

REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT



Consultation Report: Understanding Cumulative Impacts

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Introduction

In 2007, the Reflecting on Peace Practice project (RPP) undertook an effort to explore systematically how cumulative impacts in peace practice occur. The evidence gathered by RPP and summarized in *Confronting War* pointed to many factors that have *prevented* programs from “adding up” to have an impact on the overall conflict situation. Yet, while RPP gained the key insights in that phase that the effectiveness of peace initiatives depended in large part on their strategic links to the driving factors of conflict and their “linkages” to efforts at other levels, sectors and target groups, there was little practical evidence about what constitutes an effective linkage. It was clear that we need more learning about what contributes to the “adding up” process and, consequently, how practitioners can work to improve the cumulative impacts of all peace efforts in an area.

At this writing (February 2008), cumulative case studies have been completed in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Burundi and South Africa and are underway in Sri Lanka and Israel/Palestine. All have focused on contexts in which there has been progress towards peace, in some cases sustained and in others not. These cases looked specifically at whether and how multiple peace efforts have cumulative positive impacts at particular moments, and how activities and successes at the community or local level and at the national level can be linked to provide sustainable changes and momentum toward peace. CDA’s 2006 study on the impact of peacebuilding on violence in Kosovo was also included in the discussion for comparison, as it addressed similar issues.

The first Consultation on Understanding Cumulative Impacts was held in Boston, Massachusetts on January 9-10, 2008. Twenty-two people attended the Consultation, including donors, practitioners and the authors of the case studies. The purpose of the Consultation was to analyze what the case evidence suggests about how individual, diverse peace efforts and programs may or may not have contributed or even “added up” to peace, and how this evidence can inform international actors’ efforts to improve the collective impact of their activities. During the first day, participants analyzed the five cases in small groups and presented insights and observations in the plenary. During the second day, participants identified and discussed themes that cut across the different cases. We also discussed what is being learned about how to do these case studies more effectively, and developed plans for the next round of cases.

While no definitive patterns emerged from the limited number of cases analyzed during the Consultation, the discussions did highlight a number of relevant factors that will be pursued in greater depth in future cases, as well as in revisions of current case studies.

Understanding of Success and Failure

The Consultation began by asking how people understand success and failure in peace practice and whether RPP should develop a definition on which all cases and discussions should be based. Many definitions of “success” or “progress” existed in the cases: from negotiated agreements, coexistence, and restoring the ability of a society to deal with conflict on its own to stability, parallel behaviors without agreement between the parties, and others. The Consultation highlighted several issues that need to be kept in mind, both in the development and analysis of the cases.

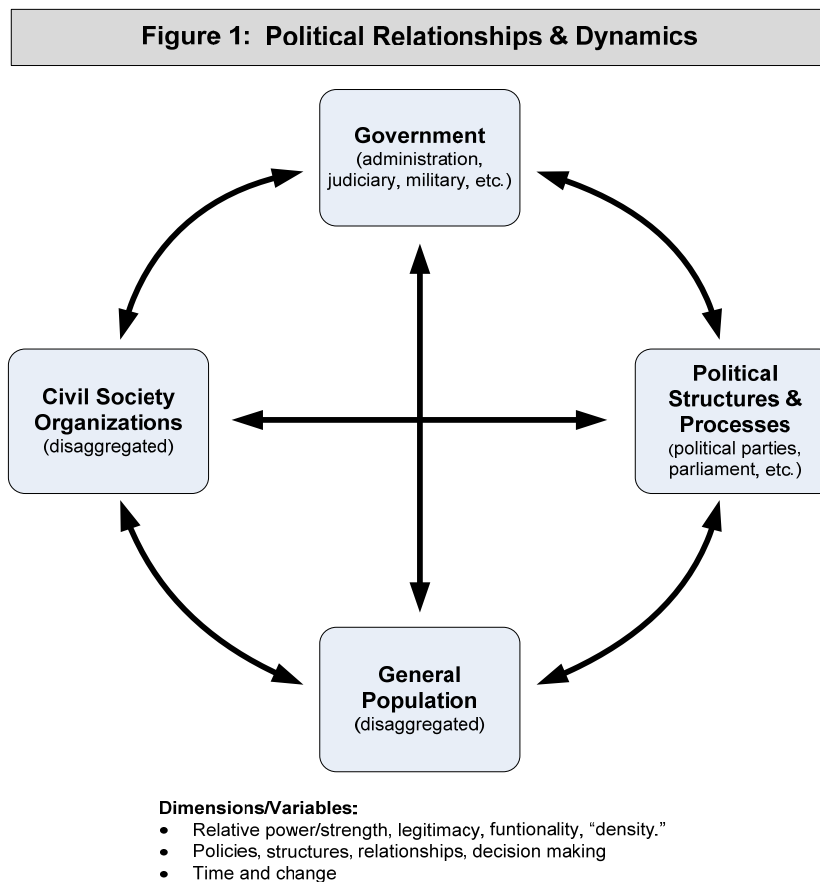
- 1. The distinction between Peace Writ Large, peace writ little and progress toward Peace Writ Large.** There was considerable discussion about the meanings of Peace Writ Large, steps or progress towards Peace Writ Large (PWL), and peace writ little. The distinctions between the three were clarified as follows:
 - PWL refers to the larger peace, at a societal level, rather than in a particular sector, geographical area, a community or within or between particular constituencies.
 - Peace writ little refers to the achievement of peace in one community, area, sector or part of the population. This concept has to do with efforts that, while good, are limited in their actual and potential impacts on the larger conflict. Peace writ little is, therefore, distinct from...
 - Steps toward PWL, which include relevant actions that address the larger conflict and represent progress toward solving it even though they fall short of the full achievement of PWL.¹ One of the questions to be explored further in this collaborative learning effort is whether and how peace writ little becomes a step toward PWL.
- 2. There is no single definition of peace.** The discussions highlighted that conflicting parties and populations often have different definitions of peace, and of what constitutes progress toward peace, and that these may change over time. There is little point in attempting to establish a universal definition of peace, since effective peace work must take account of the relevant and operational definitions that people hold in the area of focus. An area for further exploration is what these definitions are, when and how they change, and whether and how they converge over time.
- 3. Progress is not linear.** There are setbacks and advances on the path to peace. Consultation participants discussed the effects of failures or setbacks on peace processes, and how people relate to and plan activities in relation to these setbacks. It was noted that in at least one case, people did not focus on little failures as the peace process gained momentum. The discussion highlighted the importance of exploring

¹ In none of the cases – even those where the most progress was thought to have been made – was full Peace Writ Large achieved—that is, the deep, fundamental issues contributing to violent conflict were not all resolved. However, some progress toward Peace Writ Large had been identified and acknowledged in all cases, even though in Cyprus and some future cases that progress had been reversed or undermined. This progress, or steps towards peace, could be considered a cumulative impact.

how people interpret a negative event or potential failure during a peace process, and how this varies contextually and over time.

Political Relationships and Dynamics

Political relationships and dynamics amongst civil society, government, political structures and processes and the general population were key factors in all the cases. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of these interrelationships. The Consultation discussion focused on the roles of civil society, and raised the question of whether different interpretations of the importance of civil society are linked to who we are and our personal inclinations to appreciate and focus on it. Some patterns began to emerge from the cases regarding the roles, activities and relationships of civil society that contribute to the cumulative impacts of different peace efforts.



1. *Filling communication gaps.* Many people noted the impact of effective communication between leaders and constituencies within conflicting parties. For example, in South Africa, such communication occurred within each party, as well as between the ANC leadership and the white minority (general population). In Kosovo

as well, good communication between leaders and their constituencies was a key factor in communities that escaped violence during the 2004 riots. In northern Cyprus, meanwhile, a successful social movement, in which political leaders, civil society and the grassroots communicated and worked together, effectively challenged the officials' negative position vis-à-vis the United Nations peace plan.

An important but often unplanned and uncoordinated role that civil society organizations played was to create communication channels where they did not previously exist, both at the leadership and grassroots levels. Roles included:

- Mediation between government and the opposition to break impasses on important policies and issues.
- When more than one government is involved (e.g., Cyprus, Northern Ireland), mediation and building of channels of communication between each government and political and armed opposition.
- Communicating and working with representatives of armed groups with whom the government would not talk.
- Representing marginalized or excluded groups to the government.
- Reaching out to, informing and mobilizing the general population in favor of agreements, processes or policies that contributed towards peace.

2. *Providing connections between Track One and Track Two processes.* The importance of some connection between Track One (official/government and political decision makers) and Track Two (unofficial/civil society to population at large) peace efforts was noted in the negative effect of its absence in Kosovo and Cyprus (Greek Cypriot side). What constitutes a “good connection” was less clear from the cases. The evidence from the cases thus far suggests that civil society is an important part of any peace process, but, as one participant noted, “Track One finishes the process.” In Northern Ireland, for example, civil society was involved in a large number of activities that were judged to have had some impacts, but in only one of the four areas that were identified as having had the most important impacts on peace. In South Africa, the contributions of civil society movements were acknowledged as important, but the main actors in the turning points identified were not civil society ones. In Burundi, where civil society's contribution to progress in the peace process was considered to be the greatest of the cases, one of the key turning points occurred because a visionary political leader moved to negotiation, excluding the involvement of the broad population at first.

3. *Broadening ownership of the process.* There was discussion about the extent to which civil society organizations in some of the cases were connected to or representative of the grassroots. The cases do suggest that connecting more people to the peace process (whether through civil society or directly by government) in some way helps create broader impact, even if (as happened in several cases) the activities that people undertake or participate in have limited particular impacts. Connecting more people to the peace process occurred, for example, through:

- participation in peace committees (South Africa)

- media, including televising the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (South Africa)
- mobilization of the general population in a campaign against the government's position on negotiation (Cyprus)
- participation in "reconciliation" projects funded through European Union peace funding mechanisms (Northern Ireland)

4. *Questions about civil society, government and cumulative impacts.* Regarding some aspects of political relationships and dynamics that facilitate cumulative impacts, there was contradictory evidence. We will continue to explore these issues in the existing and new cases. For instance:

1. **Independent or non-independent civil society?** What kind of relationship between civil society organizations and political structures (or government) helps promote cumulative impacts on peace? Does civil society need to be independent or not? The cases did not give a consistent answer to that question. In Burundi, because of the historical politicization of civil society, it was felt that close connections to politicians and government would limit and confine the space for civil society influence. The increasing independence of civil society members from politicians helped them play a role in defining dialogues for political parties there. The conclusion was that civil society needed to be independent of politicians. In Sri Lanka (a case in progress), by contrast, an MP opened space to raise human rights issues by founding a civil society organization and raising the issues he could not raise as a parliamentarian; civil society was a more effective forum for politicians to raise difficult issues.

Despite contradictory evidence on the relationship of civil society to politicians, the cases did suggest that civil society needs somehow to connect to politicians and political issues to be effective. This was evident again in the cases where civil society had not engaged with politics and political issues (Cyprus on the Greek Cypriot side, and Kosovo). The question of how to connect in ways that open rather than close space for dealing with conflict issues, and without becoming politicized, will be an area for further evidence-gathering.

2. **Strong or weak government?** Again there was contradictory evidence about power relations between government and civil society and the relative strength of each. In Burundi, for example, the government was considered weak (at least in terms of service delivery and legitimacy), and civil society has been able to fill spaces not occupied by the government and to play a positive role in the peace process. In Kosovo, where the government was equally weak in service delivery (and equally strong in terms of patronage networks), civil society has not been able to play a similar role.
3. **Aid-dependent government or not?** Questions were raised about how the degree of aid dependence of the country affected cumulative impacts. What effects does the international community have on the peace agenda and cumulative impacts through its "carrots" or aid-related decisions? There were only two cases (Burundi and

Kosovo) in which aid dependence was discussed. Consequently, no patterns could be seen. This issue will be explored in more depth in future cases.

4. **What is “civil society?”** Finally, the Consultation participants also highlighted the need for future cases to disaggregate “civil society” and its internal relationships in order to understand cumulative impacts. Who is civil society, and what are the relationships within it? Simply grouping non-governmental activities as “civil society” was deemed insufficient to understand how civil society contributes to cumulative impacts. In Cyprus, for example, it was significant that “public benefit” organizations began working on peace issues early, but they were unable to achieve broader impact until they allied with “economic benefit” civil society organizations such as unions and chambers of commerce. In some situations, political parties or religiously-based organizations are considered civil society, while in others they are not.

“Adding Up”

The biggest surprise for many, contrary to intuition and conventional wisdom, was that a multiplicity of uncoordinated efforts in Northern Ireland “added up” without any coherent overall strategy. Indeed, there appeared to be a redundancy that was helpful – duplication that facilitated progress rather than waste. This appeared to run counter to the RPP findings that efforts do not automatically add up to peace. It supported a claim frequently heard among peace practitioners that “if we do what we do best, even if others are doing similar work, over time it will in fact add up.”

Mechanisms for “adding up”

On deeper examination of the five cases, a number of mechanisms or paths that helped uncoordinated and unplanned activities “add up” were identified. We will continue to gather evidence on these mechanisms and processes to determine if there are any patterns to suggest greater probabilities of cumulative impacts, especially patterns as to when natural redundancy is positive rather than a harmful or wasteful diversion of resources.

1. **Synchronizing domains.** One reason various initiatives “added up” was the existence of progress in several domains simultaneously. In Northern Ireland, there was simultaneous (albeit over a period of time) progress in changing policy, addressing structural causes, strengthening the social fabric and influencing political dynamics. In South Africa, the key turning points represented progress in the structural, attitudinal and political domains. It did not seem to matter what kind of progress was made in a particular domain, so long as it was on some important aspect. In other words, it seemed that what was important was the evidence that problems in the society would be addressed. It also seemed important that progress in the different domains stayed in some degree of parallel relationship to each other (i.e., one did not get far ahead of the others).

2. **Convergence of different agendas.** Two kinds of agenda convergence were noted. The first involved people building on what others had done. In Northern Ireland, when something began to have an impact, this approach was noticed, adopted, built on, and tried with different constituencies. For example, when work with prisoners appeared to be having an impact, people tried working with other marginalized groups. The second type involved convergence between pro-peace and non-peace related agendas. In northern Cyprus, agendas for democratization, economic development and conflict resolution came together to cement a coalition that successfully defeated the rejectionist government. The peace activists, it was noted, had limited influence until they linked with economic benefit civil society organizations and tied the peace agenda to the economic and democratization agendas in the north.
3. **Critical mass.** There was a question about whether involvement of a critical mass of people in peace efforts is needed for cumulative impacts, and where and how this makes a difference. In Northern Ireland, 66% of the population knew about the European Union's "Peace I" funding, and 10% were actively involved. Even more became involved in the second (Peace II) program. Similarly, in South Africa, it was noted that the peace committees (even if they did not always succeed in their stated goals) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made peace a public process, involving greater numbers of people and offering a means for people to participate in and see themselves as part of a peace process. In both cases, expansion in the numbers of people who saw themselves as part of the peace process, rather than the nature or outcomes of what they did, was the factor that most contributed to momentum.
4. **From targets to actors.** A related phenomenon in several of the cases concerned the evolution of actors in the peace process. In several cases, people with whom practitioners worked as "targets" of peacebuilding transformed from targets to actors, who in turn initiated peacebuilding work with other constituencies. Examples included political prisoners in Northern Ireland, and participants in bi-communal workshops in northern Cyprus who became leaders of the pro-settlement movement and reached out to the public and to villagers.
5. **Leadership.** It was noted that the decisions of individual people – from Nelson Mandela to F.W. DeKlerk, to "mavericks" such as Mo Mowlam in Northern Ireland or the leadership in Burundi – to take bold steps to promote compromise represented major turning points toward peace. In South Africa, the flexibility and pragmatism of the leadership – "cutting corners" and not focusing on small failures – created momentum and contributed to what was seen as the inevitability of the process. A number of questions were raised, but not examined in depth, concerning when, how and where leadership is needed for cumulative impacts -- and how to work with leaders to promote peace. What are the meanings and levels of leadership? What is needed in leaders to produce change? What should be the balance between focus on leadership and focus on structure? With key personalities, does strategy not matter as much as personal initiative/bravery? Or, as in a case like Cyprus, where the formal

leadership had more of a negative influence on the possibilities for peace, would more work on structure have limited the negative influence of leadership? We will continue to gather evidence regarding the nature and qualities of leadership, as well as the peacebuilding work done with leadership, to determine whether there are patterns and strategies that seem more effective than others.

Several additional issues were raised, and will be explored in greater depth in future case studies.

- **Intra-community vs. inter-community peacebuilding.** It was noted in several cases – from Northern Ireland to Cyprus to South Africa – how much intra-community work was done for peacebuilding. In Kosovo, intra-community social bonds were critical both to the effectiveness and the failure of violence prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Is intra-community work always necessary? How should intra-community and inter-community work be sequenced or linked to maximize cumulative impact?
- **Coherence and planning.** One reason that seemingly uncoordinated and unplanned activities added up in Northern Ireland may be that certain ongoing initiatives, which did have coherent strategies, created the overall sense that a “peace process” existed. And cumulative impacts derived from the involvement of a broad spectrum of people and activities in this overall process. What kind of coherence is necessary, and by and amongst whom, to create this sense of an overall peace process is still an open question.
- **Peace at what level?** What are the dynamics and interactions among levels? Can there be tension between progress at various levels – for example, might progress on Track One in power-sharing discourage progress at the grassroots in reducing the importance of ethnicity as a contributing factor to conflict? Does progress at one level sometimes create its own backlash at other levels?
- **Context (both international and domestic) and its effect on “adding up”, and questions of timing.** Is there a way to capture the right moment for cumulative and sustainable impacts analytically and conceptually? What are the interactions between strategies and enabling factors? What understanding of the context do people need to have to do peace work effectively?

The dynamic between the “easy” and the “difficult/extreme”

There was strong evidence from the cases – as much from its absence as its presence – that dealing with the “hard” is important for cumulative impacts to happen. “Hard” refers both to difficult issues and to people who are hard to reach. The evidence was strong that, while it is not necessary to *start* with the “hard” issues or the hard to reach, working only with the easy to reach or on easy issues can be either a useful entry point or a sticking point (as clearly occurred in Kosovo). Beyond this, the evidence varied regarding the relationship between dealing with the “easy” (easy to reach and easy issues) and the “hard,” and when, how, and where to deal with the “hard.” In Northern Ireland, for example, it was noted that an initial process that worked from the “inside out” (i.e., building from the easy to reach) was less sustainable than the Good Friday agreement,

which worked from the “outside in” (building from the hard to reach). In Burundi, by contrast, the initial exclusion of armed movements from the peace process allowed progress to be made. Similarly, the peace process in South Africa proceeded amid fierce opposition by extremist groups, only to bring them into the fold at a later stage. The cases were equally disparate on the levels (key people or more people) at which hard and easy issues were being discussed.

Insider/Outsider Roles

What were the roles and relationships of outsiders to insiders in relation to cumulative impacts? The discussion focused on two areas of influence that emerged from the cases: political and financial.

1. **Outsider political roles.** Imposed action by outsiders had positive effects in some cases, but no clear patterns emerged as to when and under what circumstances imposed action produced positive rather than negative effects. In Burundi and Northern Ireland, decisions and pressures by “outsiders” (Mandela and the regional powers in Burundi, Britain/Ireland in Northern Ireland) imposed something the parties would not have agreed to on their own, but which set them on a path towards peace. In South Africa, also, the role of sanctions in pushing the National Party leadership to change course was significant. Indeed, in Burundi, outside mediation was characterized as “bad” by traditional conceptions, but nonetheless led to what were seen as positive outcomes. In Kosovo, by contrast, the imposed frameworks of the international community (for example, regarding multi-ethnic conditionalities in grants) had negative impacts by heightening resentment and cynicism.

Although not consistently mentioned across the cases, other outsider political roles were identified that may merit further exploration in both the existing and future cases. For example, visits and exchanges by political actors from Northern Ireland to South Africa, Cyprus, and other places were seen to play an important role – both for positive examples and, as the case authors noted, for exposure to negative examples that impressed on the Northern Irish the learning that “we don’t want to be like that.”

2. **The role of money.** The ways in which donor money affects political relationships and dynamics was discussed extensively. Common themes emerged, but again the evidence was diverse and will be explored further for patterns.
 - *Increasing participation.* Funding drew people into the peace process in many cases. In Northern Ireland, 10% of the population received European funding for peace projects, while in Burundi, civil society “exploded” in part due to the absence of government and in part to the availability of funding. Kosovo likewise saw a dramatic increase in the number of NGOs in the post-war period. In these cases, people perceived the growth in civil society activity as, at least in part, opportunistic in response to available funding. In Northern Ireland and Burundi, despite questions about the effectiveness of the

- *Opening space.* Donor emphasis on supporting civil society has opened space to bring out important (and sometimes hard) issues related to peace. In Sri Lanka (an upcoming case), a parliamentarian started raising human rights issues through a civil society organization that he felt he could not raise in the Parliament. In Cyprus, civil society activities first challenged the traditional myths that the two sides could not coexist, while in Burundi, financial support to media such as Studio Ijambo made a significant difference in widespread attitudes. Yet in Kosovo, civil society work, and in particular multi-ethnic civil society work, which was heavily supported by outside donors, did not open space as expected, in part because the funders themselves left certain important issues (e.g., the status of Kosovo) “off the table” for discussion. Consultation participants asked how we can determine whether donor support for civil society will open space, or merely siphon off resources and people from government institutions and processes.
- *Constraints of dealing with governments.* There was evidence that a need to negotiate funding with local government may undermine peace. In Cyprus, it was observed, the Republic of Cyprus government restricted where funding could go, thereby reinforcing the status quo. In Burundi, too, the potential for distortion in funding allocations arose from the fact that the government was both a key party to the conflict dynamic *and* a key decision-maker (with the UN) regarding a key funding source – the Peacebuilding Fund.
- *Decision-making and shifts of priorities.* How donors shift focus from one approach or set of priorities to another was an important theme affecting cumulative impacts. What are the criteria and process for making donor decisions? Which local people are involved? And how? In Burundi, where peace is still partial, participants noted that the peace focus of the international community (with the exception of the Peacebuilding Commission) has dissipated and turned, instead, toward development. Are there dangers of shifting funding away from peace-related activities as soon as “peace” seems to be achieved? In Cyprus, funding has also shifted after the rejected referendum on the Greek side, leaving many of the older peace activists without continued support.
- *Existence of and interaction between (peace-focused) indigenous civil society organizations and outsiders.* It was noted that, in those cases where organic and indigenous civil society organizations were working in relation to peace (Northern Ireland and South Africa), there appeared to be greater cumulative impacts. In Kosovo, by contrast, indigenous civil society organizations (including the biggest one which had advocated for non-violence) that played

an important role before the conflict did not maintain their roles after the war. The “project” society that grew enormously from the influx of external money had little impact on peace, in part, the discussion suggested, because what was labeled “peacebuilding” in that context may have been traditional development work that avoided the hard issues related to the conflict. However, the evidence does not consistently point to the presence of strong home-grown civil society organizations working on peace as a key factor in promoting peace. In Burundi, the growth of civil society, which was clearly donor-led, did play a key role in the peacebuilding process. In Cyprus, where the development of the bi-communal movement was also donor-led, the impacts were completely different in the two communities: bi-communal activists became effective in northern Cyprus, while their southern counterparts became marginalized by the political leadership and had little impact on peace.

Role of Specific Events

A question was raised concerning instances where positive events and processes in some countries were seen as negative in others. In South Africa, for example, the process of writing the Constitution was considered to have been a peacebuilding activity with tremendous impact, yet in Bolivia (and in Cyprus, through the UN-led negotiations), a similar process instead escalated the conflict. Why? When does a specific institutional form, process or event have positive or negative effects? How does peace practice relate to these events and influence whether they are positive or negative? There was also discussion of “iconic events” – not intentional processes, but atrocities or other events that were interpreted by populations in such a way as to promote or derail peace. What is the relation of peace practice to these “iconic events”?

Concepts/Analysis

Several cases point to the importance of the emergence of a shared analysis (even if not agreed to or common) as a benchmark for progress and a contributor to momentum for peace. The Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Burundi cases referred to a surprisingly (to the authors themselves) high degree of consensus amongst the people they interviewed on the genesis of and underlying causes of the conflicts. This did not mean that people agreed on the analysis of the conflict, but that they had developed an analysis acknowledging the concerns of others as legitimate. In Northern Ireland, the development of this shared analysis appeared to be the most significant impact of the multitude of unconnected and uncoordinated peace activities that seemed to “add up.”

Going forward: suggestions on methodology and case selection

Consultation participants made several suggestions about areas to focus on in future cases (or refinements of existing cases). These, along with the issues raised as common themes and questions across the case studies to date, will be incorporated into the terms of reference for future case studies. The suggestions included:

- Include more detail on political relationships and dynamics, including a more differentiated description of “civil society.”
- Examine in future cases how actors in the conflict interpreted and learned from failures or setbacks, as none of the processes in the cases to date proceeded in a linear fashion.
- Make the case studies more accessible and useful to the reader by:
 - i. Including more background on the context beyond conflict analysis and identification of the turning points, such as: the development situation, violence and security situation, economic context, etc.
 - ii. Breaking down interviewees by sector/type, so the reader can understand where the perspectives are coming from.
 - iii. Providing both more and less detail: more detail on the types of programs and what happened as a result. For example, explain in detail one typical activity that is representative of a category of programming (if there was a great deal of training, describe one typical training project to give the reader the flavor of these activities).
 - iv. Including an executive summary.

A number of suggestions were also made concerning which cases should be undertaken next: East Timor, Aceh, Mindanao, Sierra Leone, Liberia, El Salvador (as a good comparative case to Guatemala), Fiji, Nepal, Haiti, Angola, Mozambique, Cambodia and Tajikistan. While CDA will not be able to undertake all of these cases (interesting and useful as all of them would be), the criteria on which the suggestions were made will be an important consideration in the selection process. These included:

- More cases in Asia
- Different religious contexts
- Cases with geopolitical dimensions
- Multiplicity of international organizations present
- More than two groups in conflict
- Different types of issues/causes