

Creating space for Peace: Peacebuilding and Reconstruction

(draft paper prepared by Koila Costello-Olsson, Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding, Fiji) February 23rd, 2009 for the 2nd Women for Peace Conference, Dili, Timor Leste)

To the organisers of the second international Women for Peace Conference, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the invitation to be here in Timor Leste. This is a country that has a special place in my heart and I was honoured to be here in Dili with Mana Mena for the Regional gathering of Womens Peacemakers from the Pacific in 2004.

The creating of space for peace, peacebuilding and reconstruction is something that women have done for along time because we are either forced out of the formal space, we are either ignored, or because our culture and traditions dictate that the formal meeting spaces are only for men not women. WE have had to be creative and use what time, opportunities and resources to find the opportunities to share with each other about important matters and to find practical ways to improve our way of life.

I would like to highlight some key things that I am reminded of in my work and from the communities that I have worked in to keep at the back of my mind, to help us to make sense of what is going on in our world as we are building peace, it helps to give me some focus and direction, not to give up but to remember my contribution will be appreciated the most by the next generation- my children and my grandchildren.

Our challenge is the creation of spaces for a positive peace not a negative peace, and creating spaces that are sustaining , nurturing and transforming.

Our challenge is also about building trust and honest relationships as we journey together, with everyone who comes into our space for a moment in time. e.g Aid workers, academics, practitioners, community development workers, trauma healers etc.

Our challenge is to also to build peace by being embodiments of peace, so that we do not inflict violence without even knowing that we are doing so. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh in his book Being Peace(1987) says being peace, means living out the values of peace and leading the parties in conflict by example. It is having respect, empathy, and humility and coming to terms with one's own self in order to reserve judgement so that one can understand deeply. Hizkias Asefa from Kenya says that he contrasts this with doing peace ,which is implicit in terms such as peacemaking and peacebuilding. Asefa found that being peace is much more challenging than doing peace. Ultimately doing peace is not very meaningful or effective unless it emanates from being peace.

For those of us who are fortunate to be able to access internet there are a lot of spaces created where women communicate over email, skype etc over thematic issues and the sharing of experiences, lessons learnt in their respective countries.

When we talk about peace we also need to be clear about our definitions of conflict. William Hocker and Joyce Wilmot developed a widely accepted definition of conflict as “ an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals. The key elements of the definition are 1) that people need or desire resources to meet their goals 2) that conflict is expressed or communicated with others in a struggle 3) that perceptions shape how people understand and act in conflict. This definition sets the stage for a three-level analysis of the dimensions of conflict.

Communication theorist John Cragan and Donald Shields propose three general approaches to problems in Western thought: rational, relational and symbolic. Conflict theorist Jayne Docherty applies these three categories to different understandings of the causes of conflict. She argues that conflict happens in rational, relational and symbolic worlds.

John Burton pioneered the idea that unmet human needs of inherent drives for survival and development such as identity, security and recognition causes conflict.

Peacebuilding aims to create societies that affirm human dignity through meeting human needs and protecting human rights.

The three dimensions of conflict (material/rational), social and Symbolic or cultural) are always present in the stories people tell about conflict and peacebuilding. In the material dimension, conflict arises over land, office space or material resources that people need or want. The social dimension of conflict focuses on relationships, communication and interactions between parties. The symbolic dimension focuses on how people's worldview shapes how they understand and make meaning of the world in particular conflict. It brings attention to the perceptual, emotional, sensual, cultural, value-based and identity driven aspects of the conflict. It is always important to see the overlap of and connection of the three dimensions and as peacebuilders we need to understand and engage all three dimensions of conflict. No single approach is sufficient for all conflicts.

Culture

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz suggests that groups rather than individuals hold culture and that Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action. It is expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. Culture, simply put is the way groups of people live and makes sense of their collective lives together. Cultural groups share common ways of

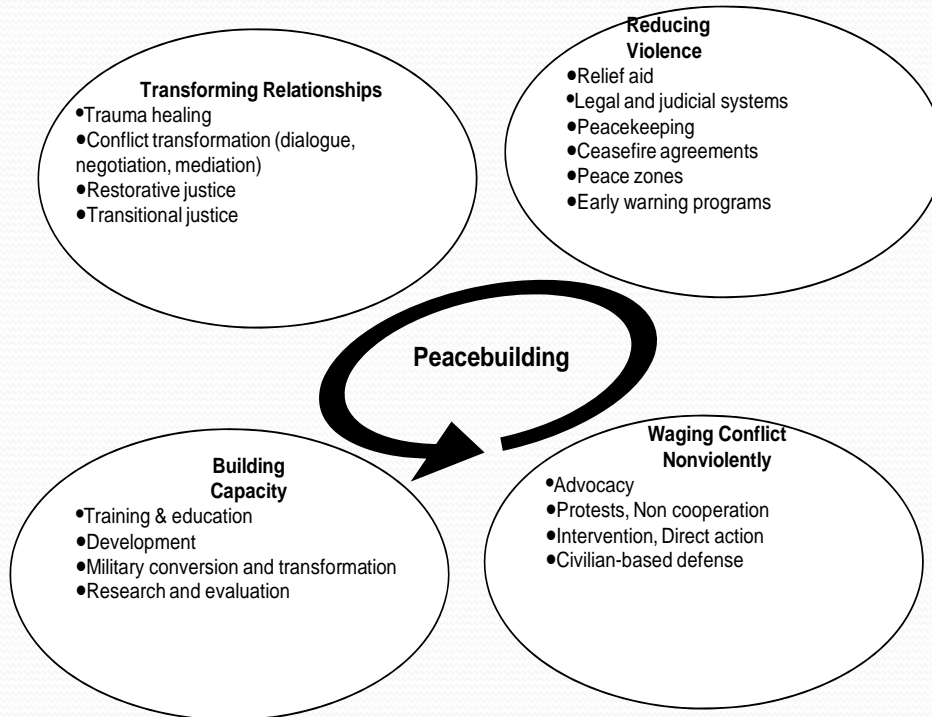
being , values , social structure and rules of interaction. An individuals worldview reflects multiple cultures rather than mirroring any particular culture. Each cultural group an individual belongs to gives that person one aspect of their identity and shapes one part of their worldview lens.

Cultural groups develop common ways of seeing and understanding conflict. Cultural groups share ways of thinking and even hold a group memory of important events the group experienced. Vamik Volkan describes how cultural groups create “chosen trauma’ and “chosen glory” in their collective memory. These are significant events of moments in a cultural groups history that have taken on enormous symbolic meaning.

Cultural groups also develop common ways of addressing conflict. Culture defines the metaphors and language people feel comfortable using to talk about conflict. While culture is often viewed as an obstacle to address conflict, symbolic approaches uses culture as a resource for building peace. Each culture has a tradition of how to handle conflict.

The term peacebuilding is used to refer to the tasks of preventing, reducing, transforming, and helping people to recover from violence, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest. At the same time peacebuilding empowers people to foster relationships with families, communities, organisations, businesses, governments and cultural, religious, economic and political institutions that aim to meet human needs and protect human rights. Peacebuilding includes a wider range of activities such as human rights activism, relief aid, peacekeeping, dialogue, negotiation, mediation, restorative justice, transitional justice, development, military conversion and transformation, education and research activities.

Map of Peacebuilding Processes



Source: Lisa Schirch, *The little book of Strategic Peacebuilding*. Intercourse, Pa: Good Books, 2004.

Schirch, describes that there are four main approaches to peacebuilding, ranging from short-term , crisis-oriented processes to long term strategies. The four approaches are waging conflict non-violently, reducing direct violence, transforming relationships and building capacity.

Use of ritual space

The use of ritual is not new to peacebuilding. In each of the four approaches to peacebuilding that was reviewed above, ritual is needed and useful both in times of crisis and the long term work of capacity building. Rituals can create space spaces for people in conflict away from the site of their adversarial relationships. It gives us a way to communicate complex, difficult messages through symbols, sense, physical actions and emotions .It can help us to understand and make sense of work through cultivating values and shaping memory and it can be transforming by reframing problems so that people in conflict are more able to find a mutually satisfying way to of addressing their human needs. (Lisa Schirch,2005)

In ritual , humans create an idealized world. Victor Turner speaks of rituals as liminal spaces. Liminal spaces or frames are in-between, set-aside contexts where the rules for acting and interpreting meaning are different for the rest of life. These liminal spaces are thresholds or places in limbo that are symbolically separated from other social settings.

Using space to cooperate on other issue: Superordinate Goals

A space for reconstruction.

Reconstruction can include the rebuilding, repairing of the whole person, communities and nations through various processes such as community based trauma healing, repairing of buildings and schools combined with the use of self esteem building programmes for example. For this to happen we may need to create spaces for superordinate goals.

It is the space created for people to come together to work on developing an objective that is common to both parties and beyond the capability of either alone. It gives parties an opportunity to work for a goal that will benefit both communities..like building a water tank in divided communities that will benefit all.

It helps to reduce group boundaries of people who are working towards common goals and develops a sense of shared identity. (Bettencourt etl., 1992, Gaertner and Dovidio, 200, Turner, 1981)

It gives you a chance to increase your knowledge first hand about the other side , which reduces anxiety toward outgroup members(Islam &Hewstone,1993)

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A fourth is by reinforcement mechanisms, as we work together , each of us rewards the other and produces a sense of and warmth in the other.

How do you develop super-ordinate goals in spaces? Sometimes circumstances forces us to work together, other times parties may develop such goals in an effort to overcome their conflict, or when third parties impose superordinate goals.

However we need to be mindful that if there was prior tension in the relationships these need to be worked through first or worked on simultaneously as the group works on the superordinate goal.