

Embedded Peace

Infrastructures for Peace: Approaches and Lessons Learned

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Design and layout: Phoenix Design Aid

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Executive Summary

Sustainable peace emerges from a deep, structural transformation of violent conflict into stable, non-violent social and political relationships. This paper argues that “Infrastructures for Peace”, a concept that entered the political arena recently, can help reconcile tensions that can arise from simultaneously addressing the dynamics of political, social and economic transformation, especially in contexts where the capacities to deal with conflict in a peaceful manner are weak. Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) can be understood as a dynamic network of skills, capacities, resources, tools and institutions that help build constructive relationships and enhance sustainable resilience of societies against the risks of relapse into violence.

The conceptual idea behind I4P arose as the result of engagements in various peacebuilding and peacekeeping projects in countries transitioning from war to peace, and/or from authoritarian regimes to participatory systems of government. The concept is premised on the basic assumption that relying on dysfunctional structures and pursuing peacebuilding objectives in an incoherent manner is likely to result in ineffective and unsustainable outcomes. Sustainable peace and peacebuilding depend not only on political will, but also on the availability of structural capacity for peace support in practice; access to structural capacity is most effective when based on coordinated planning, conscious design of institutions, individual and institutional empowerment as well as transparent implementation.

While the conceptualization of I4P has evolved significantly over the course of the last two decades, systematic efforts to learn lessons from working with I4P in diverse contexts are still scarce. The opportunities offered by the concept and practice of I4P seem to be poorly understood, and would benefit from more consistent nurturing and dissemination. This paper is designed to do just that: it aims to distill learning from the experience of expert practitioners and to draw conclusions on how to make use of generic lessons learned from the practice of working with and within I4P.

Promising entry points for international support exist with regard to drivers of change and the challenges of transformation. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is in a particularly privileged position to harness the concept to support its work at the nexus of development and peacebuilding. UNDP’s large presence on the ground, its capacities for conflict assessment and process support, and the effective network of Peace and Development Advisers (PDAs) combined with the mutually reinforcing collaboration with other actors across the UN system provide a solid basis for furthering work in this area. However, UNDP also faces challenges and potential drawbacks that could hamper its ability to achieve results through I4P, including internal and external, structural and conceptual impediments.

In addition to provide key insights on the concept, design and tailoring of I4P processes to national contexts, this paper also elaborates on recommendations to improve and expand the potential role that UNDP can play in promoting and supporting I4P - both in conceptual terms and in practice. However, this research paper will also be of benefit to other organizations and practitioners involved in implementing and supporting I4P.

1. Background and Objectives

A wealth of literature exists about the nature of armed conflicts; century-long scholarly research has investigated the root causes, catalysts, and structures of armed conflicts. A certain level of knowledge exists on: gun cultures; war economies; the dynamics of conflict escalation dynamics; security dilemmas; arms proliferation; and, the mobilization of populations along ethno-political and religious lines. Identifiable markers such as poor governance, State fragility, autocratic rule, and/or foreign domination contribute to an understanding of why social or political conflicts repeatedly degenerate into armed violence and war.

However, what do we know about the constituent elements of *sustainable peace*? Our knowledge of the root causes, structures and catalysts of peace seems less robust. Furthermore, what we do know is often insufficiently put into practice. How else can we explain why at least half of all post-conflict countries relapse into armed violence within a decade after conflict (Collier 2004, 2; Mason et. al, 2011), creating repeated “cycles of violence” (World Bank 2011)? Why is the knowledge and skills that we do possess concerning how to resolve conflicts peacefully so often neglected?

This paper is based on the assumption that peacebuilding and sustainable peace can be supported and enhanced if these dynamic processes are embedded in a network of infrastructures – I4P. If armed conflict can be understood as an archetype of a distorted relationship between social actors that is built on certain root causes, drivers and structures, peace must be looked at from the perspective of an *alternative* archetype, one which also has identifiable root causes, drivers and structures. Starting from this general assumption, this paper – and the I4P concept as a whole - is guided by an underlying hypothesis: the better the *intrinsic fabric of peace* is understood, the more social and political actors are able to undertake necessary efforts to build supportive structures that help to maintain and strengthen the state of peace.

Evidently, sustainable peace can never be the result of a “one-size-fits-all” approach. The peaceful relationships within a society, as with any other form of social relations, are intrinsically determined by various factors, such as culture, traditions, social organization, economic opportunities and the political context. Therefore, countries suffering from poverty or from a lack of access to resources, for example, may in one context give rise to increased tensions and violence, but not in others. Identical mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes may work well in one case, but completely fail in another. This being said, this paper argues that, despite these important differences, some basic commonalities exist between different cases, which allow one to draw generic conclusions about how to design and implement peacebuilding processes, and to create I4P in practice.

This research was commissioned to the Berghof Foundation by UNDP. The objective of the collaboration is to learn from the expert knowledge and experience of practitioners working with I4P, and to further develop the conceptual and practical framework behind this I4P concept.

The Berghof Foundation is grateful to UNDP for its generous support for this project. Special thanks go to Ozonnia Ojielo, UNDP Cluster Director for Governance and Peacebuilding in Africa and to the Advisory Board members for their guidance and inspiration throughout, including: Alejandro Bendana; David James; Andries Odendaal; Lisa Schirch; Johannes H Siebert; Caroline Tissot; Peter van Tuji; Malgorzata Wasilewska; and, Olaf Juergensen; Chetan Kumar; Anne Kahl; Ilona Lecerf; Vesna Marcovic-Dasovic;

Nirina Kiplagat; Alex Shoebridge; and, Nika Saeedi from UNDP for their passionate engagement and excellent assistance. We are also grateful to Josie Lianna Kaye for her contribution.

Thanks are also due to all respondents and interviewees who directed their time and energy towards making this research possible. A key consultant for this report was Hans J. Giessmann, Executive Director of the Berghof Foundation. A dedicated team of Berghof staff, consisting of: Katinka Brose; Astrid Fischer; Janel B. Galvanek; Kristóf Gosztanyi; Anna Koehler; Sonja Neuweiler; and, Lauren Schorr, also provided useful assistance.

This research was made possible through a generous contribution from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

The report, however, reflects solely the author's opinions and not necessarily that of the Berghof Foundation or UNDP.

2. Methodology

The research findings presented here are based on three major information sources:

- A desk-based research of scholarly articles, policy documents, field reports, grey papers, and insider expert statements;
- Interviews with researchers, project managers, planners, local experts, as well as governmental and non-governmental practitioners; and,
- Conceptual and contextual knowledge gathered by the Berghof Foundation team over the course of past conflict transformation research and peace support activities in Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

The desk-based research benefitted considerably from an African ACTION Support Centre mapping study, “Strengthening the African Peace and Security Architecture – An Assessment of National Infrastructures for Peace” (2014), commissioned by UNDP. Using insights from over 60 interviews with respondents from 23 countries, this project compared and reflected upon experiences with I4P work across various African regions. The synthesis of lessons learned from those cases has informed this study.

As well as relevant academic work, other relevant sources used for the desk-based study include:

- Conceptual guidelines and guidance notes published by UNDP e.g. “Governance for Peace”, 2012, “Supporting Insider Mediation”, 2015;
- Thematic expert papers commissioned by UNDP e.g. “Emerging Promising Practices in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding”, 2013; “An Architecture for Building Peace at the Local Level”, 2010;
- Relevant UN resolutions e.g. General Assembly resolution A/66/291, “Strengthening the Role of Mediation in the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, Conflict Prevention and Resolution”;
- Concept notes and documents from the European Union e.g. such as the findings from the European External Action Service (EEAS) Mediation Support Pilot Project, 2013;
- A wide range of other international, regional, and national documents related to the research e.g. “OECD Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations Report”, 2008; the “OECD Fragile States Principles Monitoring Survey”, 2010, “State of Fragility”, 2015, etc.

Approximately 120 international and national representatives from government, civil society representatives, inter-governmental organizations (IGO) and international non-governmental organizations (INGO) staff, UNDP and the rest of the UN system, regional and resident programme coordinators, PDAs, programme and project staff, academic consultants, and experts took part in this research, including through interviews, questionnaires and focus groups.¹ Most engagements were carried out in electronic form through an online questionnaire; through this questionnaire, 56

¹ This included: 56 online questionnaire responses; 19 interviews in Nepal, 8 in South Africa, 5 each in Peru and Tunisia, 4 in the Philippines, 8 in Washington D.C. (interviews and focus group) and 9 interviews in New York (interviews and focus group); and, several interviews and exchanges with further experts on I4P.

respondents from all over the world contributed their insights and assessments. Additionally, another 40 face-to-face interviews were conducted with practitioners and experts in Nepal, Peru, the Philippines, Tunisia, and South Africa. Furthermore, in September 2014 two thematic focus group discussions with international IGO and INGO experts took place in New York and Washington, D.C. An international expert advisory group also provided useful comments on the design and draft results of this report.

Lastly, the Berghof Foundation's accumulated practical and conceptual knowledge on conflict transformation support structures (Berghof Foundation 2008; Berghof Peace Support 2010; Unger et.al. 2013) also informed the report. Lessons have been learned and captured from various peace support projects, particularly in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Afghanistan and Yemen. Unfortunately, the timing of this study did not allow for active field research. Therefore, all comparative findings and conclusions are the result of the analysis and synthesis of opinions and findings compiled and presented by others.

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