³⁷⁰ Rip 2001, De la Rive Box 2001, Whitley 1984, Court and Young 2003

³⁷¹ Pouligny 2005, Grenier 1997, Powell 2006

provide an avenue for joint academic-practitioner knowledge creation. (De la Rive Box 2001) I will come back to this below.

Regarding indigenous and external knowledge, the theory mostly focuses on inequality between the two and a lack of recognition by Northern actors of valuable indigenous knowledge existing in the Southern societies in which they intervene. Such issues of recognition overlap with those existing between academics and practitioners about the validity of knowledge generation methods and the resulting knowledge: indigenous knowledge is often seen as un-scientific and therefore less legitimate. In addition, oral traditions in many societies mean that local knowledge is often not documented.³⁷²

The Southern peacebuilders consulted for this study mainly emphasise the equal importance and complementarity of both indigenous and external knowledge. They would like to gain external knowledge but stress the importance of learning in interaction and combining outside knowledge with their own, indigenous knowledge. In order to better do so, they would like to have more time and skills to do research and to reflect upon their practice. In this way they would generate locally relevant knowledge that might be usefully combined with external concepts and methodologies. In other words, there is a need for local peace NGOs to make space for interactive learning. This includes doing research in communities about the needs. More knowledge about the priorities of beneficiaries would increase the legitimacy of local NGOs and make projects more locally relevant and grounded. This is important as such legitimacy is often an issue. SNGOs financed by external donors are primarily accountable to those donors, not to the communities in which they work, and the activities they choose to engage in are often intimately tied to the preferences of NNGOs and their back donors – preferences that may flow from partner consultations but are at least as much the outcome of policy processes of Northern ministries and international organisations. In response, Southern peace NGOs want to be able to more strongly voice their own priorities and lessons, and those of their constituencies. However, they often find it difficult to formulate these due to a lack of time and capacity for reflection on practice, research, and the documentation of lessons and findings.

Knowledge of a conflict is never neutral. Conflicts are characterised by conflicting visions of past and future. Most people identify to a greater or lesser extent with one of the sides, leading to bias. Even what appear to be neutral facts may in fact be stakes in a political struggle. As data

³⁷² Powell 2006, King 2004, Van Grasdorff 2005, Mawdsley et al. 2002

are difficult to obtain in a context of instability and violence, different statistics usually circulate, and estimates given often depend on the political programme of those providing them. Even when people agree about the raw data, discussions arise about how to interpret these. People have a need to justify the role they have played and may have an interest in hiding or exaggerating facts. As a further complication, trauma tends to warp memories and perceptions.³⁷³

For Southern peacebuilders, working together on a common ‘truth’ about the conflict is seen as an important step towards peaceful coexistence. Beyond that, arriving at joint visions of peace is part of peacebuilding.³⁷⁴ However, such thinking about larger ideals and longer-term aims does not receive much attention in most peacebuilding strategies. Even NGOs whose daily job it is to work for peace often lack an integrated vision of the kind of situation they are working towards, and the way in which their activities contribute to it. One of the things needed to achieve such visioning are better knowledge strategies on the part of NGOs: ways to know more about the baseline situation, about the needs of the people for whom they work, about the activities of other organisations, and about existing ideas and theories of peacebuilding. Improved knowledge strategies may also enable NGOs to learn more about the impact of, and linkages between, their activities and the extent to which they contribute to the overall aims of ending violence and building lasting peace. All of these aims are considered important by the staff of local peace NGOs, but at the same time these staff say they are not able to give learning, reflection and exchange the attention they feel they should.

Improving learning for peacebuilding, Southern peacebuilders emphasise, would involve not one-way knowledge transfer but an interactive learning process through which people and organisations can jointly arrive at new knowledge that can improve their work. This requires time and space for research of the context, analysis of the results of one’s own projects, and interaction with other actors – NGOs, researchers, policymakers – about the way in which different activities contribute to the larger aim of peace. Such interaction is also important in order to prevent duplication of activities and ensure that different actors work in a complementary way towards a shared larger aim. In fact, to have various actors that play a role in peacebuilding agree on such a shared aim would be part of peacebuilding itself.

³⁷³ Lammers 2006, Kalyvas 2003

³⁷⁴ Pouligny 2005, Culbertson and Pouligny 2006

9.1.3 Organisational learning by Southern peace NGOs

The literature on organisational learning theorises that learning can take place at several different levels or depths: first-, second- and third-order learning. First-order learning is the passive internalisation of a pre-determined set of knowledge, while second- and third-order learning actively involve the learner and his experiences. These constitute learning from practice and take place in cycles of action and reflection: a person acts, reflects on how this went, may search for additional knowledge to compare his lessons with, then plans for renewed action. Such learning from practice is particularly relevant for SNGO staff who tend to have action-oriented learning styles and do not read much. Second-order learning takes place at the tactical level and involves asking 'how can I do this better?' Third-order learning, by contrast, takes place at the strategic level: 'am I doing the right thing?' In order to start reflection on macro issues and the contribution individual NGOs make to larger peacebuilding aims, third-order learning is needed. This includes a willingness to openly question one's own assumptions and world view.³⁷⁵

Involving others in learning may help strategic learning, because comparing with external knowledge may lead to more abstraction and deeper reflection. Knowledge exchange meetings, networks, and training and education programmes may play such a role, and indeed, some do. However, as is discussed below, they face various constraints. In line with the idea of other people supporting deeper learning, Southern peace practitioners emphasise learning in interaction. In their field this usually includes interacting with people from different geographical, cultural and organisational backgrounds, including the staff of NNGOs who fund their activities and pass on policy ideas and preferences. Interactive learning involving people from North and South requires translation processes that help bridge cultures and knowledge systems. For this, once again, an open mind is needed and a willingness to question one's assumptions and even world views – in other words, the characteristics of third-order learning.

Organisational learning theory states that organisations may support learning processes, and learn as a whole, by creating space for learning and exchange, by rewarding learning, by being open to failure, by having a leadership that sets the right example, and by having a

³⁷⁵ Kolb 1984, Smid and Beckett 2004, Boonstra 2004, Cummings 2004

cooperative (rather than competitive) culture³⁷⁶. How does this compare to the practice of local peace NGOs?

As Figure 9.1 illustrates, Southern peace NGOs engage in various learning activities. These activities are affected and shaped by the structural context of the organisations. Some aspects of the learning practice of the SNGOs are, in reality, stronger than others. As a result, the model provided at the end of Part One depicting ideal-type knowledge processes in and around a Southern NGO is now adjusted in line with what has been found in this study.

Figure 9.1: Adjusted picture of knowledge flows in and around Southern peace NGOs

The figure shows that inside the light blue rectangle, which represents the Southern peacebuilding organisation, some parts of the learning cycle function better than others. The steps in the cycle that function

³⁷⁶ Boonstra 2004, Britton 2005, Taylor et al. 2006

relatively well have been made green. The pink-coloured steps do not function so well. NGOs are action-oriented and have difficulty finding time and resources to reflect on the implications of their work and do research into their own work and into the situations of their beneficiaries. As a result, they are largely unable to produce generalised knowledge that could be disseminated to other organisations, knowledge institutions, and donor agencies, and thereby contribute to global debates and policymaking.

To some extent Southern peace NGOs are able to gain new knowledge and to compare their experiences with others – often through networking with other NGOs and through training programmes – and the insights gained from those activities are applied in new programmes. But more in-depth reflection and theorising, as depicted in the pink boxes, are often lacking. In other words, strategic, third-order learning does not take place. This can be explained by a number of factors, including the difficulty of strategic reflection in a context of conflict, the lack of room given by donors for deeper-level learning and for thinking on the wider context (see the next sections), and the general lack of capacity for research, reflection and documentation that SNGOs face.

Outside the organisation, the figure depicts knowledge exchanges with other actors. Interviewees deemed interactions with other NGOs, beneficiaries, and state and international actors central to the learning processes of Southern peace NGOs. However, again we can see that some interactions function better than others. The pink arrows represent flows this study has not looked at in detail, and although hypotheses may be made it is difficult to make any statements about them. The thick blue arrows depict knowledge flows that are relatively strong, while the thin blue arrows are much weaker. The following observations can be made with regard to knowledge exchange by Southern peace NGOs.

- *Other SNGOs*: Interaction with other SNGOs takes place regularly through conferences, meetings and networks. Networks of peace NGOs are in fact widespread. Such knowledge exchange among colleagues is considered important and may be considered a strong point of Southern peace NGOs. However, as is discussed below, is also constrained by a number of issues.
- *Donor NNGOs*: Interaction with donor NNGOs takes place but, given the structural characteristics of the aid regime (see below), the direction of knowledge flows is often one way.
- *Beneficiaries* are often mentioned as sources of knowledge but little systematic research is done to find out about their needs

and preferences for action or to garner the potential of their traditional conflict management practices. Many organisations visited feel more work needs to be done in this regard. Knowledge also flows the other way: from SNGOs to their beneficiaries. These flows primarily take the form of peace education, mediation training, vocational training for former combatants and other forms of capacity building to prevent future conflict. In fact, such knowledge transfer is the chief method of peacebuilding for most NGOs working in this field.

- *Knowledge institutions*: Little exchange takes place with knowledge institutions. Reasons for this include that Southern knowledge institutions are undercapacitated, that they pay little attention to development and peace research (or more generally to practice-oriented work) and that NGOs and academic institutions have different organisational cultures that lead to (perceived) contradictions in their approaches towards learning and make cooperation difficult.
- *Governments*: The extent to which Southern peace NGOs interact with governments depends not only on the extent to which governments are open to cooperation with NGOs, but also on the nature of the NGO in question. Stronger organisations are active in lobbying and advocacy and some also engage in the capacity building of local and national government employees. Smaller, weaker NGOs are more localised and do not engage much in such activities. For them, networks are important vehicles to make their voices heard to official institutions as they are not able to do so on their own. Somewhat surprisingly, in the interviews little mention was made of knowledge flowing the other way: from governments to NGOs.

To conclude, a lot of second-order learning takes place in interaction with colleagues, beneficiaries and, particularly, other SNGOs. However, third-order learning is difficult due to constraints that limit the capacity of Southern peace NGOs have for reflection, research and documentation.

9.1.4 Factors that constrain and support the learning of Southern peace NGOs

The lack of capacity of the SNGOs studied for learning, research and documentation is grounded in a number of factors. For reasons

explained below, often little funding is available for these activities. In addition, interactive knowledge exchange is inhibited by the realities of a conflict-affected society characterised by social cleavages and mistrust, low resources and bad infrastructure. Conflict also shapes the kind of knowledge that is exchanged: its contested and rapidly changing nature makes documentation and learning difficult. A context of conflict may be more conducive to superficial, tactical learning than to deeper, strategic learning that involves asking difficult questions regarding one's assumptions and past actions.

The sense of urgency experienced by people working for peace in unstable environments contributes to an emphasis on action at the expense of reflection. A short-term focus that results from project cycle funding prevents the institutionalisation of longer-term reflection and learning. Being open about failure is difficult in a situation where future funding often depends on the demonstration of 'results'. High staff mobility makes it difficult for organisations to retain knowledge. Competition plays a role in knowledge exchange between NGOs: as organisations compete for the same sources of funding, they are often reluctant to share knowledge for fear of losing competitive advantage. In addition to these local factors, more structural, macro-level factors constrain the possibilities SNGO staff have for third-order reflection and learning.

9.1.5 Power differences, donor relations and North-South dynamics

At the global level, more structural issues constrain the opportunities SNGOs have for learning. Inequality between Northern and Southern societies when it comes to research capacity and the recognition of knowledge as 'valid' contributes to the difficulty Southern peace practitioners have in strengthening their contribution to global policy debates. Various factors combine to create and maintain this structurally unequal situation:

- *Recognition of knowledge*: 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 social, economic and political systems of developing countries.

- *Research capacity*: 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. Southern research that does take place is often very abstract and theoretical and does not immediately lend itself to application. There is very little interaction among researchers and practitioners in the field of peacebuilding in the countries visited.
- *Knowledge policy*: Initiatives by donors to stimulate Southern knowledge generation are not linked to policymaking, which often remains top-down. '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 NNGOs are mostly internally oriented and do not explicitly include partner organisations in the South.
- *Donor discourse*: The aid regime and dominant discourse forces Southern NGOs to speak the language and jargon of NNGOs 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.
- *Short-term funding and deliverables*: 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.
- *Depoliticisation of NGOs*: 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. At least in the field of peacebuilding, civil society support is used more as a tool for the implementation of policies than as a way to create an independent civil society with its own political activities and views. This denies the political nature of peacebuilding: achieving lasting peace often requires changing the power balance and is therefore not a neutral, technocratic development activity – in contrast with the dominant discourse which casts development as a neutral, value-free activity. As a result of this

approach, there is little attention for social, political or cultural peculiarities – and local knowledge – while a universal, technical language and toolkit are promoted. This leads to some tension in the field of peacebuilding, in which on the one hand the need to be neutral and apolitical is emphasised, while on the other it aims to ‘empower’ marginalised groups and thus to change power structures. Although even relatively technical development work has political components, these issues play a particularly strong role in peacebuilding. Indeed, many Northern and Southern peace-oriented actors recognise the inherently political nature of peace work. At the same time, however, most of the work of the Southern organisations visited is funded through the regular development chain, which is characterised by the apolitical discourse and service delivery chain just described.

- *Top-down policy*: Although intentions are often good, 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 for third-order learning. After all, strategic learning is only possible if one is able to influence strategy at all. Top-down policy implementation also limits the possibilities SNGOs have for producing knowledge and contributing 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’.

These structural issues limit the agency of SNGOs. However, several kinds of initiatives may contribute to expanding their agency by changing these structural constraints.

9.1.6 Initiatives to improve the learning processes of Southern peace NGOs

Initiatives to help NGOs deal with constraints and improve their learning processes include knowledge sharing networks and training programmes that try to build on knowledge of participants. In this study networks received particular attention. It is very common among Southern peace NGOs to form networks. Networks facilitate knowledge sharing and joint learning. Participants are inspired by each other’s

successes and learn from each other's failures. Through networks they may gain access to contacts, materials, and possibilities for funding. In addition networks may provide a larger critical mass of organisations which, if they speak with a common voice, may have a stronger message that reaches more people – including policymakers. Organisations in the South with little access to Northern policy forums may be able to get their views across via their Northern network partners. Importantly, network members also note that networks have the potential to facilitate joint strategic thinking about the way the activities of various organisations contribute to larger aims.

The extent to which this potential is achieved varies. Networks are plagued by the same limitations as the knowledge strategies of SNGOs more generally – competition limiting open exchange, bad infrastructure, and the lack of room SNGOs have for strategic thinking and independent action. Through joint action some of these issues may be overcome as networks use their critical mass to address structural issues. However, working for structural change would involve criticising and tackling existing power structures and policies – in other words, it would involve playing a political, activist role. Civil society peacebuilding networks struggle with this as they are often funded by the very actors that maintain current structures. More generally, some favour a cooperative approach and hope to achieve gradual change through engagement rather than activism.

The success of networks in facilitating knowledge processes is influenced by various factors. They relate to things like the capacity of the member organisations, the added value and focus of a network, its governance structure, its context and its funding structure. Particular issues that emerged include the difficulty of open knowledge exchange in the face of conflict, power differences, and competition among NGOs. These issues are probably even more salient in conflict-affected areas than in others, thereby affecting the peacebuilding field particularly strongly.

Experiences with the ACTS programme and the International Steering Group of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) suggest that networks that bring together NGOs at a regional or even global level are less vulnerable to being constrained by competition and power issues among the participants than networks within a given country. Although national-level networks enable second-order learning, global networks make possible third-order learning by providing a safe space for discussion and reflection – less hampered by direct rivalry – and because the comparison with other contexts leads to

a higher level of abstraction and brings in fresh perspectives. The funding regime also plays a role in increasing or decreasing competition among local actors. In addition, working on a joint identity that is based on an overriding, uniting goal helps to minimise competitiveness within networks.

9.1.7 Global networks

Thus, cross-border networks that bring together peace NGOs from different parts of the world have the potential to facilitate third-order knowledge processes. GPPAC is an interesting example that covers all continents. Generally it is found useful for knowledge exchange, facilitating reflection through discussions during network meetings and online interaction. Another important function of the network is that it gives local NGOs the opportunity to make their voice heard more widely and contribute to global discussions on peace and conflict. At the level of concrete activities participants hope that it will enable joint action in the face of broader issues that individual NGOs cannot deal with on their own.

In these ways global networks have the potential to address the more structural issues that have an impact on global conflict and peace, thereby expanding the agency of individual NGOs and jointly contributing to the larger goals of stopping war and building peace. This would entail a political role for networks, in addition to their function of exchanging knowledge to improve the local-level practice of member NGOs. GPPAC has begun to do this at the UN peacebuilding commission and in some regions vis-à-vis governments. A network can be a powerful tool to carry out such lobby and advocacy work more effectively. It represents a larger number of people than an individual NGO does and can therefore have a stronger voice. Discussions within GPPAC show that this is not easy. Some members fear that upsetting powerful actors may endanger funding and other forms of support. In regions such as Central Asia, where political authoritarianism is a major issue, political activity can even endanger organisations and their staff.

The conclusion mentioned earlier that peace NGOs need to better link their individual activities to the bigger picture of peacebuilding is also something that emerges as a clear issue for a global network like GPPAC. Joint priority setting, identified by members as a shortcoming, requires structured reflection on the larger, structural issues affecting conflict and peace, and the way in which the variety of individual activities of NGOs and networks involved in GPPAC may add up in

addressing these issues. Thinking about individual and joint impact is closely tied to this. However, impact assessment, agreeing on priorities for action and achieving a division of labour are very difficult for any diverse group of organisations coming together in a network.

The stage and form of civil society in the countries under study also plays a role. Civil society is weakened by conflict and most NGOs are relatively new. Many NGOs are highly dependent on specific individuals, and as a result networks may become either groups of friends or platforms for competition among influential people. To some extent, network governance structures and procedures can help mitigate such issues. But there is a deeper issue at play, namely that of the limited local constituency of many organisations and the legitimacy of civil society groups that are externally driven. As mentioned, strengthening the downward accountability towards beneficiaries, rather than the currently predominant upward accountability towards donors, is needed. Part of this could be enabling local organisations to do more and better research into the needs of their communities and the impact of their work.

9.1.8 Involving knowledge institutions

The theory on the role of academia versus that of practice in development³⁷⁷ identifies a gap between the two fields and sees networks of researchers, practitioners and policymakers as a helpful tool for the bridging of this gap. In the Southern postconflict countries visited, the gap appears to be even larger and there is little interaction between NGOs and knowledge institutions. Few universities in these countries pay attention to peacebuilding and development, and capacity building is needed in these academic fields. On their part, NGOs could benefit from the involvement of universities who could function as learning ‘scaffolds’ and play a role in the needed research into the needs and knowledge of communities and the effectiveness of peace projects.

In this regard, the ACTS Master programme is an interesting case. Through action research, ACTS promotes organisational reflection and learning and thereby to facilitate the learning cycle portrayed in the light blue square at the centre of Figure 9.1, as well as exchanges with others around this square. At the current stage of the programme it is difficult to establish the extent to which organisational learning cycles have improved, but some indications of individual learning and fruitful

³⁷⁷ Rip 2001, De la Rive Box 2001, Court and Young 2003

exchanges can already be observed. ACTS also aims to diminish North-South inequalities in knowledge recognition and generation, and to strengthen the voice of practitioners in global debates. In this sense it focuses explicitly on changing structural inequalities. Particularly significant from the perspective of involving knowledge institutions is that ACTS is an academic programme that leads to a Master's degree. In offering the programme, NGOs and local universities cooperate.

The fact that ACTS has managed to get universities involved in its programme, which they have accredited as a Master course, is promising. However, the case study shows such academic-practitioner cooperation can also be difficult. There are differences in organisational culture between NGOs and academia, which may help explain why such interactions are so rare in the countries studied. It will therefore be interesting to continue to follow ACTS to see how the cooperation between NGOs and universities develops. Another reason why it would be interesting to revisit ACTS in a few year's time is to see in how far the action learning experience of ACTS participants has indeed led to better 'third-order' learning, reflection and documentation of knowledge on the part of these people and their organisations. The two-year length of the course helps to develop group solidarity. Action research as a method may also be a binding force in that it explicitly recognises the knowledge people have, which may create mutual respect and stimulate discussion about experiences. Such an atmosphere of high trust and safety is what stimulates third-order learning, which involves the questioning of the assumptions and world views of the learner, thereby also facilitating learning across (organisational and geographical) cultures.

9.1.9 Ways in which Northern actors may support the learning of local peace NGOs

The structural aspects that limit the learning of Southern peace NGOs and their role in global policy debates are not set in stone. The relationship between Northern and Southern NGOs provides an entry point for a different approach that helps to increase the agency of SNGOs by changing these structural factors. Truly reciprocal North-South NGO 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. Northern organisations involved in such partnerships see them as being part of a network of equal actors. Compared to a chain

through which policy flows downwards and accountability upwards, in a partnership network both policy preferences and accountability flow both ways. This makes for learning by both partners, as well as joint learning to create new knowledge.

Things that have made such partnerships possible include trust between partners, flexible arrangements regarding timelines and planning, and core institutional funding rather than tied project funding. In other words, two-way exchange requires a structural climate that allows for the development of long-term partnerships beyond concrete, output-oriented projects. The way an NNGO itself is funded plays a role in this regard. If the NNGO is dependent on project funding that is tied to specific objectives, then it has little choice but to pass these objectives on to SNGOs, leaving little space for exchange over content and direction. Other structural factors that may play a role include the extent of specialisation of both Northern and Southern partners (less specialised organisations may leave their partners more freedom of action), transparency and trustworthiness on the part of the SNGO (increasing mutual trust and making it possible for an NNGO to be flexible), political factors (donor governments with a strong political interest in a developing country are likely to leave NNGOs and SNGOs with little policymaking leeway), and the capacity of SNGOs (to which I return below).

A genuine dialogue about policy is also stimulated when NNGOs are willing to think out of the box and respect indigenous notions, processes and time frames for organisational development. On the other side of the partnership such dialogue is helped by SNGOs that are open to external ideas and suggestions for efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, space is made for reflection and learning when NNGOs allow for failure or incomplete success on the part of their Southern partners. 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 their beneficiary communities, this may give them a stronger position in the exchange with external actors. For this, they need stronger capacities for reflection and for the formulation and dissemination their findings.

Regarding the capacity of Southern partners, 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. 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 organisations to research local conditions, to draw lessons from experience more consciously, to document or otherwise store these lessons inside the organisation, and to share experiences with others would strengthen the position of SNGOs in exchanges over policy and practice and lead to more relevant and effective activities. In line with theories about capacity building (but not necessarily with its practice), such capacity building would not start from scratch but aim to build on the knowledge that people already possess, helping them to develop this knowledge, compare it with other ideas, and to document and disseminate it. The ACTS programme is an illustration of the form that such an effort may take.

Action research may be used to help peace practitioners study their own practice, compare this with relevant theories, exchange with others and develop new knowledge as a result. In this way, action research may reinforce the learning cycle and related knowledge interactions depicted in Figure 9.1. Initiatives like this have the potential of strengthening the voice of Southern actors and practitioners in global policy discussions. In the case of ACTS the fact that practitioners can gain a Master’s degree may further facilitate this, as such a degree may cause others to take them more seriously. Another interesting facet of the programme is that it involves local universities, thereby strengthening the links between knowledge institutions and NGOs and helping build knowledge capacities more widely than within NGOs only. Although the ACTS programme is still in a very early stage, and is experiencing difficulties in the cooperation between NGOs and academia as well as with regard to the application of action research, it gives food for thought about ways forward.

In addition to learning-oriented capacity building and different forms of partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs, other ways in which Northern actors may support the knowledge and learning strategies of local peace

NGOs include participating in networks, helping link actors around the world and supporting the development of Southern knowledge institutions and the recognition and dissemination of Southern research findings. The case of GPPAC shows that one of the potential benefits Southern NGOs see in being part of a global network is the access that this provides them to global, and Northern, policy forums. In the case of ACTS, the importance of engaging Northern actors is illustrated by the need participants have for additional accreditation of the Master programme by a Northern institution. Another illustration of the importance of linking initiatives in the South to actors in the North is the hope of ACTS that it will gain access to North-based knowledge forums and journals for the dissemination of its research results, so as to reach the people shaping discourse, debates and policy. The fact that one of the partners in ACTS is based in Europe may prove very helpful in this regard. As with ECCP in GPPAC, this Europe-based partner has also been best able to secure funding for the programme.

9.1.10 Overall concluding remarks

The overall research question of this study was: *What are 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?*

Southern peace NGOs engage in various learning and knowledge sharing activities. They are particularly active in organising exchanges with other SNGOs – particularly in their own country and region – in order to facilitate joint, interactive, second-order learning. Third-order, strategic learning – which involves thinking about wider issues of conflict and peace, the role of the organisation within this big picture, whether it is working on the right assumptions, and what else is needed for structural change – is more difficult. Such third-order learning would be helped by increasing the research done by SNGOs, improving both the capacity of Southern knowledge institutions and their cooperation with SNGOs, and interacting with people from different parts of the world in order to compare one's situations with that of others and achieve a higher level of abstraction and learning.

However, Southern peacebuilders are unable to create room for such strategic learning activities, due to a number of structural constraints factors that limit their agency. These include:

- Conflict, which leads to bad infrastructure, low resources, a high sense of urgency (leading to short-term focus and making it difficult to take the time to step back and draw lessons for the longer term), distrust among actors (which inhibits sharing), and a disincentive to openly question views and past actions (needed for deeper learning)
- Competition among NGOs over funding, which limits their willingness to openly share knowledge with one another and which is compounded by conflict-related distrust
- Funding regimes, in which SNGOs are often implementers of policy developed in the North rather than independent civil society actors, thereby limiting their ability to think about wider strategies or about the needs existing in communities
- A weak knowledge base in developing, conflict-affected countries, in which knowledge institutions are weak and pay little attention to issues of peace and development
- Global inequalities with regard to knowledge generation and recognition, in which Northern knowledge systems and discourses dominate over Southern ones
- Oral traditions, in which knowledge is often not documented, thereby limiting its wider sharing
- Low capacity on the part of Southern peace organisations, including a lack of abilities for research, documentation and knowledge dissemination.

Opportunities for local peace NGOs in trying to increase their agency for learning and knowledge generation are

- Coming together with other peacebuilding actors for joint reflection and strategising, which may be facilitated by networks
- Networks and training programmes that focus on the joint creation of new knowledge, including its documentation and dissemination
- Action research, a methodology that can support not only organisational learning but also the participation of Southern practitioners in global theory development and policy debates
- Forms of cooperation between NGOs and knowledge institutions in conflict-affected countries, which can contribute to capacity building on both sides and increase the knowledge base of these societies
- More equal partnerships with NNGOs, based on mutuality, trust and long-term relationships, in which knowledge flows in both directions and policy is developed jointly

- Capacity building programmes that do not transfer pre-existing knowledge but equip participants with the tools to learn, document and share.

These conclusions translate into a number of concrete recommendations for various peacebuilding actors and initiatives. These recommendations are provided in the next section.

9.2 Recommendations

9.2.1 For Southern peace NGOs

In order to increase the legitimacy and relevance of activities, as well of the strength of an SNGO in its interactions with Northern actors, it is necessary to pay ample attention to ‘downward accountability’ towards constituencies: the communities for whom projects are intended. Increasing the knowledge base of organisations with regard to these beneficiaries and their ideas and priorities is part of this. It is important to try to convince donor organisations of the need to make space for this kind of interaction and research.

Southern peace NGOs need to do more explicit thinking on the ‘big picture’: what are the overall aims of peacebuilding and how do the activities of individual NGOs contribute to these aims? This includes joint reflection with other NGOs and non-NGO actors regarding the complementarity of activities. It may also entail using creative ways of impact assessment, building on what is already being done in this area.

Southern peace NGOs may try to gain a stronger position in the interaction with donor agencies by

- working for longer-term partnerships by building trust and continuous dialogue, keeping in mind that organisational transparency contributes to trustworthiness
- strengthening the knowledge base of the organisation through action research into its own work and through interaction with beneficiaries, paying attention to the documentation of findings and lessons so that these may be shared with others and contribute to building a body of theory that is practitioner- and Southern-generated. Linking up with local and international knowledge institutions – universities – could be part of such a strategy

- connecting with other SNGOs in networks and arriving at joint positions and plans
- questioning the action priorities of donors, demanding attention for alternative views and the local knowledge possessed by SNGOs and beneficiaries, and if necessary, turning down projects. This requires a true motivation for peace (rather than prioritising organisational survival or personal interests) but also a capacity to propose alternatives. The latter in turn requires a capacity to research local needs and set priorities independently from donors
- last but not least, by making space for research, networking, reflection and documentation, all of which should become part of standard practice and be included in programme proposals sent to prospective donors

In capacity building programmes (both those provided and those attended) priority should be given to those activities that aim to strengthen the knowledge generation of participants rather than those that merely introduce pre-existing concepts and ideas.

9.2.2 For Northern NGOs with partners in the South

In the selection of partners it is important pay attention to their constituency. Even if a group does not comply with the organisational model of an NGO it may be a suitable partner if it is rooted in local communities and reflects the priorities and needs of those communities.

Funding regimes that enable more equitable partnerships are likely to lead to more locally relevant activities and ideas. Instead of imposing external ideas and programming priorities, two-way partnerships create room for local knowledge and priorities to be taken into account. In this way, North-South partnership in the true sense of the word can help prevent externally-driven peacebuilding activities and the fostering of organisations with limited local constituencies. This, however, takes time to invest in relationships and learn about the nature of the partner organisation. With the development of a relationship, either the partner is found unreliable or unresponsive to local needs, or the opposite occurs and trust grows, making a more equitable exchange possible.

NNGOs should support the development of the learning and research capacity of their Southern partners, invest in ICT development and internet connectivity, link SNGOs up with knowledge institutions, and

make external knowledge available. Using networks, external actors may facilitate joint research projects, as GPPAC is doing around peace education and ACTS is doing more generally.

Although building the capacity of local actors for research and documentation is important, another way to achieve a more balanced knowledge relationship is by looking for ways of knowledge documentation and dissemination that are less centred around written information – given the oral tradition prevalent in many non-Western societies. Making more use of tools like radio, art, video, film, theatre, or games in exchanges is something that could be explored much more.

NNGOs may stimulate networking or other forms of cooperation among SNGOs through the way the funding regime is given shape. Competition among SNGOs over funding is an obstacle to sharing and networking. NNGOs may start to think about ways to offer financial aid that support rather than discourage cooperation among Southern partners. They may stimulate coordination and joint planning on the part of SNGOs, with an eye on the ‘big picture’ and the way in which organisations contribute to it. However, this is only useful if the SNGOs are given some leeway in setting project priorities.

Part of such a strategy may be to fund networks of SNGOs, although it is important to keep an eye on who in the network is the recipient of funding and what kind of power position this accords that person or organisation. Emphasising participatory and accountable decision-making structures for the partner network is therefore important.

9.2.3 For ‘back donors’

Many of the difficulties identified in this study are related to the lack of influence SNGOs have on the peacebuilding policies they implement. This limits the relevance of their activities and is due to the chain model of funding and policymaking, which remains largely top-down. Back donors (Northern governments and international organisations that finance the work of peace NGOs) should think about ways to open up policy making. This may include thinking about alternatives to the chain model, such as a network model in which various actors – including back donors themselves – involved in peacebuilding jointly exchange, learn and strategise.

The ‘knowledge for development’ policies of back donors should pay more attention to the integration of practitioners – not only industry and

business, but also NGOs – in these policies. This would increase the practical relevance of the work of knowledge institutions and build broader societal knowledge bases.

More recognition of, and reflection on, the political nature of development, peacebuilding and civil society is needed. Pretending that these are neutral activities may be convenient from the perspective of preventing confrontation with powerful actors both in developing countries and internationally, but it does not eventually serve the aims of peacebuilding, democratisation and development and it constrains the role that Southern NGOs can play domestically.

9.2.4 For peace NGO networks

Networks of peacebuilders may pay more attention to their potential roles as learning ‘scaffolds’ by documenting knowledge and the outcomes of joint learning and by involving knowledge institutions. Training or action research-oriented academic courses may be built into such networks, as ACTS has done, in order to contribute to capacity building and strengthen the position of peace NGOs in global exchanges of knowledge.

In functioning as platforms for knowledge exchange, networks should not try to pre-determine the content of sharing but rather provide a flexible framework for members to come together and share about whatever issue they deem most relevant at a given moment.

Networks have the potential of amplifying the voice of NGOs, speaking on behalf of many rather than few. They may use this strength to address the structural constraints peacebuilders face: macro-level power structures and policies that maintain conflict, prevent sustainable peacebuilding and limit the role of NGOs. Doing so, however, risks jeopardising funding and more cooperative strategies vis-à-vis policymakers. Each network has to find its own solution to this. This may even include separating a network into a more activist body and a more professional one.

In the selection of members networks should pay attention to the constituencies of organisations – do they work on behalf of local communities, donor interests, or their own organisational survival? In addition, democratic governance inside networks, including transparent procedures for admitting new members and for the selection of

representatives, may help reduce issues of power, competition and distrust among civil society actors.

9.2.5 For training programmes

Rather than transferring pre-set concepts and methods, training programmes for peace practitioners need to focus on facilitating reflection and knowledge generation by the participants. Action research may be a helpful tool in this. In addition, it is important for capacity building activities to include the building of capacity for (action) research, exchange, documentation, and dissemination. Thus, actors providing capacity building may consider moving towards programmes that combine elements of action research, training and networking. This would facilitate organisational learning and knowledge generation on the part of peace practitioners and strengthen their voice in global theory development and policy debates.

Taking such recommendations and initiatives into account may help capacity building and knowledge exchange initiatives to be developed in a way that is more sensitive to the local context and that builds on existing expertise, while increasing the effectiveness of local actors by introducing access to peacebuilding knowledge and organisational skills.

9.2.6 For knowledge institutions

Southern universities may play a larger role in the knowledge processes of NGOs by participating in research into the needs and circumstances of beneficiaries, carrying out baseline studies, and developing methodologies for impact assessment. This should not be a way of ‘outsourcing’ but be connected to the learning of the NGOs themselves.

Universities may also play a part in the continuing education of NGO staff members, functioning as ‘scaffolds’ that enable deeper level reflection, learning and theory development. Action research and other methods that build on the practical knowledge of participants could be explored in this regard. Universities in Southern conflict-affected countries need to pay more attention to ‘practice oriented’ education and research in order to be more relevant for practitioners. This is also important from the perspective of conflict prevention: if education does not match the skills required by a society, then this can lead to unemployment, grievance, and conflict.

9.3 Follow-up and further research

The following strategies and topics for further research remain or have emerged from the study.

Research *strategies* that would further refine and improve the conclusions reached in this book include a longer-term observation of knowledge flows and learning activities taking place in and around a Southern NGO. Such observation would add to the findings from interviews, which are likely to reflect the bias of the interviewed, and may bring issues to the surface that SNGO staff themselves do not realise are important. An additional strategy for improving the current findings would be to revisit the case studies of ACTS and GPPAC in a few year's time to see how they have developed would be very interesting. In addition, analysing other initiatives that aim to facilitate learning, knowledge generation and sharing would add to the picture.

Research *topics* that remain include the following. First, researchers may more closely analyse the issue of how donor-recipient partnerships may be give shape in different ways. It has become clear in this study that different forms of partnership between those providing and those receiving funds for peacebuilding are to different extents open to the knowledge of recipients and conducive to joint learning. I have looked at this mainly from the perspective of the Southern partners at the receiving end of donor funding. More research on different approaches to partnership of different donors, and on examples of different partnerships, would enrich this thinking.

Second, the study of learning by NGOs would benefit from more research about the ways in which monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can be used for learning. Better connecting the M&E of NGOs with their organisational learning would involve making M&E a central part of work rather than an added activity that receives little priority. Such integration of M&E and learning proves difficult in practice. A study that collects experiences organisations have gained in this regard would contribute to thinking about M&E and learning. It could look at questions such as: how to make sure that M&E results in information that staff members want and need to improve their practice? How to ensure that M&E facilitates and documents, rather than overlaps with, processes of learning and monitoring already taking place? How to reconcile the goals of accountability and learning?

Third, future research may pay attention to finding alternatives to written documentation. In this book we have seen that the oral traditions

of many Southern societies limit the extent to which NGO staff members document knowledge, and how this in turn weakens the position of Southern actors in global exchanges of knowledge. In response a need was identified to build capacity for documentation. However, we may think more about the different forms that this documentation may take. Non-written forms, such as film, may better match the oral traditions of some, and new technologies may play a role in creating these forms. Powell (2006: 530) writes that “[w]ithin the foreseeable future, developments in ICT will enable a capacity to handle oral information that will match current capacity for the written word.” Researching such developments would be interesting with an eye to the future.

Other ways in which ICT may support the learning of SNGOs represent a fourth topic for further research. In addition to technologies for the documentation of knowledge, research could also look at the way ICT may be used to promote the participation of all relevant parties in knowledge generation and exchange. This would include studying low-cost, accessible forms of connectivity that are open source and avoid long-term dependence on suppliers.

A fifth area for further research is what may be termed ‘knowledge for peace’. In this study I have noted that knowledge is part of conflict and that, conversely, discussing different interpretations of the conflict as well as of the shape peace should take is an important part of peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. This means that reconciliation has an important knowledge component. However, I have not really been able to find out how exactly knowledge exchange and joint learning processes may contribute to peacebuilding directly (rather than via the increased effectiveness of learning organisations). Initiatives such as the ones mentioned in section 5.1.1 could be studied in more detail: The Dialogues Politiques project by the organisation Environmental Development Action in the Third World (ENDA) in Dakar, Senegal; in Brazil, the visioning activities of the Landless Workers; the Reflect Programme of Action Aid; and the Netherlands-based Split Screen project.

A final and more macro-level field of study that would merit additional research is the response of different countries to tensions between knowledge systems. All developing countries are confronted with tensions between traditional, indigenous knowledge and new types of knowledge coming from the West. Different countries have responded to this in different ways. Analysing these different responses, and their results, would be an interesting research project.

Whether or not it leads to such further research, it is hoped that this book may make a small contribution to improving the learning, and thereby the actions, of Southern peacebuilding NGOs, and perhaps other organisations as well. An effort will be made to ensure that the findings and recommendations of this study reach those who may put them to use. They will be discussed with the organisations co-funding the research that led to this book, with other NNGOs, with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a 'back donor', and in as far as possible with the Southern NGO staff that were interviewed for the study.

Dutch summary

Dit proefschrift richt zich op kennis en op vredesopbouw. Het heeft als doel om een beter inzicht te krijgen in de manieren waarop lokale vredesopbouworganisaties in (post)conflictlanden (met name Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cambodja en de Filippijnen) kennis vergaren, verwerken, genereren en verspreiden om zo effectiever te worden in hun streven naar het bereiken van duurzame vrede – met andere woorden, hoe zij strategisch leren. Strategisch leren gaat dieper dan het maken van tactische aanpassingen in een bestaande strategie. Het houdt in dat men zich afvraagt of de gevolgde strategie überhaupt de juiste is, op welke aannames de strategie is gebaseerd, welke impliciete waarden eraan ten grondslag liggen, en of die aannames en waarden eventueel moeten worden aangepast. Dergelijke strategische leerprocessen zijn belangrijk voor organisaties om zich aan te passen aan de snel veranderende omstandigheden die een conflict met zich meebrengt en om fouten – of sub-optimale uitkomsten – te voorkomen. Juist in een omgeving die wordt gekenmerkt door (dreigend) conflict is de mogelijke prijs van het maken van fouten hoog en is voortdurend leren van belang.

Externe actoren kunnen helpen strategische leerprocessen op gang te brengen. Hun frisse blik en vergelijkingsmateriaal maken het mogelijk om buiten denkkaders te treden en meer diepgaande vragen te stellen over het eigen handelen. De lokale gemeenschappen op wie projecten zich richten, collega's van andere organisaties en kennisinstellingen kunnen ieder op hun eigen manier een dergelijke bijdrage leveren. Interactie is dus van groot belang voor leren, iets dat door de medewerkers van lokale vredes-NGOs die meewerkten aan het onderzoek ook werd benadrukt. Een andere reden waarom interactie van belang is voor leren is dat alleen op deze manier de zogenaamde stille kennis – kennis die niet is gedocumenteerd – naar voren komt. Vaak beseffen mensen niet dat ze kennis bezitten die voor anderen relevant is totdat ze met die anderen in gesprek treden.

Strategisch leren blijkt in de wereld van de vredesorganisaties echter vaak achterwege te blijven. Wat met name ontbreekt is denken over het grotere plaatje van vredesopbouw – de weg naar het uiteindelijke doel van duurzame vrede – en de manier waarop de eigen activiteiten in dit plaatje passen. Dit kan worden verklaard door een aantal omstandigheden die uit de studie naar voren komen, die het moeilijk maken voor lokale vredesorganisaties om te leren. Over het algemeen hebben deze NGOs een gebrek aan tijd en capaciteit voor onafhankelijke reflectie op het eigen werk, het doen van onderzoek, en het

documenteren en verspreiden van kennis. Verscheidene factoren dragen hiertoe bij. Allereerst is er de lage onderzoekscapaciteit in ontwikkelingslanden als geheel, waar getalenteerde mensen vertrekken en lokale universiteiten ondergefinancierd zijn en zich bovendien meestal niet richten op ‘praktische’ disciplines als vredesopbouw en ontwikkelingsstudies. Nog fundamenteler is het enorme verschil in onderzoekscapaciteit tussen Noord en Zuid. Ook botsen verschillende kennissystemen – ‘modern’ en ‘traditioneel’, ‘extern’ en ‘inheems’ – binnen ontwikkelingslanden met elkaar. Daarbij is er een structurele ongelijkheid in wie bepaalt welke kennis als legitiem wordt beschouwd. Het dominante discours in de wereld van ontwikkelingssamenwerking en vredesopbouw wordt over het algemeen in het Noorden bepaald.

Het ontmoetingspunt tussen Noord en Zuid waarin zulke structurele factoren tot uiting komen zijn de partnerschappen tussen Noordelijke en Zuidelijke NGOs, waarbij de Noordelijke NGOs (NNGOs) als donor optreden. Deze relaties zijn ingebed in een keten van beleid en financiering: de NNGOs worden op hun beurt door regeringen en internationale organisaties ondersteund. Ondanks de goede bedoelingen van donoren is het binnen deze keten vaak een éénrichtingsverkeer van kennis. Beleid wordt in het Noorden bepaald en Zuidelijke partners doen vaak weinig meer dan het implementeren van dat beleid. Hierbij ligt de nadruk op korte-termijnprojecten en het leveren van meetbare resultaten. Deze zaken laten weinig ruimte voor reflectie op het grotere plaatje – de plek van de activiteiten in langdurige processen van vredesopbouw.

Niet alle Noord-Zuid partnerschappen volgen echter een dergelijke ketenbenadering en er zijn ook relaties waarbij wel tweerichtingverkeer plaatsvindt rond beleidsvorming. Dergelijke partnerschappen worden over het algemeen gekenmerkt door een langere relatie, onderling vertrouwen en het openstaan voor andere perspectieven. Dit gaat het gemakkelijkst met Zuidelijke organisaties die al een bepaald capaciteitsniveau hebben bereikt – die in staat zijn onderzoek te doen naar hun omstandigheden en resultaten, te leren van hun werk en een mening te vormen over beleid. Veel Zuidelijke NGOs zijn echter minder ver ontwikkeld. Zij zouden gebaat zijn bij capaciteitsopbouw, niet in de vorm van het overdragen van reeds vaststaande kennis maar door hun eigen leer-, onderzoeks- en documentatiecapaciteit te helpen ontwikkelen. Deze vaardigheden worden door lokale organisaties ook hoog geplaatst op het lijstje van kennis die zij graag zouden vergaren.

Het feit dat lokale organisaties vooral door buitenlandse actoren worden gefinancierd, en aan hen ook in eerste instantie verantwoording schuldig zijn, roept vragen op over hun lokale inbedding en de rol die ze kunnen

spelen in het binnenlandse politieke spectrum. Als uitvoerders van donorbeleid die concrete, bijna technische resultaten dienen te behalen zijn lokale NGOs vaak niet in staat een politieke rol te spelen als onderdeel van de civiele maatschappij, vertegenwoordiger van lokale belangen, en controleur van de regering. Ook dit beperkt hun mogelijkheden om zichzelf als onderdeel te zien van het bredere proces van vredesopbouw, dat immers een politiek proces is.

De conflicten die hun werkomgeving kenmerken spelen ook een rol in het bemoeilijken van de leerprocessen van Zuidelijke vredesorganisaties. Deze conflicten hebben vaak geleid tot een tekort aan de benodigde infrastructuur voor onderzoek en kennisuitwisseling, maar ook tot een gebrek aan het onderlinge vertrouwen dat nodig is voor interactie en gezamenlijk leren. Dit gebrek aan vertrouwen wordt nog eens versterkt door het financieringssysteem van NGOs, dat hen tot concurrenten van elkaar maakt. Concurrentie is niet bevorderlijk voor open kennisuitwisseling, omdat organisaties bang zijn strategische voordelen weg te geven.

Ondanks de genoemde obstakels zijn de medewerkers van lokale vredes-NGOs in (post)conflictlanden op verscheidene manieren bezig met kennis en leren. Een veel voorkomende kennisstrategie is het opzetten van netwerken waarin medewerkers van verschillende organisaties kennis uitwisselen en hopen te leren van elkaars ervaringen. In deze netwerken komen veel van de problemen tot uiting die de leercapaciteit van Zuidelijke vredesorganisaties in het algemeen beperken. Concurrentie tussen organisaties en wantrouwen tussen individuen beïnvloeden het functioneren van vredesnetwerken. Dergelijke problemen spelen echter een veel minder grote rol in internationale netwerken waarin mensen uit verschillende landen samenkomen. Over grenzen heen is de concurrentie minder direct aanwezig en lijkt men bovendien beter in staat om te discussiëren op een hoger abstractieniveau, en daarmee om strategisch te leren.

Leerprocessen binnen Zuidelijke vredes-NGOs zijn veelal informeel, evenals leren uit interactie met doelgroepen, regeringen en andere actoren. Wat vaak niet gebeurt is het documenteren van de hieruit voortkomende kennis, die daarmee tot een kleine kring beperkt blijft. En hoewel medewerkers van lokale NGOs vaak kritiek hebben op beleid en discours van externe actoren zijn zij hierdoor niet in staat om hun kennis hier tegenover te stellen en op gelijke voet aan beleidsdiscussies deel te nemen.

Universiteiten zouden kunnen helpen bij het documenteren van kennis door onderzoek te doen in de praktijk van NGOs maar ook door NGO-medewerkers bij te staan in het opdoen van onderzoeks- en documentatievaardigheden. Er is echter weinig interactie tussen academici en NGO-medewerkers in de bezochte landen. Eén van de zaken die hierbij een rol spelen is het verschil tussen de cultuur van academia (en hun definitie van legitieme kennis) en die van NGOs. Toch bestaat er een initiatief, bestudeerd in hoofdstuk acht, waarin een dergelijke samenwerking wordt bevorderd, met het doel NGO-medewerkers te helpen uit de eigen praktijk lessen te trekken en die om te zetten in kennis die een bijdrage kan leveren aan internationale discussies over vredesopbouw. Actie-onderzoek naar de eigen praktijk staat hierin centraal. Deze methode lijkt goed te passen bij de leercyclus (handelen – reflecteren – planning aanpassen – opnieuw handelen) van vredesorganisaties. Betrokken universiteiten staan echter niet altijd even open voor deze methode.

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Meetings attended

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- Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) seminar with Johan Galtung and Cambodian peacebuilders. Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 23 May 2006.
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- RTC: meeting with Alexandra Moore (Programme Coordinator), Simon Fisher (ACTS Co-ordinator and Lead Trainer), and Gopal Rao (Chief Executive). Birmingham, UK, 5 July 2007.

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Annex 1. GPPAC survey statistics per region

GPPAC region	Survey type ³⁷⁹	Surveys sent	Surveys returned	% of surveys returned
Central and East Africa	A	21	12	57%
	B	36	17	46%
	Total	57	29	51%
West Africa	A	21	6	29%
	B	35	12	34%
	Total	56	18	32%
Southern Africa	A	13	8	62%
	B	21	3	14%
	Total	34	11	32%
Middle East and North Africa	A	12	2	17%
	B	8	4	50%
	Total	20	6	30%
Western Europe	A	29	8	28%
	B	28	15	54%
	Total	57	23	40%
The Balkans	A	11	9	82%
	B	52	9	17%
	Total	63	18	29%
Western Commonwealth of Independent States	A	11	3	27%
	B	0	0	-
	Total	11	3	27%
The Caucasus	A	7	4	57%
	B	24	14	58%
	Total	31	18	58%
Central Asia	A	0	0	-
	B	19	15	79%
	Total	19	15	79%
Northeast Asia	A	12	8	67%
	B	21	1	5%
	Total	33	9	27%
Southeast Asia	A	26	4	15%
	B	24	8	33%
	Total	50	12	24%
South Asia	A	14	4	29%
	B	24	9	38%
	Total	38	13	34%
The Pacific	A	24	11	46%
	B	12	3	25%
	Total	36	14	39%
North America	A	16	3	19%
	B	15	5	33%
	Total	31	8	26%
Latin America and the Caribbean ³⁸⁰	A	44	2	5%
	B	43	0	0%
	Total	87	2	2%
Totals	A	261	84	32%
	B	362	115	32%
	Total	623	199	32%

³⁷⁹ Version A was for people directly involved in GPPAC; version B for people indirectly involved.

³⁸⁰ All were sent both versions so that they could choose which one they wanted to fill out. For the purpose of the calculations of totals, here the surveys sent are listed as half A's and half B's.

Annex 2. Excerpts from GPPAC global survey reports

Version A – for people directly involved in GPPAC

3. What, if any, are the benefits of the global GPPAC network for your organization?

No benefits	Benefits (specify)	Don't know / not applicable
7	See below	2

- **Access to knowledge and expertise (35)** in the field; increased understanding of issues – particularly those at global level
- **Exchange of experiences and learning (32)** collect and share lessons learned and best practices
- **Contacts; expansion of network and partners (30);** partnerships; meeting people at conferences; links with other regional networks
- **Collaboration (24);** provides potential for truly regional and global action. Joint projects, including peace education.
- **Capacity building (12)** – strengthen organisation, provide training
- **Visibility/legitimacy (11)** of our organisation through GPPAC
- **Lobby and advocacy (11);** more advocacy power through the power of numbers and links with influential players; bridging the gap between governments and civil society; lobbying with UN, especially around the peacebuilding commission, of particular value
- **Raising awareness (8)** conflict prevention and the role of civil society
- **Mutual assistance (10)** and practical and moral support
- **Access to funds (6)**
- **Unity of civil society (5);** bringing CSOs together
- **Provides a focus on the concept of conflict prevention (4)** and a way to both clarify and promote concrete actions and policies in support of that idea.
- **Create bridges (2):** Link local initiatives for conflict prevention with (sub)regional mechanisms for influencing political decision-making
- **Acknowledgement of women's organizations (2),** sharing, cooperating with women and women's organizations working with 1325
- **An "honest" agenda (2):** "the agenda is set by the regions, through the ISG. I can clearly see that this agenda differs from a, for example, pure European agenda. The wide spectrum of opinions, cultures, and knowledge makes it possible to deal with such complex issues such as conflicts and wars in an equally complex way"

4. What, if any, are the benefits of the regional GPPAC network for your organization?

No benefits	Benefits (specify)	Don't know / not applicable
5	See below	2

- **Exchange of experiences and learning (40)** collect and share lessons learned and best practices
- **Provide access to knowledge and expertise (28)** in the field
- **Collaborative work and joint activities (22)** ; provides potential for truly regional action. This could deepen the cultural and economic integration of countries and people in a region. Peace education could be a joint programme.
- **Gaining contacts and partnerships (18)** with other players in region; networking
- **Lobby and advocacy (14)**; more advocacy power through the power of numbers and links with influential players; bridging the gap between governments and civil society
- **Capacity building (10)**, also increasing our understanding of the context in which we work
- **Coordination (6)** of activities to prevent duplication
- **Visibility/legitimacy/influence (5)** of our organisation has increased
- **Raised awareness (3)** of the importance of working on peacebuilding and conflict prevention issues
- **Mutual understanding and support (3)**
- **Fundraising (3)**
- **Local and national issues can be raised at regional and global levels (2)**
- **Provides a focus on the concept of conflict prevention (2)** and a way to both clarify and promote concrete actions and policies in support of that idea.
- **Use of the conclusions and recommendations of Regional and Global Action Agenda (2)**
- **Strengthening our networks (2)**
- **Regular meetings (2)**

5. What, in your view, are the most important functions of the global GPPAC network?

- **Lobby and advocacy (31)** towards international policymakers, particularly the UN.
- **Exchange of experiences (26)** and information
- **Generating and disseminating information, research (26)**
- **Implementing joint programmes (17)** and the Global Action Agenda (although some feel it is too broad and needs more focus)
- **Facilitator and coordinator (16)**: of interaction and cooperation among NGOs and between NGOs, governmental bodies and international organisations. Facilitate meetings among regional

GPPAC in order to plan activities and set common agendas.
Harmonise peacebuilding activities at global level.

- **Fundraising (14)** and supporting members' fundraising
- **Raising visibility and awareness (13)** of nonviolent strategies of preventing armed conflicts and of the role, activities and issues of civil society. Linking the global to the local.
- **Partnerships and contacts (12)**
- **Capacity building (11)** of members
- **Acting as an interface (7)** between universal civil society on the one hand and the United Nations and other official (regional) organisations on the other.
- **Building solidarity and unity (6)** among the members of the network; form a common front. Mutual support.
- **Providing global leadership (5)** – direction and guidance
- **Advisor (5)**
- **Global conferences and meetings (4)**
- **Political activism (2):** on global issues such as War on Terror, Middle East, North Korea
- **Enlargement of the network (2)**
- **Evaluation (2)** of the results of conflict prevention initiatives
- **Bring civil society peacebuilders together (2)**
- **Vehicle for developing policy and practice (2)** that potentially will have a positive impact in emerging conflict situations.
- **Supporting the regional networks (2)**
- **Connect civil society and the UN (2)** in efficient, concrete mechanisms that can empower a global civil society network to work for human security.

6. What, in your view, are the most important functions of the regional GPPAC network?

- **Exchange of experiences (19)**
- **Generating and disseminating information, research (17)** including analyses of the functioning of organizations in the field of conflict prevention; Mapping of conflict, actors, CSO roles and contributions
- **Lobby and advocacy (17)** towards governments and regional policymakers; changing national legislation; establish partnerships with the peacekeeping institutions
- **Joint activities and campaigns (17)** including the implementation of the regional action agendas
- **Coordinate (14):** harmonise peacebuilding activities, prevent duplication of work
- **Connections and contacts (12)**
- **Joint strategising (11)** – incl. the regional action agenda and work plan
- **Capacity building (8)** of members – esp. training. Empower civil society.

- **Mobilize and unify civil society (7)** and build a common understanding of conflict and conflict prevention
- **Building solidarity (6)** among the members of the network
- **Bring to the fore regional and national concerns (5)** that need to be addressed at the global level; provide a place for different groups to recruit support for their ideas
- **Raising awareness (5)** of nonviolent strategies of preventing armed conflicts and of the role of civil society
- **Meetings (4)**
- **Building relationships between civil society, governments and regional and international organisations (4).** Promote dialogue.
- **Facilitating dialogue (3)** and communication between various players in the field
- **Strengthen and support national networks (3)** and help them to become linked regionally and globally
- **Fundraising (3)** and helping members raise funds
- **Early warning and early response (2)**

9. What are the main challenges faced by GPPAC and/or the regional network?

- **Low financial resources (24)**
- **The difficulty of proving its value by moving towards implementation and concrete activities (18).** There is lack of clarity on way forward post–New York. GPPAC needs to prove of practical value in actually preventing violent conflict—as opposed to “holding endless meetings and conferences to talk about it”.
- **Finding a focus and developing a clear strategy (11).** Focus on a few achievable goals and then doing those well
- **Unfriendly political environment (9)** in some regions and countries makes it difficult for civil society to work freely; bad governance; corruption; lack of political will of powerful states; lack of security.
- **Insufficient information flow / communication (8)**
- **Coordination (7)**
- **Low commitment (5)** on the part of some actors. Persuading people to be actively involved is a challenge. Members have to deal with competing demands on their time and energy.
- **Demonstrate relevance to prominent conflicts (3)** - Middle East, Iraq, Darfur, North Korea, war on terror - as well as less prominent conflict situations and trends
- **Keeping the momentum (3)**
- **Little coverage (3)** in the countries of the region ; enlarging the network
- **Sustainability (3)**
- **GPPAC is little known (3)**
- **Too few members (3);** important actors left out
- **Supporting weak members (2)**
- **Language barriers (2)**

- **The reality of armed conflicts (2)**
- **Poverty (2)** and related issues
- **Ownership and decision making (2)** – lack of transparency

10. What are your recommendations for strengthening the functions mentioned under questions 5 and 6?

- **Raise funds (22).** Find more stable and constant fundraising basis. Make more use of the media to raise profile.
- **Improve information flows (16):** establish research and documentation centre; regional websites; brief electronic newsletter; activate the GPPAC website and make it a marketplace of ideas, initiatives, projects.
- **Build capacity (13)** of members; provide (online) trainings
- **Plan and implement concrete joint activities (11).** Establish working groups to work on common activities. Start implementing the action agendas.
- **Improve democratic governance, transparency and ownership (8)**
- **Strengthen global, regional and national secretariats/coordinators (8)**
- **More regular meetings (6)**
- **More focus (4);** also in order to create the GPPAC ‘brand’
- **Expand the network (4),** engaging as many institutions as possible at all levels
- **Establish better links to local level (2)**
- **Set up Monitoring and Evaluation methods (2)**
- **Develop an early warning for early response system (2)**
- **Focus on peace education (2)**
- **Work in close collaboration with UN Peacebuilding Commission (2)**
- **Create and strengthen secretariats at global, regional and national level (2)**
- **Better PR (2)** of GPPAC and of conflict prevention

22. What are your priorities for knowledge sharing within the global and the regional GPPAC network? What knowledge do you think should be shared?

- **Conflict prevention and peacebuilding knowledge and methods (19)**
- **Specialised conflict prevention/peacebuilding issues and methods:**
 - **Peace education (13)**
 - **Human rights (5)**
 - **The arms market; SALW; disarmament (4)**
 - **Early warning and early response (4)**
 - **Good governance (2)**
 - **The role of religion (1)**
 - **Grassroots experiences and traditions (1)**
 - **Postconflict reconciliation (1)**
 - **Link between development and conflict (1)**
 - **Innovative peacebuilding methods (1)**
 - **Types of conflict and root causes (1)**
 - **Human security (1)**
 - **Negotiation skills (1)**

- **Experiences (9)** in the field
- **Information about GPPAC (7):** goals, action plans, developments – including follow up to UN activities
- **Activities undertaken by members (8) and by the network.** Information on how programs in various regions are carried out. Understand the formula of success.
- **Lobbying and advocacy methods (4)**
- **Information about what is happening in regions (3)**
- **The role of civil society (2)**
- **Networking methodologies and lessons (2)**
- **Capacity building methods (2)**
- **Information about global issues and processes (2)**
- **Strategic planning (1)**

Version B – for people indirectly involved

9. What, if any, are the benefits of the global GPPAC network for your organization?

No benefits	Benefits (specify)	Don't know / not applicable
7		14

- **Opportunity to exchange experience (34)**
- **Partnerships and contacts (23)** - creating global connections and multilevel communication
- **Access to knowledge and expertise (20)**
- **Growth of my organisation's capacity (11)**
- **Draws attention (10)** of the world community to our conflicts and peacebuilding efforts
- **Facilitate cooperation and collaboration (9)** of peacebuilding organizations within their regions and globally, between governments, and international agencies
- **Lobby and advocacy (8)** at various levels
- **Meetings, conference (7)**
- **Increased visibility of organisation (6)** and more clout towards governments and regional organisations
- **Access to resources (4)** directly or by establishing contacts with donors through GPPAC
- **Solidarity (4)** regionally and globally
- **Joint projects (4)**
- **Link the global to the local (3)**
- **Partnership with UN (3)**
- **Reduction of the risks of conflict development (2)** in our region

10. What, if any, are the benefits of the regional GPPAC network for your organization?

No benefits	Benefits (specify)	Don't know / not applicable
12		16

- **Exchange of experience (21)**
- **Partnerships and contacts (17)**
- **Collaboration (12)** on relevant regional peace and conflict issues
- **Increase of capacity of the organisation (11)** , access to training, and broadening organisations' sphere of activities
- **Receiving information (8)**
- **Lobby and advocacy (5)** at various levels
- **Increased visibility and credibility of organisation (4)**
- **Access to resources (3)**
- **Partnership with UN (2)**

11. What, in your view, are the most important functions of the global GPPAC network?

- **Lobbying (32)** at different levels; advancing the interests of the network members and their constituencies. Liaise with the UN and in particular the Peacebuilding Commission
- **Information (20):** Provide us with information of good quality –about global processes, what other members are doing, research results, tools and methods
- **Bring together governments and NGOs (16)**
- **Sharing knowledge and experiences (14)**
- **Partnerships and contacts (14)** among civil society and with governments
- **Advocacy (14):** high-level; organising global campaigns
- **Liaising with UN (14) – in the future,** represent the network with a seat at the UN
- **Collaboration (11):** coordinating joint activities and implementing plans. Establish working groups on different directions where conflict develops. Maximising resources through collaboration.
- **Awareness raising (11)** among populations
- **Access to resources (11):** financial as well as content
- **Build capacities (11):** Training of specialists and monitors
- **Supporting the regional networks (10)**
- **Develop common vision and strategy (9)**
- **Mobilisation (9):** Mobilise the world community, mass media, and international organisations in the resolution, and prevention of conflicts and war
- **Organise meetings (9):** Participation at high level international and global conferences
- **Develop methods of prevention (7):** introduce alternative approaches to address conflicts around the world

- **Coordination (6)**
- **Monitor, research and analyse conflicts (6)** and their cause-consequence relations
- **Building networks around themes (4)**
- **Trust and solidarity building (3)** between representatives of peace NGOs, grassroots peace people, representatives of UN and governments
- **Mediate (2)** between conflicting groups, ethnic groups and the state.

12. What, in your view, are the most important functions of the regional GPPAC network?

- **Cooperation and joint activities (27)**; implementing the Regional Action Agenda. Maximising resources through collaboration.
- **Partnerships and contacts (17)** among civil society and with governments
- **Exchange of knowledge and experiences (16)**, lessons learned, best practices
- **Lobby (12)** – national, regional and international. Promotion of regional interests on international level
- **Advocacy (11)**: Unite forces of NGOs in conflict prevention. Present the opinion of the public to the relevant authorities.
- **Building capacities (10)**: Education of our specialists
- **Elaborating norms and methods of prevention (9)**
- **Keeping us informed (6)**: communication and provision of information to network members
- **Monitoring (6)**: Evaluation of ongoing conflicts
- **Financial support (6)**
- **Developing joint agenda (5)**
- **Representing regional interests (3)** and special regional issues
- **Raise the profile (2)** of civil society and peacebuilding at the regional level

15. What are the main challenges faced by GPPAC and/or the regional network?

- **Unfriendly political environment (11)**
- **Communication (10)**
- **Lack of concrete activities (8)** ; no implementation yet
- **Lack of funds (8)** – need to interest donors in long-term support
- **Few contacts with state bodies and regional organisations (6)**
- **Maintaining the network (6)**; Maintain the level of attention and activities.
- **Enlargement (6)** stay open to all organisations actively committed
- **Lack of focus (5)**
- **Continuity and sustainability (5)**; activities have an isolated character, they are not systematic
- **Too far removed from grassroots (4)**

- **Governance (4):** ineffective, lack of ownership, lack of transparency
- **Building coherency (4)** despite the diverging issues and levels development of countries and regions
- **Socio-economic issues (3)**
- **Reality of armed conflict (3)**
- **Political realities (2):** violent conflicts, US foreign policy
- **Lack of institutional support (2)** to members and national networks/focal points
- **Politics within network (2)** particularly in Middle East where Israeli organisations are prevented from joining
- **Commitment (2) of members**
- **Language barriers (2):** information is distributed in English
- **Low capacity of members (2):** not enough skills in networking and little capacity for conflict intervention

16. What are your recommendations for strengthening the functions mentioned under questions 11 and 12?

- **Governance (17):** create clarity on structures and procedures; increase ownership and transparency; provide equal opportunities for all network members. Specify mandates and roles and address representativeness
- **Decide on aims and strategies (12)** for the implementation of the Action Agendas, and do so in a participatory way. Also develop benchmarks.
- **Strengthen the secretariats (10)** at various levels
- **Exchange of knowledge (9):** Learn from others. Constant exchange of information among network members
- **Build capacity (7)** of network members
- **Increase communication and access to information (7)** possibly through internet and a regular newsletter
- **Organize regular conferences and meetings (7)**
- **Influence governments (7):** Develop a system of cooperation and mechanisms of influence on politicians and the state
- **Cooperate with existing networks (7),** unite forces and methodologies with real activists and active organizations
- **Capacity building of members (6):** this would also provide them with incentives for participation in the network, moral and material
- **Monitor possible conflict zones (4)**
- **Start joint activities (4)** including follow-up of conferences
- **Financial support (4):** find long-term funding
- **Regular meetings (3):** Organise a early global forum or a constant operating network of round tables
- **Join organizations and networks that deal with security (3):** UN, NATO, EU and other multilateral and international organizations
- **Establish ongoing relations with international institutions such as UN (3)**

- **Access to experts (3):** Establishment of a data base of consultants
- **Internships and visiting fellows programmes(2)**
- **Establish monitoring mechanisms (2)**
- **Advocacy (2)**
- **Intensify lobby with UN and others (2)**