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National Peace and Dialogue Structures

Strengthening the Immune System from Within instead of Prescribing Antibiotics

Hannes Siebert

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Content

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We invite readers to respond to the papers (as to all articles). Interesting and original contributions can be added to the web version of the Dialogue.

To Berghof Handbook Dialogue No 10 *Peace Infrastructures – Assessing Concept and Practice* the following authors have contributed:

- ≡ Stina Lundström and Barbara Unger (eds.) (introduction)
- ≡ Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka (lead article)
- ≡ Oliver P. Richmond (response article)
- ≡ Hannes Siebert (response article)
- ≡ Borja Paladini Adell (response article)
- ≡ Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka (reflection on the responses)

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1 Introduction[1]

Having been involved in establishing peace and dialogue structures in a variety of countries and conflict settings, including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Lebanon, Myanmar/Burma, and my own home country of South Africa, I consider Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka's article *Giving Peace and Address? Reflections on the Potential and Challenges of Creating Peace Infrastructures* (2012) to be an invaluable contribution. It captures some essential concepts that can serve as a sound framework for external actors' support for national and local initiatives, for evaluating their own role, and for further developing their thinking on the emerging theory of national peace and dialogue structures (what Hopp-Nishanka in her article refers to as peace infrastructures). Many so-called "national" practitioners and analysts have written and reflected upon their own processes. But at a time when peace infrastructures have become a norm, rather than an exception, I would like to call for more joint reflection and more research to enable us to advance and develop meaningful theoretical frameworks for these essential components of peace, dialogue and change processes. While I am wary of simplifying the complex and constantly evolving approaches of national peace and dialogue structures, I would like to highlight a few issues raised in the lead article and pose some further questions to explore our understanding of these structures, including their contribution to overcoming the current gaps in the theory of conflict transformation.

After briefly discussing the strengths and shortcomings of the emerging theory of peace infrastructures as presented by Hopp-Nishanka, my response will focus on the "ownership" of national and local peace structures. While Hopp-Nishanka (2012, 4) has correctly highlighted that peace infrastructures are local mechanisms based on domestic foundations there is a risk that they might become a new technique of international intervention. Hence, I will try to point to the pitfalls of interventionist approaches while at the same time presenting useful roles for external actors in assisting and enabling local activists, stakeholders and participants in their efforts to create (or re-activate) their own mechanisms for change. I will draw examples from four of the countries I have worked in and have firsthand knowledge of, all of which had peace and dialogue structures initiated by local stakeholders. I will conclude my arguments by highlighting the opportunities, potential and limitations of these structures for transforming national violent conflicts around the world.

2 Peace Infrastructures: Old Wine in New Skins?

As the theoretical debate on peace infrastructures is still evolving, I understand this dialogue series *Peace Infrastructures – Assessing Concept and Practice* as an invitation for joint reflection and continuous learning from experiences, including both failures and successes. I would suggest that the aim of this exchange should not be to develop a universal, homogenous definition of internally developed and locally owned peace and dialogue structures. Rather, the focus should be on broadening and deepening our understanding of structures and mechanisms that strengthen peace from within – structures whose diverse anatomy in terms of process and structure are shaped by local needs, culture and context. The structures that I would call "peace and dialogue structures" are the very structures and mechanisms that constitute the "process" itself. They were created with a mandate from key stakeholders, who themselves participate (directly or through

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[1]   This comment is based on an interview of Hannes Siebert by Katrin Planta and Barbara Unger in August 2012.

representatives). And they were created through formal agreements between the main parties (including non-state actors) to implement and monitor their joint commitments and to manage the peace process and formal dialogue or negotiations as agreed to in a comprehensive peace agreement or ceasefire agreement.

Peace and dialogue structures are by their nature vulnerable and imperfect instruments, straining under the burden of helping a society cross the bridge from war or serious conflict, to a shared space that promises sustainable or acceptable peace. We have seen in both Nepal and Colombia that peace structures have constantly changed as the needs of the peace processes have evolved and the working relationships between the parties have matured. Sadly, we have also seen that when the relationships between the stakeholders erode, as in Sri Lanka, peace structures and dialogue mechanisms become self-serving and destructive of the very process they were supposed to sustain. They are constantly vulnerable to exploitation by either power politics or by external influences.

Although we try to explore and define trends and common approaches from the experiences of different peace and dialogue processes, my most important observation is that – just as Hopp-Nishanka (2012, 16) notes in her lead article – you cannot transplant "models" from one country to another. Advisers and national stakeholders in each of the processes I worked on learned the hard way that transplanting "good models" and "quick fixes" often undermined or threatened the processes as these "transplanted models" had been designed in different contexts and were intended to address different conflict dynamics. Nevertheless, I recognise a need for a theoretical framework to better understand the emergence, functioning and reasons for failure or success of peace and dialogue structures. There are several key issues and concerns that are important for this theoretical and conceptual reflection.

Hopp-Nishanka rightly outlined that "…peace infrastructures are established during any *stage of peace and dialogue processes*, from the height of a violent conflict to the implementation and monitoring of peace agreements" (2012, 4; emphasis in original). Although these structures often fulfill a broad variety of purposes – from assisting the parties to build capacity, to facilitating dialogue processes or the implementation of peace agreements, to facilitating memory and reconciliation efforts in the post-conflict period – this observation alone does not sufficiently capture the essence of these national mechanisms and structures. Her observation that peace infrastructures may either act as a change agent themselves or provide the necessary mechanism for such change agents (ibid., 2) is essential to fully understanding the dynamics of these structures.

Peace and dialogue structures are often complemented by mechanisms that serve as safety nets for ongoing informal dialogue, facilitation, knowledge sharing, conflict transformation, or to create a conducive or catalytic environment for political and constitutional change. Most of these structures, where they are well designed and carefully constructed, use the country's internal "peace assets" and respond to the needs in that particular context. They also have built-in facilitative and deadlock-breaking mechanisms and procedures. It is important to emphasise the non-static, flexible and composite nature of national peace and dialogue structures. These structures not only emerge at different points of time with specific tasks, but they also evolve, transform and take on different purposes over time as they respond to changing contexts and challenges.

So what is really new about peace infrastructures? First are the new forms they have taken over the last 30 years, and second is the growing interest in these structures shown by national and international actors. With regard to the first point, the main difference between traditional and new forms of peace infrastructures is, in my view, that the latter can rely on strong governmental involvement, acknowledgement by national and international political players and decision-makers, and a higher degree of formalisation. The formal dialogue structures, like National Dialogues or National Conferences, are designed and mandated to support constitutional and state reform. Today, governments and political parties increasingly use peace infrastructures, while civil society actors often participate in and organise them. On the second point, there is a risk that external actors might "discover" peace infrastructures as a new mode of intervention in the

light of failing third party mediation, and in doing so they might try to instrumentalise peace infrastructures for their own interests.

3 Concrete Peace Infrastructures under the Lens

In this section I will describe the evolution, sequencing and design of peace infrastructures in the cases I have been involved in, especially Nepal and South Africa. I will also highlight some key mechanisms that in my experience are often forgotten in peace infrastructure designs.

In the **Nepalese case** the same structures were transformed at least four times between 2002 and 2012 as the process unfolded. The first Nepalese dialogue structure was established in 2002 by the government in the form of a Peace Negotiations and Coordinating Secretariat that was created to manage, coordinate and to facilitate the negotiations between the Maoist movement and the Nepalese Government. This structure provided a management and logistical infrastructure for the formal negotiations between the main stakeholders. The dialogue structure also appointed a team of esteemed and credible national facilitators as advisers and chairs, who, where needed, facilitated the talks.

In 2005, the Peace Secretariat was re-activated to prepare for new talks between the government and the Maoists and it facilitated the establishment of the Nepal Transitions to Peace Initiative (NTTP), which was and still is the informal dialogue and knowledge sharing mechanism between all parties. It was established as a safety net for formal talks and as a "common space" for the parties to meet on an ongoing basis. With a team of national facilitators, international experts, and the head of the Peace Secretariat, the NTTP also served as a deadlock-breaking mechanism and catalyst for ongoing talks.

In 2006, following the people's uprising and the stepping down of the King, the Peace Secretariat's staff and party leaders (part of a coordinating peace committee at the Secretariat) jointly drafted Nepal's ceasefire agreement and assisted in the setting-up of monitoring mechanisms. The Peace Secretariat was also the mechanism through which the parties and government negotiated a formal mandate to be presented to the United Nations to monitor elections and to coordinate the monitoring of the management of arms and combatants. In the same year the Peace Secretariat and the NTTP coordinated and hosted both the formal and in-formal discussions on drafting and finalising the Comprehensive Peace Accord and all its implementation mechanisms. The Peace Secretariat functioned as the coordinator and principal implementer of the provisions of the accord. In 2007, as the parties were drafting the interim constitution, the Peace Secretariat was transformed into a formal government ministry – the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MPR) – and given direct executive powers.

The additional functions of the Peace Secretariat included: managing and administering the formal multi-party talks (the "National Dialogue") from 2006 until after the formation of the Constituent Assembly in 2010; responsibility for establishing local peace committees; conducting consultations and jointly drafting a Truth Commission Bill in consultation with all the parties and experts; coordinating between governmental ministries on urgent reconstruction and normalisation challenges; addressing missing people's issues and establishing mechanisms to deal with them; hosting and coordinating the special committee dealing with the integration of security forces and combatants; and continuing deadlock-breaking processes in coordination with the NTTP. Both the NTTP and the MPR still function today, seven years after their inception.

> **Box 1: Nepal's Peace Infrastructure**
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> **National Dialogue**
> The *High Level Dialogue Team* (1999) and *National All-Party Talks* (2002/3, 2005-2010) with participation of all main parties and government to resolve the issue of the "insurgency" or "people's revolution", the monarchy, economic discrimination, and the establishment of a Constituent Assembly to redraft the constitution of the new republic.
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> **Peace and Peace Support Structures**
> The *Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction* (2007-ongoing) was established to manage and administer the all-party talks and peace process, and to provide consultation services, including institutional, procedural and technical support to the government and parties in order to strengthen the peace process and open avenues of lasting peace and development.
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> The *Peace Secretariat* (2005-2010) helped facilitate the peace process by supporting conflict transformation and by acting as advisory body for the Cabinet on peace and conflict management. It also organised regular dialogues with those with a stake in peacebuilding such as civil society, the media and human rights organisations.
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> The *Peace Negotiation and Coordination Secretariat* (2002-2005) was formed to institutionalise the efforts for peace negotiation between the government and Maoists and to provide technical, physical and other necessary assistance to the peacebuilding process.
>
> **Safety Nets**
> The *Nepal Transition to Peace Initiative* (2005-ongoing) was a national peace support programme designed in cooperation with the government and political parties to strengthen their capacity to take part in the peace process and to establish an inclusive multi-party dialogue in order to tackle all stakeholders' concerns.

As noted by Hopp-Nishanka (2012, 2), different peace and dialogue structures often coexist alongside and complement each other.

A good example is **the case of South Africa** where the national dialogue structure, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), was established to manage, administer and coordinate the formal talks between all the main parties and the government. When the first formal dialogues failed and horrific violence broke out and claimed the lives of thousands of people, the National Peace Committee and the Peace Secretariat were created. The peace and dialogue structures were separate but complementary, in contrast to Nepal where these functions were mostly integrated into one core management and coordinating structure. In South Africa, the same parties were represented in both mechanisms, and communication links were established through the National Peace Committee and the party leaders who served in both mechanisms. The peace structures were created to secure peace, maintain a code of conduct between stakeholders, prevent violence, resolve conflicts, and to establish a relatively stable environment where formal negotiations could be conducted. Once the parties at the national dialogue reached a framework agreement on constitutional change, electoral reform and state restructuring, separate structures were created for constitutional drafting, transitional justice and reconciliation, reconstruction and development, and military integration.

> **Box 2: South Africa's Peace Infrastructure**
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> **National Dialogue**
> The *Convention for a Democratic South Africa* (CODESA) I (1991) and II (1992) and the *Multi-Party-Negotiations Process* (MPNP) (1992-1993) were a mechanism and a structure for all-party negotiations to reach a constitutional framework agreement and to create a process for the establishment of a constitution-making body and the preparation for free and fair elections.[2]
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> **Peace and Peace Support Structures and Safety Net**
> The *National Peace Secretariat* (1991-1995) was created to establish, coordinate, service and finance a countrywide network of peace committees with eleven *Regional Peace Secretariats* (RPCs) and over 300 *Local Peace Committees*. Each structure comprised of representatives of political and religious organisations, unions, business and industry groups, local authorities, security forces and other relevant organisations. The structures were responsible for preventing violence, mediation in ongoing conflicts, monitoring, facilitating ongoing dialogue and negotiations between key stakeholders, and acting as safety nets to create a conducive environment for national formal negotiations and local transformation. They made decisions by consensus.
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> The *National Peace Committee* (1991-1995) aimed at monitoring and making recommendations on the implementation of the National Peace Accord as a whole and at ensuring compliance with the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Organisations.[3]

The establishment of various structures and mechanisms in all of the cases in this article followed the unfolding of events and specific process, dialogue or implementation needs: a negotiated agreement, political context, the readiness of the parties to commit to specific joint mechanisms, and the anatomy of the conflict. Although one can observe general trends or logic in the sequence of their establishment, the structures and mechanisms are not always the same. Hopp-Nishanka (2012) points to a sequencing in some key processes, but the processes in Nepal, Lebanon and South Africa each followed different sequences. The main elements, though, are still the same: confidential and multi-layered negotiations to end the armed conflict; the creation of safety net structures and safe spaces for dialogue; ceasefire agreements and the creation of monitoring mechanisms for ceasefires and the management of arms and combatants; comprehensive peace agreements and the establishment of national peace structures and other relevant implementation mechanisms (land claims commissions, investigation commissions, rapid development support, local peace structures etc.); national dialogues, bilateral dialogues and the creation of support and management structures; transitional governance mechanisms and interim amendments to constitutions; the negotiation of constitutional framework agreements and redrafting of electoral laws accordingly; elections and/or referenda; the setting-up of inclusive and representative structures to draft a final constitution; new elections/referenda once the final constitution is finalised; the integration of security forces; truth and reconciliation programs; state reform; and the rebuilding of social infrastructure and advancement of economic development.

Mechanisms that are seldom mentioned – but in my view should be – are structures that serve to manage arms and combatants during peace negotiations and that manage the integration of security forces and combatants, including addressing former combatants' economic and educational needs. Many processes fail to address this adequately, resulting in endemic crime or remobilisation. Other essential

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2   For more information about the Convention for a Democratic South Africa, see "Constitution Making with Reference to CODESA" at, www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02039/04lv02046/05lv02047/06lv02049/07lv02056.htm.
3   For more information about the National Peace Committee, see "The National Peace Accord and its Structure" at, www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02424/04lv03275/05lv03294/06lv03321.htm.

undervalued structures are the ones created for reconstruction and development. These development mechanisms are sometimes included in the infrastructure of formal peace structures to address the needs of communities most affected by the conflict. Failing to do so often leads to the recurrence of conflict – people cannot "eat" agreements or constitutions.

That being said, it is essential that each process, structure and mechanism is authentic, meaning that they are designed by the stakeholders themselves or in close collaboration with all stakeholders. Without the buy-in, agreement and ownership of all key stakeholders, the mechanisms will inevitably fail – maybe not initially, but eventually. Such failures often lead to the breakdown of an entire peace and dialogue process and its structures.

A critical lesson learned from these structures designed by national stakeholders is that they often serve a purpose beyond their explicit objective. We find many cases of national conferences or constitutional assemblies created to draft new constitutions, but it would be a tragic mistake to force them to focus purely on this task, under unrealistic timeframes, when really these structures are also mechanisms for reconciliation, developing joint visions between former enemies, and slowly evolving an understanding of the needs, perceptions and perspectives of the "other".

4 External Actors: The DOs and the DON'Ts

During my years as a practitioner, I have seen many useful roles for external actors, but also common pitfalls that external actors often fall into. The role of external actors should be to strengthen internal processes. In my experience, peace infrastructures cannot be brought in from the outside, but can only be built from the inside with the non-interventionist support of external friends. The difference between external mediation and the role of "inside mediators" working within national dialogue and peace structures can be likened to the use of "antibiotics" and/or natural remedies and "changing lifestyle" in a healing process. The latter is prescribed to strengthen the immune system from within, and this takes time and commitment. Antibiotics, on the other hand, are used when the system is too weak and severe symptoms need to be addressed before healing can take place. Both are sometimes needed, but the continuous use of antibiotics creates dependency and can harm the body.

External actors should also support internal reflection on matters beyond the *symptoms* of a conflict. External mediation and interventions are often by necessity focused on symptoms –severe violence, oppression or war. By their design and functioning, national peace structures and dialogues have to tackle the root causes of existing conflicts, whether they are structural, psychological, value-based, or physical. It is thus essential that external support and facilitation patiently assist processes of joint reflection, offer experiences from other places, help generate options, and strengthen national peace structures. There are committed people in every society capable of doing the deep work, and our task is to walk these difficult journeys with them, enabling collective processes and the transformation of relationships, societies and state structures.

To avoid the common pitfalls, I would recommend that external actors take into account the political, cultural and historical practices and customs in each country. This is essential when creating and developing peace infrastructures. There are multiple examples of ancient conflict resolving mechanisms in the Middle East (Mukhtars), in Asia (Gamshabas), in Africa (Bushmen, Congolese and Ugandan customs), in South America, and in the Balkans; many operate in the same manner as peace infrastructures today (if not in even

more complex and authentic ways). These traditional structures emerged within communities to resolve conflicts at a collective level, and were characterised by representativeness, inclusivity and local credibility.

The first step for an external actor must therefore always be to understand the context, the conflict issues, the culture and dynamics of past processes and dialogues, and possible entry points for a solution – and all from the point of view of the affected parties. Before starting a process it is important to look at what kind of dialogue and decision-making structures or peace structures have existed in a society.

As an example of this, **in the Lebanon case** one of the first things we did collectively in the Common Space Initiative was to study the five major areas of historic dialogues – national dialogues, international dialogues and interventions, economic dialogues, inter-religious dialogues, and civil society dialogues. We looked at their impact, the agendas, decision-making, management structures, collective knowledge sharing, timeframes, context, implementation mechanisms, participation, mandate, and forms of conflict transformation. This exercise gave us a better understanding of the strengths and the weaknesses of previous dialogues in Lebanon.

Box 3: Lebanon's Peace Infrastructure

National Dialogue
The *National Dialogue* (2007-present) includes Lebanon's main political stakeholders who jointly address root causes of conflict and structural challenges outlined in the Taef Accord (the national reconciliation document), as well as symptomatic challenges arising from ongoing tensions and present political conditions. The main objective of the dialogue is currently to develop a National Defense Strategy.

Peace and Peace Support Structures
The *Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee* (2005-present) aims at providing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon with the conditions to live in dignity, prosperity, security and harmony with their environment until they are able to enforce their right of return as stipulated in United Nation's Resolution 194 and the Arab Peace Initiative.[4]

The *National Dialogue Steering Committee* (2008-present) provides advice, knowledge resources and strategic facilitation support to the President of the Republic as convener and chair of the National Dialogue.

Safety Net
The *Common Space Initiative* (2010-present) was created to respond to the needs of the Lebanese National Dialogue(s), the government and the parliament by facilitating structured informal dialogues among policy makers, intellectuals, experts, civil society actors, stakeholders, and individuals in order to create an environment conducive to progress. This is mainly achieved by enhancing public policy debates, building expertise and common knowledge resources on key issues, and promoting collaboration among the national parties.[5]

Peace infrastructures commonly serve as the places and spaces where conflicting parties meet to address their differences and explore the common ground. These "common spaces" become over time spaces for

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4 For more information about the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, see "Lebanese Republic: Presidency of the Council of Ministers: Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee" at, www.lpdc.gov.lb/About-Lpdc/BackGround.aspx.
5 For more information about the Common Space Initiative, see: www.commonspaceinitiative.org.

ongoing dialogue, building trust and relationships, jointly creating and sharing knowledge, and deepening understanding of each other's positions, interests and needs. These spaces cannot, therefore, serve as mechanisms of intervention by external actors since these are "living spaces" that evolve based on the national stakeholders' confidence, their commitment to common national interests, and their willingness to work together on finding joint solutions. These "safe spaces" often benefit from quiet and confidential external support to build confidence in the process, but they fundamentally rely on the credibility, profile and integrity of the national facilitators and managers, and their access to top-level leadership.

The external facilitator or supporter must therefore be guided by the values, needs, perceptions and understanding of credible and respected change makers and leaders. A process that uses the framework of these stakeholders' own "facts" and perceptions can evolve into deep reflection on the factors and beliefs that divide people – and ultimately into the discovery of common interest and values. A process cannot be based on imposed values, and it needs to reach a depth where the values and objectives come out. Some of the most common areas where external and internal perceptions and values clash are in the areas of economic transformation, traditions and customs, forms of representation (participatory democratic models, consensual or communal governance), and forms of power-sharing based on ethnicity or group identity.

Finally, there are some situations that should be understood as "hands-off" for external actors. First of all, external actors should only provide support or intervene if there is a real and genuine invitation by the main stakeholders or concerned parties. Such invitations should be carefully weighed against an assessment of such actors' capacity, experience and deep knowledge of the substance, context and the design of national processes. If there are adequate, mature, local structures and mechanisms already in place, there is no role for external support other than providing resources that national participants explicitly ask for. And if there are no internal structures and efforts at all, I would discourage external actors from trying to create new ones until there is sufficient and genuine support for them in the country.

5 Concluding Thoughts: Peace Infrastructures as a Universal Remedy against National Violent Conflicts?

As with any conceptual building block applied to challenging peacebuilding and national change processes, one must ask whether peace infrastructures really can make a difference. I think the answer, as unsatisfying as it may seem, is as ambiguous and complex as reality is: in most cases they do, but in some cases they don't. Despite the relative success stories of peace and dialogue from Nepal, South Africa, Lebanon, Ghana or Kenya, there are also failed experiences. As a first reality check, we might want to look at **the Sri Lankan case:**

Box 4: Sri Lanka's Peace Infrastructure

National Negotiations
Negotiations between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were facilitated by the Norwegian Government, resulting in the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 2002.

Peace and Peace Support Structures
The *Peace Secretariat for Muslims* (2004-2012) was mandated by the Muslim parties to act as a resource center and adviser to the peace process and the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. It aimed at facilitating consensus-building among Muslim political parties and other stakeholders to develop cohesive responses on vital issues affecting the Muslim community.

The *LTTE Peace Secretariat* (2003-2010) was established to represent the political wing of the LTTE in the peace process, to promote peace, to monitor human rights violations and to resolve disputes. It also coordinated resettlement, reconstruction, rehabilitation and development work.

The governmental *Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process* (2002-2010) was a coordinating and facilitating body of the peace process. It engaged in extensive and regular consultations with all stakeholders in the South, including the public and private sectors, civil society, donor community and line agencies.

Safety Nets
The *One Text Initiative* (2003-ongoing) provided a confidential multi-party dialogue mechanism and shared knowledge resource for Singhalese, Tamil, and Muslim political stakeholders on the peace process and local structures.[6]

Three national peace secretariats, over a hundred local peace structures and over six thousand local mediation centers were established. Yet the country still plunged back into civil war. The same holds true for Colombia (see more on Colombia in Paladini Adell 2012) where a plethora of peace structures did not prevent the armed violence. It thus becomes clear that the mere existence of infrastructures is not enough. Accordingly, I do not share the optimism of colleagues that a given number of structures will be enough to help create systems for transforming conflicts. The Sri Lankan case shows that peace structures cannot be measured by quantity alone but instead need genuine commitment from the major stakeholders. The best technical equipment does not help to make a hospital function effectively if its doctors do not speak to each other, do not use the equipment, and if the sick do not get to the hospital.

So what is needed to make peace structures work effectively? Is it possible to determine the success factors? To evaluate peace structures' outcomes, we need to look at a variety of different factors: environmental factors such as the political context, conflict-related factors such as the stages of escalation, but also relational factors – the relationship between conflict actors. We also need to pay attention to the quality of the peace structure itself. Important indicators for quality are the levels of inclusion of key conflict stakeholders, the establishment of clear objectives (oriented towards real needs), the interconnection and interdependence of different elements of peace infrastructure, and their potential for connecting actors on different peacebuilding and dialogue tracks. The strength of a peace infrastructure is in fact deeply related

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6   For more information about the One Text Initiative, see "Sri Lanka: Support to the One Text Initiative and Other Initiatives" at, www.peaceappeal.squarespace.com/sri-lanka/.

to its ability to create direct connections between the participants: top-level political decision-makers in charge of implementing conflict transformation agreements and community members at the local, national and regional level. To summarise, inclusive peace infrastructures offer great potential where they are determined by the common interest of the key actors involved in the change and transition process and are situated in an environment where they can respond to real needs of the people and their representatives.

To return to our analogy, if national and local peace and dialogue structures are authentic and carefully designed, and if they build from the inside and respond to the conflict's context and dynamics, then they can constitute the immune system that protects societies from violence in a far more efficient way than any antibiotic prescribed from outside. As such, they can be commended as a means to strengthen a society against violent conflict – but they cannot be regarded as a universal cure to be brought in from outside, but rather as spaces and processes that need – and are sustained by – committed actors on the ground.

About the Author

Hannes Siebert is currently working on issues related to sustainable peace and constitutional reform as senior adviser for the United Nations in Lebanon and as a non-formal peace envoy (Berghof Foundation) in entities supporting the National Dialogue and the Common Space Initiative since 2008.

He has worked in many conflict-ridden societies as an international peace process and negotiations adviser and facilitator. In South Africa, he served as director in the National Peace Secretariat, mandated to implement its 1992 Peace Accord, and subsequently assisted the Special Presidential Task Force focusing on the de-militarisation of youth militia. He advised Sri Lanka's peace secretariats and helped create the multi-party negotiations forum. In Nepal, he contributed to the drafting of key agreements, helped facilitate talks between the Nepalese Army and the Maoists, assisted in setting up the confidential dialogue process (NTTP), and advised the Peace Ministry. With five Nobel Peace Laureates, he initiated the Peace Appeal Foundation in 2000. In 2003 he developed the Peace Tools, a comprehensive set of innovative tools for conflict transformation and negotiations processes.

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