

5 NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURES FOR RESPONDING TO CONFLICT

restrictions and control. Concerning conflicts dealing with minority issues it is a key step to involve political leaders in a dialogue process in order to restore trust and to explore avenues for future rapprochement and reconciliation.

Peace education

These projects are quite different in terms of their target groups, time frames and activities and are often based on a rather long-term dialogue processes. Their activities are neither covered by media reports nor by publications. Some have an in-built monitoring and evaluation mechanism (M&E) that gives regular feedback to the project team. Providing the participants with the opportunity to meet under very difficult circumstances, it serves not only as an example for peaceful coexistence but has also a psychological function (supporting people who feel isolated and want to do something to promote peace, showing the extremists that they cannot win, etc.). In the long run, the participants of such programs could function as ‘ambassadors of peace’ in their communities. At the same time, one should probably not overestimate the potential impact of this kind of dialogue projects in times of violent conflict. Mutual negative perceptions characterize all parties entangled in a conflict. In order to change the perceptions of the ‘others’, it seems to be necessary to combine dialogue workshops with a full range of other (follow-up) activities. Given that it is very difficult to maintain the results of short-term coexistence projects without the necessary political framework, peace activities on the ground should be accompanied by efforts to influence political leaders on both sides of the conflict.

Post-war peacebuilding

Post-war peacebuilding measures should deal with the immediate consequences of war by activities like physical reconstruction (of infrastructure, houses, services, and agriculture) and social reconstruction like rebuilding trust and confidence, forgiveness and reconciliation, dealing with the past and dealing with trauma. Post-war peacebuilding should aim at a change of conditions, as well as a change of behaviour. The projects funded by the zivik program are dealing with

aspects of peacebuilding, which are most relevant for conflict transformation.

Dealing with the past requires the creation of a safe environment, ‘safe spaces’ where victims are allowed to talk about their experience, if they wish and discover their space in society again. Dealing with the past also includes the search for the truth, and the development of dialogues between the different groups of society in one or the other way involved in the conflict. Dealing with the past is part of healing, but also drawing lessons from what has happened so that the society can learn what it has to do in order to prevent the repetition of the experience in present and future. Possible approaches may be the production of poster series, school books and the engagement of the story telling in the communities. ‘Dealing with the past’ can also be achieved by community based trauma counselling. As follow-up, people who have undergone such a counselling period may be able to apply what was learnt to others in their communities.

‘Transitional justice’ is aiming at the restoration of trust and confidence by restoring a rule of law. Monitoring of Special Courts, Anti Corruption Commissions and the national courts are contributions to transitional justice and thus to post-war peacebuilding. Other projects aim at making people understand the judicial system, empowering them to claim their rights and enabling courts to do their work in a better way.

Most tangible effects may also be achieved by measures trying to bring about a change in behaviour by non-violent conflict resolution. They are dealing with peace education through the establishment of peer mediation networks, concentrating often on young people – mainly in secondary schools – or rural communities. The approach used in schools is similar, teaching mediation skills to teachers, who then work with the students, preparing them for peer mediation. Addressing the youth is definitely relevant, especially in countries where they represent the majority of the population. It is in the end this youth who will decide, whether the country stabilizes peace or goes back to violence as a means of solving conflicts.