

## Strengthening Support Structures for Peace Negotiation, Mediation and Dialogue

### Short Introduction to the Work Programme

Dialogue, negotiation and mediation in peace processes can be assisted in many different ways. Berghof Peace Support, Berlin and Folke Bernadotte Academy, Stockholm wish to strengthen the domestic actors through their own support structures, e.g. peace secretariats or peace commissions. These peace support structures are set up in various conflict- and post conflict situations with the aim to perform secretarial functions during peace and reconciliation negotiations, implementation and monitoring of peace accords and communication efforts made by conflict parties.

This work programme aims at understanding and assisting peace support structures through a process of reflection and capacity building. The direct target groups are national and local actors, conflict transformation practitioners as well as UN, EU, donor agencies and diplomatic personnel that act as third party in violent conflict situations.

## **Why are Peace Support Structures relevant?**

National actors play the central role in peace processes. They have to own and drive those processes. While most literature on national and local peace building actors deals with civil society contributions, there is much less literature related to relevant governmental, quasi-governmental, and other structures affiliated with and mandated by the conflict parties. Examples are peace secretariats and mediation boards, truce and ceasefire or human rights monitoring bodies, reconciliation commissions or joint commissions for disarmament.

These organisations play different, supportive roles in a peace process and are part of a wider landscape of peace building actors. They contribute to the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements as well as to the prevention of violence and renewed conflict. For example, the South African peace commissions are widely known as a cornerstone in the implementation of the National Peace Accord. Similarly, we find support organisations set up in most other peace processes, albeit without much attention to their role and functioning. They serve as secretariats, logistical or technical aides to the negotiators and without them most negotiation processes would not have taken place. However, despite their wide prevalence, there is little reflection on past experiences or conceptual understanding; thus their potential remains underutilized.

At the same time, the conflict parties receive only limited conceptual support when establishing above mentioned support structures. External assistance to support structures – if at all - mostly relates to funding while policy issues like representation, principles of engagement, or symmetry of institutionalized bodies – that touch the core of the conflict – are hardly covered. These and other crucial questions are often dealt with in an ad-hoc manner since there is little guidance or learning opportunity available to interested national and local actors.

## **What do we mean with Peace Support Structures?**

As it is often the case in the early stages of a new conceptual debate, there are no agreed definitions. Different actors and authors speak of infrastructures for peace, peace institutions, peace architecture or a peace building infrastructure.

With peace support structures (PSS) we mean officially and unofficially, formally, semi-formally and informally institutionalised structures and organisations that have been established and are mandated by at least one of the conflict parties before, during or after official peace talks with the intention of supporting the parties, the process, e.g. through public participation, or the implementation of results of the negotiation, dialogue or mediation process.

We focus on those structures and organisations that have been called into existence by representatives of the conflict parties, and not by other stakeholders or the international community. The parties define the mandate of the organisation, and often they contribute actively through staffing or participation in steering committees, working groups and other forums.

Our definition comprises a variety of different institutions. Examples can be found in the context of most peace processes, e.g. in the form of peace secretariats in Sri Lanka and Nepal; national peace councils or commissions in Ghana, Kenya or South Africa, secretariats for national dialogues in Lebanon or East-Timor, or even international commissions set up on agreement by the parties like the International Independent Commission on Decommissioning for the Northern Ireland conflict.

**Examples from different conflict situations:**

Peace support structures can be found in diverse contexts. The current Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction in Nepal evolved out of a peace secretariat that accompanied the negotiations between the government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Role, tasks and mandate changed several times according to progress in the peace process and were expanded towards reconstruction, rehabilitation and sustainable development strategy. Similarly, the earlier crisis management structures in Ghana and Kenya were enhanced towards a national peace building architecture.

Contrarily, the Sri Lankan peace talks of 2002/2003 saw the establishment of separate peace secretariats for each of the negotiation parties, i.e. the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). With the military victory of the government in 2009, both ceased to exist.

The examples from various countries highlight a number of different functions that PSS have acquired and that can be outlined as follows. They can coincide or change over time:

- **Support:** to offer accompanying secretarial, administrative, logistical and other supportive services during peace negotiations; provide information (e.g. on other peace processes), advisory services and build individual and collective capacities of the conflict party representatives.
- **Communication and Participation:** to manage information sharing and communication strategy during negotiations; facilitate coordination and consultation with other stakeholders and civil society; encourage and facilitate public participation in the peace process.
- **Facilitation of Dialogue and Mediation:** to support dialogue and mediation between the parties directly related to the peace talks, or on special issues (e.g. reduction of violence); enhance formal or informal communication between parties and serve as a back channel in case of stalled talks; to initiate or prepare political proposals of individual parties for negotiations or joint proposals for further discussion, e.g. constitutional drafts (often in collaboration with other government institutions).
- **Implementation:** to facilitate, steer or guide particular political and societal processes as part of the overall peace process (during and after negotiations), e.g. truth and reconciliation, human rights documentation, compensation of victims, demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration processes; monitor the implementation of negotiation results (e.g. on reduction of violence, arms control, disarmament, resettlement of IDPs etc.).

While the supportive functions cater mostly to particular requirements of the official negotiations, the later functions take on a wider array of tasks that relate to the peace process in general and are based on a more comprehensive mandate of the PSI. However, all of them can contribute to conflict transformation in different ways.

Literature on peace processes and negotiation points to the relevance of sustainable and “crisis-proof” communication links between the parties; therefore one might hypothesize that an institutionalisation of such communication channels helps stabilising the relationship between the conflict parties. Thus, even an organisation with a narrow mandate limited to secretarial support might have a strong effect on relationships among the parties that leads to increased confidence in the peace process and a renewed engagement of the parties.

What determines the transformative potential of the organisations? Experience tells us that the organisations’ potential depends both on their respective conflict context as well as their own strategic role and technical functioning. In order to strengthen the possible transformative contribution of PSS, we need to consider these factors as they might be limiting or increasing the organisation’s potential.

## Central Questions for Strengthening Peace Support Structures

The following list serves as illustration for questions that are of interest for internal and external actors involved in supporting peace processes:

Of central interest is to understand the organisations’ role and functioning in a peace process. What is their contribution within the complex landscape of peacebuilding actors? And how can they be strengthened and supported by third parties and donors?

As outlined above, PSS have many faces and fulfill different **roles and functions in a peace process** and its different phases. How do these evolve? Can we develop a comprehensive understanding of these in the sense of a mapping or sequencing? How can we assess the relevance of these organisations in case of a stalemate or collapse of peace negotiations? How can we understand their chances for survival, their sustainability and contribution to a stable peace and conflict prevention in the case of increased violence, reduced commitment by the parties, or a return to war? How do these organisations see their needs, strengths and weaknesses in their conflict settings? Are there common needs, strengths and weaknesses in various countries? If and how has the lack of any sort of capacity an impact on their roles and functions?

Within a conflict setting, we find **interaction** between any single support organisation, e.g. a peace secretariat, and a magnitude of domestic and international actors. How do PSS interact with others, given their specific mandate by the conflict parties? Do they take over particular roles of coordination or leadership within the wider context of the peace building landscape? How does this organisation interact with the domestic legislative, executive and judicial institutions in the conflict system? How can the organisations’ relevance within the system and acceptance by other actors, e.g. civil society, be understood? Which relevance do they have in concepts of multi-track-diplomacy?

When helping to establish PSS, there is a wide choice of **organisational options** regarding governance structures, management, staffing, tasking and monitoring. One main criterion in our definition of PSS refers to the mandate by the conflict parties, which means that the organisations depend strongly on the commitment of the parties. How does the choice of institutional arrangements relate to the characteristics of violent conflict, e.g. the asymmetry of the conflict parties or the degree of militarization of the conflict? Which other characteristics, besides the mandate, inform the organisation's performance?

#### **Donor support for peace support structures**

In many cases, peace support structures receive external assistance. This often involves funding as well as capacity building and organisational development. One example for far-reaching capacity building is the support for the Palestine Negotiation Support Unit which is administered by the Adam Smith Institute (UK) and funded by the governments of UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. In the event of separate institutions in support for the individual conflict parties, donors often opt to extend assistance to all of them equally, e.g. in the case of UNDP support to the peace secretariats of the government, the LTTE and the Muslim communities in Sri Lanka.

### **Contribution of this Work Programme**

We wish to enrich the nascent debate, to which so far only few actors have contributed. We aim at developing a shared understanding and conceptual framework for peace support structures (PSS).

Following the tradition of Berghof reflection processes, this will involve reviewing experiences from different conflict settings and will lead to hands-on recommendations for the work with PSS.

By integrating these findings into mediation and dialogue training as well as in direct advisory services, we will help the conflict parties themselves improving the effectiveness of their support organisations and thus of the peace process altogether. Also, we will help enhancing the practice of other third party actors, donors and diplomats through sharing of our findings and conceptual framework.

This work programme will be undertaken in partnership with the Folke Bernadotte Academy in Sweden. Further elaboration of the joint project will take place in consultation with interested donors.

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