
The Systemic Approach to Conflict Transformation

Concept and Fields of Application

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Information on the study and acknowledgements

This study is an initial attempt to present the promising systemic approach to conflict transformation to practitioners in the field, policy- and decision-makers in ministries and administrations, and interested colleagues working in action research and in other intermediary organisations. It draws on our own experience with this approach as well as on a comprehensive review of the relevant research and on dialogue with many colleagues involved in the theory and practice of conflict management.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for their generous support in the preparation of this study. They not only provided the requisite

resources but also contributed expert advice and made recommendations which enhanced the quality of this work. We would also like to thank our partner organisation, Conciliation Resources, and all the other agencies which provided practical assistance with our research.

Lastly, the study would not have been possible without the commitment and partnership of the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies and the close cooperation of our colleagues from the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. We are also grateful for the support we received by the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies for the translation and publication of this study.

Berlin, December 2005 / September 2006

Executive Summary

This study presents the systemic approach to conflict transformation: the concept, its core elements and fields of application. The intention is not to establish a new school of civilian conflict management (CCM) but to provide a conceptual framework based on the following components:

- i) the application and further development of key peacebuilding concepts;
- ii) the evaluation of practical experience gained by the Berghof Center, especially the Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation (RNCST) in Sri Lanka, which is funded by the BMZ and DFA, and the high-level Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue Process, which was implemented by the Berghof Center in conjunction with Conciliation Resources (CR) and is embedded in a comprehensive capacity building programme run by CR;
- iii) the application of key concepts and instruments from systems theory, which in recent years have become well-established and positively received in disciplines such as organisational development consulting, family therapy and cybernetics.

The study was produced by the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support (BFPS) as part of a 15-month action research project entitled *Systemische Ansätze zur Unterstützung von Friedensprozessen: Konzept und Anwendungsgebiete* [Systemic Approaches to Supporting Peace Processes: Concept and Fields of Application], which was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). Alongside the evaluation

study, four separate short studies on Nepal, Aceh/Indonesia, Sudan and Southern Sudan were prepared, and key insights from these think pieces have been incorporated into this study.

The target group identified for the study comprises staff from intermediary organisations and implementing agencies involved in international cooperation – especially those working in peacebuilding and civilian conflict management (CCM) – and staff of donor organisations. The systemic approach to conflict transformation can also be applied by trainers, conflict researchers, mediators and other multipliers working in civilian conflict management and peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding challenges and the aims of systemic conflict transformation

A systemic approach to conflict transformation can help improve responses to the following key challenges:

- the heightened complexity, dynamics and longevity of protracted conflicts and their external parameters;
- weaknesses in strategic planning and coordination of the various actors engaged in peacebuilding;
- managing asymmetrical conflict structures and considering the specific roles of non-state armed groups and state actors in scenarios of state failure;
- taking account of the needs and interests of, and relationships between, all conflict actors, including spoilers.

A systemic approach to conflict transformation takes specific account of the high level of complexity and the multidimensionality of “conflict systems”, both in conflict analysis and when planning intervention. However, systemic approaches are relevant not simply because they reflect the complexity of systems, but rather because they make a meaningful contribution to reducing this complexity. They do so by making this complexity transparent and identifying the fundamental structures which can facilitate change. This includes, for example, identifying relevant intervention levers and agents of peaceful change, but it also involves promoting a general sensitivity to the potential for change within the system. The purpose of systemic conflict transformation is not to maintain or stabilise existing systems but to contribute to their transformation by mobilising the system’s own internal resources. This will help to establish or reinforce support systems that will promote the necessary political and social change towards a peaceful and just society.

The defining features of systemic conflict transformation

1. Systemic conflict transformation is based on the recognition that highly escalated inter-group conflicts constitute highly complex “systems” which can only be “modelled” to a limited extent, so that all interventions can only draw on limited knowledge.
2. An appropriately complex analysis of the conflict system is therefore especially important; this must be undertaken with local actors and take particular account of the self-reinforcing nature of many inter-group conflicts.
3. When analysing and intervening in a system, it is essential to define the system’s boundaries precisely and be aware of the interactions and interdependencies in supra- and sub-systems. Here, a shift in perspective offers an overview of the system as a whole (“bird’s eye view”) and of individual sub-systems (“frog’s eye view”).
4. Interventions in the system require an analytical reduction of complexity to a series of

working hypotheses which permit viable interventions with a “leverage effect” as well as facilitating the identification of agents of peaceful change and the critical mass needed for political and social change.

5. It is helpful to make use of the methodologies of applied systems theory (especially in the areas of organisational development consulting, psychotherapy and cybernetics).

The systemic approach is therefore based on the following normative elements:

- The need for a peaceful and constructive transformation of conflict systems;
- Support for processes of comprehensive social change is desirable and necessary for a transformative approach;
- Local actors must be in the driving seat of social change;
- Peacebuilding must pursue an inclusive approach;
- The need for a holistic human rights approach;
- Power asymmetries must be considered and dealt with;
- A transformative approach must also contribute to overcoming gender-specific power relations and violence.

Core elements of systemic conflict transformation

Systemic conflict analysis and conflict monitoring: describes principles, approaches and methodologies in order to encapsulate the complexity of conflict systems as fully as possible. Besides presenting methodologies such as systems diagramming, it is also important to demarcate system boundaries as precisely as possible, switch between and compare the “bird’s eye” with the “frog’s eye” view and explore the role of external actors. Furthermore, cybernetic analysis methods are outlined and the analytical relevance of resistances is discussed.

Strategic planning of systemic interventions: The focus here is on reduction and simplification. The systemic approach to conflict transformation calls for the development of strategies and working hypotheses relating to appropriate entry points and intervention levers. Various principles and aids are presented which support the development of hypotheses. Flexible project planning methods are also presented, and lastly, the monitoring and assessment of systemic interventions are discussed.

Engagement with key stakeholders: This explores the issue of how to deal with central conflict actors. The systemic approach to conflict transformation is based on two key principles: the inclusivity of the approach, and multipartiality as the fundamental position of the third party. The challenges and dilemmas arising in the implementation of these principles are discussed, along with some thoughts on and insights into the critical-constructive engagement with difficult political actors. Particular account is taken of power asymmetries in this context. The multi-stakeholder dialogue approach and forms of network management between state and non-state, international and local actors are also presented.

Mobilisation of agents of peaceful change: The task here is to identify and support agents of peaceful change and mobilise a “critical mass” of agents of peaceful change to initiate processes of social and political transformation. This section also explores the issue of the possible institutionalisation of these actors. The benefits of linking dialogue measures and capacity building in work with these target groups are also discussed.

Creativity in the imagination of sustainable solutions: This underlines the need to assist conflict actors to develop constructive solutions. This not only involves working on substantive and affective resistances and blockades, but also – and especially – taking account of ownership by stakeholders. What is required, then, is an open-ended

shared learning process which can be stimulated by means of “paradoxical interventions”, creative techniques and knowledge transfer.

In practice, these five fields of work cannot be separated and should therefore not be regarded as sequential. The cycle of systemic conflict transformation consists of

- i) observing the system,
- ii) working with and within the system, and
- iii) evolving along with the system.

Parameters and limits of systemic conflict transformation

In principle, systemic conflict transformation can be applied to all violent inter-group conflicts, especially in disputes over identity, territory, security and governance systems. The approach is suitable for the pre-negotiation, negotiation and post-negotiation phases of conflicts. Its use may be restricted by extreme escalations of violence, for example, which greatly limit the scope of international but also local actors and also make an adequate security regime a necessity.

The study focusses especially on the experience of intermediary organisations and work at Track 1.5 and Track 2 level. If adapted accordingly, the systemic approach can also be applied to the other tracks of conflict management. In general, however, it is essential to clarify the issues of access and mandate and provide support for the conflict actors in a way that encourages them to endorse a strategy of non-violent conflict management. Appropriate capacity building among conflict actors can play a key role in this context.

It is important for the third party to clarify its understanding of its own role and to communicate with adequate transparency in order to deal constructively with the challenges and dilemmas arising in work geared towards multipartiality and inclusivity.

Summary: strengths and weaknesses of the systemic approach

In the summary, the benefits of systemic conflict transformation for donor organisations are discussed. Various strengths and weaknesses of the systemic approach are also underlined, such as:

- The systemic approach to conflict transformation guides individuals, organisations and networks towards an open-ended and “complexity-sensitive” way of thinking and acting, without blurring the necessary focus on specific details and factors.
- By applying methodologies which encourage “thinking out of the box”, a shift in perspective and challenging of accepted ideas, systemic conflict transformation can help improve intervention methods; some systemic tools (e.g., the fishbowl method) are already being applied in workshops and dialogue processes.
- Systemic conflict transformation makes an important contribution to establishing a strategic planning framework to coordinate and link different activities, levels of activity and actors.
- Systemic conflict transformation requires substantial inputs of time and resources (due to the need for flexibility, networking with activities/actors on other tracks, etc.).
- Systemic conflict transformation presupposes that organisations involved in international cooperation will rethink their attitudes and undergo a change in mentality – shifting away from unilinear planning feasibilities towards sensitive and long-term process monitoring, and also away from thinking in terms of “our project” towards engaged and credible support for local partners.
- Systemic conflict transformation requires very well-trained key personnel who display a high level of openness and have the excellent process and mediation skills needed to implement systemic approaches.

Recommendations (to BFPS and donor organisations)

1. To *produce, develop and adapt systemic methods of conflict transformation*, especially in the fields of conflict analysis, intervention planning (e.g., process architecture) and systemic impact monitoring. Methodological development should take place, for example, within the framework of BFPS's field projects and also in cooperation with the Berghof Research Center.
2. A greater *systematisation and application of systemic methodologies and conflict transformation approaches in dialogue and problem-solving workshops*. Besides Berghof's own experiences, a more intensive exchange should be sought with partner organisations.
3. To *reinforce and promote the systematic management of learning experiences*, we propose integrating learning loops and action research components into all major long-term and methodologically innovative peacebuilding projects and programmes. With support from action researchers, regular reflection on the projects could take place, thus systematising learning outcomes (which only then allows the transfer of experience) and also offering feedback on the projects/programmes themselves.
4. We want to continue and intensify the *dialogue about systemic conflict transformation* through publications but especially through workshops and seminars.
5. As regards the practice of systemic conflict transformation, we will continue to offer support and *advice for other international organisations and donors*, e.g., in the context of donor working groups or with respect to the development of other peacebuilding structures (peace support groups; peace secretariats, etc.).
6. To facilitate the use of the systemic approach by donors, clear entry points should be identified. A distinction should also be made between the fields of application at the level of political management and coordination, and the use of the systemic approach for the further development of tools. To further clarify how the approach should be applied, for example, a *pilot project on systemic conflict transformation* could be incorporated into an existing peacebuilding programme and targeted advisory services offered in the fields of application mentioned above.
7. We recognise that there is a considerable need for action on the part of the international community in facilitating the transition from peace negotiations to the *post-conflict phase* (both in the development of support structures and in process monitoring). We therefore recommend that the applicability of systemic approaches be tested in multi-actor contexts, specifically in this transitional phase, which is highly sensitive in political terms.
8. The application of systemic approaches requires all those involved to show flexibility, openness and creativity in developing viable solutions, which may also necessitate greater inputs of time and resources. We therefore recommend that donor organisations provide the *resources necessary for a comprehensive analysis of the conflict system, strategic planning, reflection and learning* when undertaking pilot projects and implementing systemic approaches.
9. The systemic approach is largely based on inclusivity and cooperation. This requires working in partnership and greater incentives

for coordination and cooperation as the basis for fruitful inter-agency dialogue between local and international actors. It also requires *incentives from the international donor community, such as explicit support for networks and joint activities involving different actors.*

10. The use of systemic conflict transformation at management and instrumental level should be linked with *advanced training for donor organisations' staff* in these areas.
11. However, the implementation of systemic approaches to peacebuilding also places huge requirements on project personnel (expert, methodological and process skills). We therefore recommend that *capacity building and training measures be provided and promoted for actors from the conflict countries* at a very early stage. Participants in these measures can then help to develop a programme of systemic conflict transformation in their own countries.

12. To support the proposed training measures, we strongly encourage a process of reflection on *support and funding for south-south cooperation*. Regional networks and exchange programmes between actors in conflict countries can help to reduce the existing dependency relationships between the south and the north. This greatly benefits systemic approaches in many ways, especially because actors from the region have a far greater knowledge of the political, historical, economic, cultural, social and religious structures in which the conflicts are taking place. Furthermore, actors from the south can facilitate access to complex conflict systems, e.g., in the Islamic region, which are less accessible to actors from the north.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and context of the study

Containing and transforming violent conflicts is likely to remain a key task for international politics and cooperation for the foreseeable future, affecting state, non-state and multilateral actors and organisations alike.

The figures vary. Some suggest that there is a constant “core” of 30-35 conflicts being fought by military means every year, while others predict that around half of all developing countries have the potential to become crisis countries with violent conflicts. More than 90% of these conflicts are internal, with the traditional instruments of diplomatic peace-making having little impact on them.¹

In order to respond effectively to the challenges presented by violent conflicts and engage in sustainable and effective peacebuilding², innovative concepts and approaches are required. Conflict systems are characterised by a multitude of (intermeshing) causes and accelerators of conflict, power asymmetries, cultures of violence, and a range of directly and indirectly involved local and international actors – to mention just a few of the relevant factors. Peacebuilding con-

cepts and approaches must take account of this high level of complexity. The now widespread recognition of the need for “holistic” and “integrated” approaches and adherence to the principles of coherence, cooperation and complementarity are important in this context. However, more is needed besides.

What is required are peacebuilding approaches and concepts that offer a strategic framework, which is accessible to a range of actors and programmes and allows the interventions taking place at micro and meso level to achieve better and more focussed impacts at macropolitical level. Furthermore, in conflict systems dominated by different power-political interests, it will become increasingly important to find answers to questions relating to both the appropriate entry points for peacebuilding support measures, and the identification of actors and institutions that are likely to facilitate social and political change. Ultimately, the task is to establish creative platforms for innovative approaches to conflict management. Against this background, the present study is intended to map out the basic features of a systemic approach to conflict transformation and set it in a practical context. As we will show, systemic conflict transformation can

¹ cf. Heidelberg Institute on International Conflict Research: Conflict Barometer 2004. 13th Annual Conflict Analysis. Heidelberg: HIIK 2004.

² Based on the development policy discourse, the term “peacebuilding” is used here to denote medium- and long-term measures which aim to i) establish interest-reconciliation and constructive conflict resolution mechanisms, ii) overcome the structural causes of violent conflicts, and iii) create framework conditions suitable for peaceful and equitable development; cf. BMZ: Sector strategy for crisis prevention, conflict transformation and peace-building in German development cooperation, BMZ: June 2005.

contribute to the necessary reflection and reduction of the complexity inherent in violent conflicts and provide innovative impetus for peacebuilding practice.

The study was produced by the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support (BFPS) as part of an action research project entitled “Systemische Ansätze zur Unterstützung von Friedensprozessen: Konzept und Anwendungsgebiete” [Systemic Approaches to Supporting Peace Processes: Concept and Fields of Application], which was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). The project duration was 15 months (October 2004 to December 2005). Alongside the evaluation study, four separate conflict studies on Nepal, Aceh/Indonesia, Sudan and Southern Sudan were prepared, and key insights from these think pieces have been incorporated into this study.

1.2 Issues and target group

The study aims to play a part in presenting and further developing an innovative peacebuilding concept by means of a systemic approach. The intention is to show that systemic conflict transformation offers immense potential, both in terms of analytical capacities and also in the development of effective strategies. It can help identify relevant intervention levers and agents of peaceful change, and offers a framework for the coordination and interaction of activities on the various tracks of conflict management as well as for systemic interaction between state and non-state, and international and local actors.

For organisations which are interested in active peacebuilding as part of their international cooperation, systemic conflict transformation also helps to identify the entry points and potentialities that can be utilised more fully to facilitate more intensive networking of activities at

various levels and more effective support of peace processes. For example, to what extent and in which form can comparative advantages (such as longevity of engagement at local level, relevance to partners, contacts with decision-makers in government and civil society, mandating of work at local level, management of core conflict causes) be utilised as “entry points” for high-level negotiations, dialogue and problem-solving activities? How can short-term, more process-oriented measures such as dialogue events be meshed with structurally oriented (and generally medium-term) capacity building measures? How can the central element of networking and relationship development be integrated into other programmes?

Besides presenting an overview of conceptual and normative elements of systemic conflict transformation and exploring contexts of application, the study also considers the parameters necessary for the effective application of this approach. While systemic conflict transformation is designed primarily for intermediary organisations that deal explicitly with civilian conflict management and peacebuilding issues, it also offers various options for application by donor organisations. With a particular focus on the report’s two sponsoring organisations, we will therefore present various process-oriented recommendations on the use and further development of systemic conflict transformation.

The study specifically targets several different user groups which vary considerably in terms of their specific fields of, and options for, application:

- staff and partners of intermediary organisations which deal explicitly with civilian conflict management and conflict transformation issues (e.g., BFPS, Conciliation Resources, International Alert, etc.);
- implementing agencies involved in development cooperation which also deal with the development and management of peacebuilding strategies as part of their engagement in war-torn and crisis regions (Swiss Agency for

- Development and Cooperation – SDC, GTZ, German Development Service – DED, KfW, etc.);
- staff of the donor organisations (BMZ and DFA) who deal with issues relating to strategic planning, management and coordination of peacebuilding activities or who are working on the further development of tools and methodologies in this area;
 - working groups and competence centres working on the conceptual development of peacebuilding instruments and methodologies and involved in organising the exchange and transfer of lessons learned (KOFF – Center for Peacebuilding, FriEnt, zivik).

In terms of its content, the study is limited explicitly to the sphere of active peacebuilding and conflict transformation, with reference to the Swiss and German international development agencies working in this area. Although a systemic approach offers opportunities for linkage with other policy areas (e.g., diplomacy, defence and economic policy), this aspect is beyond the scope of the project and is not discussed here. Based on a broad understanding of peacebuilding (see Glossary in the Annex), we focus on all phases of conflict management, but especially the pre-agreement (negotiation) and post-agreement phase (implementation of peace agreement, “post-conflict” phase).

1.3 Methodology

The study is based on an action research approach which links reflection on practical experiences with conceptual ideas from the current debate on civilian conflict management and related

disciplines. The following components were integrated into this dialogue between theory and practice:

Much of the evaluation is based on a systematisation of the experiences and lessons learned from two systemic projects:

- the Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation (RNCST) in Sri Lanka, which is funded by the BMZ and DFA and implemented by the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies;
- the high-level Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue Process, which was implemented by the Berghof Research Center and, in 2005, by BFPS in conjunction with the British partner organisation Conciliation Resources (CR) and is embedded in a comprehensive capacity building programme run by Conciliation Resources. This dialogue process was funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Church Development Service (EED), the DFA and the German Federal Foreign Office (AA).

With the aim of developing and enhancing the practical experiences in theoretical terms, use was made of key concepts and instruments from systems theory which in recent years have become well-established and positively received in disciplines such as organisational development consulting, family therapy and cybernetics. We also took account of the recent debate in the field of civilian conflict management and peacebuilding and have attempted to integrate the experiences of other CCM organisations assumed to be working on similar issues or dealing explicitly with systemic concepts.³

³ 28 organisations were contacted and invited to engage in a substantive dialogue with us or to send us studies or pointers to other relevant organisations (see list of organisations in the Annex). Overall, the response to this survey was muted. Although there was a clear interest in the topic of the study, very few organisations sent us any detailed information. However, in individual cases (e.g., with CMI), a very interesting dialogue evolved, and a commitment was made to forward further studies (e.g., from the Center for International Conflict Resolution and the Eastern Mennonite University).

As a further building block in the study, four short “think pieces” were prepared on systemic conflict transformation options in Nepal, Aceh/Indonesia and Sudan (one study from a “northern perspective” and one study on the specific situation in the south). The BFPS, DFA and BMZ worked closely together to select the countries for these short studies.⁴

Consultations then took place with local actors to identify appropriate authors for the study. The studies on Nepal and Aceh/Indonesia were prepared during the May – September period, and the Sudan studies were not available in their revised form until December 2005. The findings and conclusions of the think pieces, which are intended to provide an overview of the conflict systems in question and, above all, stimulate ideas for systemic interventions, were integrated into various sections of the study, especially Chapter 6.⁵

The issues, structure and findings of the study were discussed at a series of meetings and smaller workshops with staff from the BMZ and DFA and also with various partner organisations (see the Terms of Reference and project timetable in the Annex). The writing process within the BFPS authors’ team proved to be particularly interesting. Besides literature studies and discussions with colleagues, an iterative dialogue process between more general conceptual ideas and the reflection on specific practical experiences evolved at an early stage. Although the original plan was to develop a conceptual framework and structure the practical experience accordingly, it soon became apparent that it would be more sensible to utilise the reflection on practical experience as a core element of conceptual development. To this end, project workers from the RNCST and the Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue project were also involved early on in the discussions on the development of the study and the production of the first draft texts.

4 BFPS (in December 2004) drafted an initial list of possible “candidates” (based on the following criteria: type of conflict, security situation, regional scope of the conflict). After discussion with the relevant country desk officers at the DFA and BMZ, it was agreed in February 2005 that Indonesia, Nepal and Sudan would be selected for the study. Following this decision, the Terms of Reference for each think piece – each to consist of 15-20 pages – were drafted and discussed with the relevant desk officers and authors.

5 The think pieces can be downloaded from the BFPS website: www.berghof-peacesupport.org

1.4 Structure of the study

Chapter 1 p. 1 – 5	Introduction Context, target group and methodology
Chapter 2 p. 7 – 12	Outline of the problem: Core challenges in peacebuilding Characteristics of violent conflict and the problems of civilian conflict management (CCM)
Chapter 3 p. 13 – 16	Bases of systemic conflict transformation Definition and normative bases
Chapter 4 p. 17 – 30	The evolution of systemic conflict transformation Practical experience at the Berghof Center and general concepts of CCM
Chapter 5 p. 31 – 66	Core elements of systemic conflict transformation Concepts, ideas and methodologies
Chapter 6 p. 67 – 74	Fields of application and framework conditions Use of the approach, access and range
Chapter 7 p. 75 – 82	Benefits and limitations for international donors Management level and development of instruments (for BMZ and DFA)
Chapter 8 p. 83 – 88	Summary and recommendations Recommendations for practical work and the further development of the approach; unresolved questions

2. Core challenges in peacebuilding

In practice, state and non-state organisations involved in peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive development cooperation face many different challenges. Although the instruments, strategies and concepts of peacebuilding and civilian conflict management have been developed further, especially since the 1990s, and are now highly sophisticated, fundamental problems arising in conflict management remain unresolved. These relate both to specific characteristics of violent conflict, and also to the fact that adequate responses to many of the problem areas in conflict systems have not yet been developed. The following overview provides an outline of these various challenges which, in reality, are inter-linked:

- the heightened complexity, dynamics and longevity of protracted conflicts and their external parameters;
- weaknesses in strategic planning and coordination of the various actors engaged in peacebuilding;
- managing asymmetrical conflict structures and considering the specific roles of non-state armed groups and state actors in scenarios of state failure;
- taking account of the needs and interests of, and relationships between, all conflict actors, including spoilers; and

- the further development of peacebuilding methodologies on a systemic basis.

This chapter outlines the key challenges and dilemmas which a systemic approach to conflict transformation must address. Entry points for dealing with these challenges are presented in Chapter 5, which describes the core elements of the systemic approach. The complexity of the challenges described here indicates that at present, these core elements merely constitute relevant entry points for the further development of systemic conflict transformation, but do not yet provide conclusive solutions to these challenges.

Heightened complexity, dynamics and longevity of protracted conflicts and their external parameters

A key feature of the large majority of intra-state conflicts is their protracted conflict history. The civil wars which have erupted over the issue of political self-determination display particular longevity: the average duration of the 25 armed self-determination conflicts still being fought at the end of 2004 was 27 years.⁶ The duration of the conflicts dealt with in this study ranges from nine years (Nepal) to 22 years (north-south conflict in Sudan and Sri Lanka).

6 Monty G. Marshall & Ted Robert Gurr: *Peace and Conflict 2005. A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*, College Park: CIDCM 2005, p. 26f; Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson & Pamela Aall (eds.): *Grasping the Nettle. Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict*, Washington: USIP Press 2005. This latter publication describes 23 conflicts as “intractable”. Some countries such as East Timor and Angola could now be deleted from its list, but others, such as Uganda, could be added.

Conflict longevity has various impacts and implications, also for conflict management practice. In protracted conflicts, the original causes of the conflict fade into the background, while the conflict's own dynamics and the direct effects of the violence committed by actors on both sides become more important. The conflict actors are caught up in an increasingly destructive spiral of action and reaction, and their positions become more entrenched (with the opponent becoming increasingly "dehumanised") as a result. A strong polarisation into "friend" or "foe" ("anyone who is not for us is against us") can be observed. The conflict becomes increasingly decoupled from conditions within its environment, making itself and its dynamics the dominant theme. However, work undertaken to de-escalate the conflict and build relationships must not lose sight of the original causes of the conflict. On the contrary, it is essential to identify an appropriate combination of relationship-building and thematic work which fits with the conflict's political, social and cultural context. However, this contextualisation of conflict management approaches has often not taken place.

Appropriate contextualisation of the conflict must also take account of the impacts of the environment/external parameters on the conflict system: some protracted conflicts are not being resolved because regional powers – because of their geostrategic interests – are doing too little, or nothing, to support a negotiated solution. For example, Russia and, indeed, the USA are doing much to perpetuate the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, and India is a relevant actor in terms of a conflict solution in Nepal and Sri Lanka. In situations in which there are no adequately mandated cooperation structures to deal with these interest-driven scenarios, these power-political interests can actually impede the constructive transformation of the underlying

conflicts and contribute to their becoming entrenched, i.e. protracted ("frozen") conflicts.

Other factors exacerbating the situation are the resurgence of "hard power" in the war on terror, its use by a few key international actors under the leadership of the US government, and the deployment of preemptive military intervention. In such a militarised and politically loaded environment, how can the conflict causes be managed and transformed in a process that adequately involves local actors? How is it possible to deal with the reactions of local actors who, in such an environment, become radicalised and may be receiving support from extremist forces to ward off interventions which they see as "external interference"? How can the different values and the adherence to an open-ended outcome as a matter of principle in civilian conflict transformation be conveyed in a clear and comprehensible way, demonstrating how profoundly this form of support differs from military or intelligence-based interventions?

Weaknesses in strategic planning and coordination of the various actors engaged in peacebuilding

The second set of challenges relates to the objectives and direction of peacebuilding measures. In its comparison of various donors' experiences of peacebuilding, the Joint Utstein Study identifies various weaknesses, including the following:⁷

- insufficient understanding of the complex political dynamics of conflict;
- overly optimistic policy design and inability to adapt to changing environments;
- ad hoc, fragmented, 'too-little' and 'too-late' responses.

7 cf. Dan Smith: "Getting Their Act Together. Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding," Synthesis Report of the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, Oslo: PRIO, November 2004.

Studies by the World Bank also deal with the problem of suboptimal sequencing of support measures.⁸

The international community often responds mechanistically to changes in conflict systems. This is especially apparent in the politically sensitive phase of implementing peace agreements, when the diplomats engaged in the negotiations withdraw, leaving the field to other actors involved in reconstruction. This change-over is generally described as “post-conflict”, even though it is during this implementation phase in particular that the conflict parties are expected to make painful concessions. They also come under strong pressure from their constituencies to achieve rapid improvements in living conditions, while disappointment over the agreed compromises runs high. The risk of a resurgence of violence is thus greatest at this time.

Besides issues relating to chronology and sequencing, the division of labour between state and non-state actors and the orchestration of activities on and between the various tracks are also difficult. The lack of coherence and complementarity of peacebuilding measures is attributed to a variety of factors. They include structural and organisational reasons such as differing organisational cultures, competition and structural inequalities between external and local actors, time pressure (rapid launch of comprehensive development and reconstruction programmes), institutional inflexibility and lack of experience with the requirements of peacebuilding.⁹ A further factor is the incompatibility of goals and priorities, which can be seen as both a cause and an effect of this lack of coherence. Security sec-

tor reform, transformation of economies of violence, emergency relief, democracy-building and poverty reduction can easily emerge as factors which heighten conflicts.¹⁰ However, the call for conflict-sensitive planning and implementation does not solve the dilemma that there may be highly divergent responses to certain questions – such as which measures are appropriate, at which point in time, for which actors, and how they should be implemented – and that adequate information and coordination mechanisms may also be lacking. In view of the complexity of the conflict and the high number and variety of external actors, e.g., in Sri Lanka, the key question when developing such mechanisms is this: which interventions can be regarded as at all relevant in the context of the overall system or its sub-systems?

However, it is important to note, at the same time, that the “first generation” of peacebuilding projects, which were funded as part of international cooperation (IC) at the end of the 1990s, has managed – with the aid of external actors – to support peace processes. However, many issues remained unresolved and very often expectations of the activities’ effectiveness were simply too high. The difficulty in measuring effectiveness is a problem in two respects: in many instances, it is hard to demonstrate the impact of these activities and thus to provide adequate justification for them. However, this does not appear to deter third parties from nurturing excessively high expectations: indeed, at first, these are generally supported by donors and implementing partners before being swiftly abandoned when difficulties arise. No effort is made to question the objectives and strategy

8 cf. World Bank: “Breaking the Conflict Trap. Civil War and Development Policy,” Washington: World Bank 2003.

9 WSP International & International Peace Academy: Building Effective Partnerships. Improving the Relationship between Internal and External Actors in Post-Conflict Countries, New York: IPA 2004.

10 cf. Mimmi Söderberg & Thomas Ohlson: Democratisation and Armed Conflicts in Weak States, Stockholm: SIDA 2003; Martina Fischer & Oliver Wils: Armutsbekämpfung und Krisenprävention. Wie lässt sich Armutsbekämpfung konflikt sensitiv gestalten? Bonn: VENRO 2003, Series 20015, Dialogue No. 6.

and adapt expectations accordingly. In recent years, this approach has been challenged increasingly, but the process of developing new methodologies is not yet complete.

Managing asymmetrical conflict structures and considering the specific roles of non-state armed groups and state actors in scenarios of state failure

The majority of conflicts to be managed today are asymmetrical conflicts. The question that arises when developing peacebuilding measures is how the differences and power imbalances between the conflict parties can be managed in order to facilitate peace negotiations. It is apparent, in this context, that interventions by the state inevitably and systematically prioritise its “opposite number” in a partial way. State actors find it difficult to deal with inclusive, multipartial approaches, especially when there is no immediate prospect of a settlement to the conflict, which remains “frozen” with a significant level of ongoing violence.

This is especially apparent from the incentive and sanction mechanisms which the international community uses to reward a peaceful approach and penalise violence and the abuse of power. Incentives from state actors, such as development aid for non-state conflict actors, are subject to the endorsement of the government in the recipient country, which means that this approach is often non-viable. On the other hand, sanctions applied in response to human rights violations tend to be imposed mainly against resistance movements and the organisations which support them; the international community is far more restrained in its use of sanctions against states. This type of practice tends to reinforce asymmetries rather than dismantling them.

From the international actors’ perspective, there is an opportunity for a constructive division of labour between state and non-state organisations as governmental third parties have special access to, and can thus cooperate directly, with the state apparatus. Non-state actors, on the

other hand, are generally in a better position to adopt a multipartial position, enabling them to work with non-state armed groups as well. Due to the high risk of polarisation in protracted conflicts and the frequent power inequalities between the conflict parties, this approach requires a high level of conflict sensitivity from third parties, as well as a transparent and empathetic attitude towards all sides involved in the conflict. As the successful negotiation of peace agreements in Sudan or Aceh/Indonesia shows, and as is also borne out by other successful examples of support for peace processes, e.g., in the UN framework, constructive process support and dialogue facilitation by state and non-state actors are key activities in peacebuilding. However, to manage the causes of conflicts, safeguard peace processes and promote institution-building for constructive conflict management, structurally oriented peacebuilding measures are also important, and these can often be supported through development cooperation. These successful approaches underline the importance of a networked and sensitive approach and also highlight the challenges facing actors involved in conflict transformation.

When analysing asymmetrical conflicts, it is important to bear in mind one particular aspect which has only started to be considered in more detail in recent years. Previously, attention tended to focus primarily on non-state actors, their legitimacy and approach etc. However, it is increasingly being acknowledged that not all state actors are equally competent or legitimate. Many current conflicts are taking place in contexts of weak or failing states. The conflicts considered in this study (Sri Lanka, Indonesia/Aceh, Georgia/Abkhazia, Nepal, Sudan) can all be categorised as conflicts in failing states, although each case is very different.¹¹ State failure can undoubtedly be an effect of, or at least be accelerated by, civil war. However, a weak state or a state which primarily serves the interests of particular groups may be a causal factor in the emergence of violent conflicts. In Sudan, for example, state actors must be regarded as key

actors in the multitude of intra-state conflicts taking place there, and yet these groups, which exploit and instrumentalise the government apparatus to further their own interests, only constitute a small section of Sudanese society. Representatives of third parties seeking to contribute to conflict management and peacebuilding are thus confronted with a paradox: to avoid being co-opted by state actors which are themselves part of the conflict while nonetheless seeking to enhance the legitimacy and governance of the state's (not the regime's!) apparatus at the same time.

In sum, successful conflict management must involve the transformation of state and non-state armed groups into civilian actors with a democratically legitimate agenda. What is needed for this process, alongside dialogue and the management of the causes of conflict in cooperation with the conflict parties, is confidence-building, the encouragement of institutional change and appropriate capacity building with each of the individual parties. Linking these various packages of measures presents major conceptual and methodological challenges, especially in terms of the further development of conflict transformation strategies.

Taking account of the needs and interests of, and relationships between, all conflict actors, including spoilers

Besides considering the relationship between the conflict actors, their internal conditions and processes are a further key issue. It is very rare for these groups to have homogeneous interests and needs; instead, these generally vary among

the various camps within the stakeholder groups. The usual distinction between “peace constituencies” and spoilers thus appears too superficial. It is therefore advisable to dispense with the assumption that there is homogeneity and stability of interests within these groups.

Dealing with spoilers presents particular challenges to actors engaged in conflict transformation. First of all, more detailed analysis of the interests and needs of these groups is required. In some cases, the spoiler function arises from the overall conflict scenario, in which intra-party rivalry may mean that actors gain in influence and power if they take on this role. Recent debate has focussed especially on the political economy of civil wars and emphasised the economic interests of non-state armed groups. It should not be overlooked, in this context, that during the course of the conflict, firm political and economic interests have evolved on all sides (secondary gains) which help to generate a measure of “stability” for the conflict.¹²

While the discourse about the political economy is central to achieving an understanding of conflicts, it is also essential to establish a holistic overview of the roles played by affective, non-affective, rational and emotional motives in this context. Resistance can only be managed effectively on the basis of a well-founded analysis of spoilers' motivations and patterns of perception. In this context, key experience has shown that the reproduction of destructive patterns of interaction and perception among these actors – who view themselves as fundamentally misunderstood and excluded (emergence of cultures of

11 Based on the classification by Ulrich Schneckenner (ed.): *States at Risk. Fragile Staaten als Sicherheits- und Entwicklungsproblem*, Berlin: SWP 2004. It must be borne in mind that the terminology itself is a political issue and is often interpreted by the states concerned as interventionist and unacceptable.

12 This aspect can only be touched upon here, but merits further consideration. See, for example, the article by Karen Ballentine & Heiko Nitzschke: *The Political Economy of Civil War and Conflict Transformation*, in: Martina Fischer & Beatrix Schmelzle (eds.): *Transforming War Economies. Dilemmas and Strategies*, Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series No. 3, Berlin: Berghof Research Center 2005.

violence and “pathological feedback loops”) – may result in mounting resistance to non-violent solutions.

It is vital to ensure that none of these groups is excluded summarily from the intervention strategy and that sanction regimes are coupled intelligently with incentives for constructive engagement. A particular challenge is to ensure that hardliners and spoiler groups are offered few opportunities to derive political capital by engaging in measures which undermine a constructive approach.

Further development of peacebuilding methodologies on a systemic basis

The challenges described above can be summarised as follows: they signify the need to perceive politically motivated violent conflicts as systems, and in line with this systemic view, to plan and implement interventions aimed at their transformation.

It therefore seems appropriate to search for ideas in the related fields of psychotherapy and organisational development consulting, where systems theory is well-established. For example, in light of the aforementioned need to improve the way in which resistances are dealt with and include affective and non-affective elements, psychotherapy can help develop new approaches and contribute to the further development of methodologies. Building on experience with systemic approaches in organisational development consulting and the analysis of complex systems,

it is possible to gain particular insights which can help remedy the overly strong linearity and under-complexity of conflict management methods. It is also possible to borrow from these fields, as well as from cybernetics, to address the issue of managing complex systems. For example, these approaches can be used to develop a complex but practical design for intervention that creates the strategic framework necessary for state and non-state, international and local actors and also helps to identify the relevant entry and starting points for CCM in close partnership with local actors. A further key building block is a sophisticated monitoring system which not only tracks the impacts of intervention in terms of promoting a sustainable peace but also focusses on the quality of partnership-based relations between various actors.

Another methodological challenge lies in the involvement of partners and conflict parties on the basis of multipartiality. How can their views be considered to an equal extent and incorporated appropriately into analysis and planning? And how can model solutions be developed, in accordance with the differing starting conditions and interests, which help to achieve the desired open-ended character of transformative intervention? In many instances, seeking to pursue an open-ended approach in practice is an overly ambitious goal, for in targeted development, it needs at least one results corridor that can be clarified through transparent value concepts and principles for action. These will be presented in the next chapter.

3. Definition and bases of systemic conflict transformation

This chapter explores the definition and normative bases of systemic conflict transformation with reference to the challenges outlined in Chapter 2. These not only arise from the “nature” of protracted conflicts but also from the suboptimal strategies and under-complex concepts pursued by organisations involved in international cooperation and peacebuilding. Its core elements will then be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Chapter 4 will focus on the evolution of the approach with reference to the Berghof’s practical experience and will provide a brief summary of key concepts relating to civilian conflict management.

3.1 Definition: systemic thinking and systemic conflict transformation

Think systemically – act systemically

We define a “system” as an entity which comprises specific “elements” but which should not be understood simply as the sum of these individual parts. The inter-relationships and interaction of these elements create something new which is not solely attributable to the properties of the elements themselves. Systems also display (more or less permeable) boundaries and sub-systems. These perform specific functions within the system and exhibit their own patterns of interaction with the system elements.

However, systemic approaches are relevant not because they reflect the complexity of systems, but because they make a meaningful contribu-

tion to reducing this complexity. Peter Senge, one of the leading theorists of learning organisations, argues that the art of systems thinking lies in seeing through complexity to the underlying structures generating change. Systems thinking, according to Senge, does not mean ignoring complexity, but organising it into a coherent story that illuminates the causes of problems and how they can be remedied in enduring ways.¹³

We argue in favour of a creative systemic approach, which means not being forced into the narrow confines of one particular school but utilising the innovative opportunities afforded by systems thinking and interpretation as creatively as possible. The key fields and disciplines to be mentioned in this context are organisational analysis, development and consulting, change management, family mediation and therapy, supervision and cybernetics. Here, systemic issues, methodologies and instruments have already reached maturity, and a core of practical experience is therefore available in relation to interventions at micro level (e.g., family therapy) and meso level (e.g., organisational development consulting).

We have only been able to draw on meta systems theories (such as those developed by Niklas Luhmann) to a very limited extent in the present study, due to their high degree of abstraction. Furthermore, such theories tend towards a systems conservatism which we do not endorse. The aim, in our view, is not to maintain or stabi-

13 Peter M. Senge: *The Fifth Discipline. The Art & Practice of The Learning Organisation*, New York: Doubleday 1990, p. 128.

lise existing systems but to contribute to their transformation by mobilising the system's own internal resources.

The aim of systemic conflict transformation

The explicit aim of systemic conflict transformation is to contribute to reducing violence in conflicts and mobilise the system's own internal resources. This will help to establish or reinforce support systems that will promote the necessary political and social change towards a peaceful and just society. Due to the centrality of the issue of a fair and equitable distribution of power and resources, another key element of systemic conflict transformation is always to empower local stakeholders and state and non-state institutions to identify and implement forms and processes of power and resource distribution.

A circular internal dynamic of cause and effect is a key feature of many conflicts. This means that a violent conflict is continuously self-reinforcing as the impacts of the violence constantly supply new reasons to perpetuate the violence. One of the aims of systemic conflict transformation is therefore to identify and address these destructive and pathological feedback loops within the system. This approach was inspired mainly by Karl W. Deutsch's concept of "political cybernetics", in which he posits that it is precisely the compulsion for power-poor actors to learn politically in an environment dominated by power-political interests which gives them a relatively high capacity for survival/self-assertion in times of crisis.¹⁴

Defining features of systemic conflict transformation

The defining features of systemic conflict transformation can be summarised as follows:

1. Systemic conflict transformation is based on the recognition that highly escalated inter-group conflicts constitute highly complex "systems" which can only be "modelled" to a limited extent, so that all interventions can only draw on limited knowledge.
2. An appropriately complex analysis of the conflict system is therefore especially important; this must be undertaken with local actors and take particular account of the self-reinforcing nature of many inter-group conflicts.
3. When analysing and intervening in a system, it is essential to define the system's boundaries precisely and be aware of the interactions and interdependencies in supra- and sub-systems. Here, a shift in perspective offers an overview of the system as a whole ("bird's eye view") and of individual sub-systems ("frog's eye view").
4. Interventions in the system require an analytical reduction of complexity to a series of working hypotheses which permit viable interventions with a "leverage effect" as well as facilitating the identification of agents of peaceful change and the critical mass needed for political and social change.
5. It is helpful to make use of the methodologies of applied systems theory (especially in the areas of organisational development consulting, psychotherapy and cybernetics).

¹⁴ Karl W. Deutsch: *The Nerves of Government. Models of Political Communication and Control*, London: Macmillan Press 1963.

3.2 Normative bases of the systemic approach

As is apparent from the above definition and descriptions of systemic conflict transformation, the approach is based on a series of normative assumptions which are extremely important for an understanding of the systemic approach. These are therefore explored in more detail below.

The need for peaceful and constructive ways of transforming conflict systems:

In phases of high conflict escalation (scale of violence, attacks on the civilian population, massive human rights violations, etc.), external political pressure is appropriate and external military measures may be necessary. However, they cannot and should not be a substitute for civilian conflict transformation strategies which must address the root causes of the conflict and the fundamental interests and legitimate needs of the actors involved.

Support for processes of comprehensive social change is desirable and necessary for a transformative approach:

To satisfy unfulfilled basic needs and re-establish a minimum of social, cultural and economic justice between regions, groups, classes and ethnicities, social change is a prerequisite. It is essential, however, that this takes place non-violently as far as possible. Change processes should primarily begin with the system's own internal resources and potentialities. A guiding vision for this change is Dieter Senghaas's "civilisational hexagon".¹⁵

Local actors must be in the driving seat of social change:

The decision on the development and direction of social change should be taken, first and foremost, by local actors (with the involvement, if appropriate, of the diaspora community). Third parties can and should support this process (expert and process consulting, intercultural exchange and learning).

Peacebuilding must pursue an inclusive approach:

Sustainable and equitable transformation can be achieved only if the interests and legitimate needs of all stakeholders in the conflict system are taken into account and included.

The need for a holistic human rights approach:

Systemic conflict transformation is committed to protecting and promoting human rights and humanitarian norms and principles. A holistic human rights approach takes account of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights as well as individual and collective rights.¹⁶

Power asymmetries must be considered and dealt with:

Power asymmetries between the conflict actors must be taken into account in peacebuilding as they have a direct impact on issues of principle such as inclusivity and participation in the peace process as well as on the opportunities for and limits to interaction between the actors. It may be necessary to strengthen the "weaker" actors so that their interests and concerns are

15 Dieter Senghaas: Frieden als Zivilisierungsprozess. in: Senghaas. (ed.): Den Frieden denken, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1995, p.196-223.

16 At one time, the relationship between human rights work and conflict management tended to highlight the tensions and possible goal conflicts between these two areas, whereas the more recent debate has focussed primarily on creating synergies and complementarity. On this issue, see especially Michelle Parlevliet: Bridging the Divide. Exploring the Relationship between Human Rights and Conflict Management, Track Two (Occasional Paper), Cape Town (CCR) 2002; Ghalib Galant & Michelle Parlevliet: Using Human Rights to Address Conflict: A Valuable Synergy, in: Paul Gready & Jonathan Ensor (eds.): Reinventing Development? Translating Rights-based Approaches from Theory into Practice, London: Zed Books 2005.

adequately articulated and communicated. Power asymmetries between local actors and third parties should also be addressed and appropriately reflected upon so that potential problems can be identified at an early stage.

A transformative approach must also contribute to overcoming gender-specific power relations and violence:

The issue of gender-specific power relations and violence must be taken into account during systemic conflict analyses, when planning interven-

tions and in monitoring and evaluation activities. This includes heightening sensitivity to the role played by gender-specific identity constructions and gender role assignments in the conflict system¹⁷ and identifying what are usually divergent options for action and potentialities of men and women. When carrying out interventions, it is essential to avoid reinforcing gender-specific patterns of violence and to support existing approaches for their transformation. In general, appropriate integration and participation of women in these activities should be safeguarded.

17 On changing gender role assignments in different phases of conflict, cf. Barbara Müller: *Konflikt und Gender*, unpublished manuscript 2006.

4. The evolution of the systemic approach to conflict transformation

This chapter presents two projects – in Sri Lanka and Georgia/Abkhazia – which played a key role in the development of the systemic approach to conflict transformation. The systemic nature of the two projects lies in the fact that they attempt to identify strategic entry points for conflict management, link different tracks, pursue a highly process-oriented approach and deal with both the thematic and the relationship level. In both projects, there is an intensive exchange with local state and non-state actors and also with the international donor community (donor working group, coordination with Norwegian negotiators, Friends of the General Secretary, UN special envoy).

4.1 Experiences with the Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation (RNCST) in Sri Lanka

The Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation (RNCST) was launched in 2001 with the conventional goal of strengthening peace constituencies in Sri Lanka through engagement with civil society partners. After a brief phase of confidence-building, the signing of a ceasefire agreement and the commencement of the peace negotiations between the government and the LTTE in 2002 provided the opportunity to focus on direct engagement with major political stakeholders and address almost all the key issues of the peace process.

The overall aim of the project is to empower stakeholders and partners from politics and civil society to shape long-term processes for a just and lasting peace based on fundamental changes in structures and relationships. To this end, the

stakeholders, leaders and decision-makers firstly need to alter their patterns of thinking and attitudes in order to develop the political will for change. Secondly, strategic and long-term concepts for the peace process must be developed and effective negotiating processes supported. Other aspects include the institutionalisation of, and capacity-building in, agencies involved in fostering the peace process.

The project, which is funded by the DFA and BMZ/GTZ and is scheduled to run until December 2008, targets five stakeholder groups: the government; the opposition parties; the LTTE and other Tamil actors; the Muslim community; and functional elites (e.g., from the public sector). The project partners belong to these stakeholder groups or to civil society organisations (CSOs).

The project is based on two components of systemic analysis: firstly, driving factors of conflict, and secondly driving factors of peace. Both have been useful in defining key variables.

Based on this analysis, five core programme elements can be identified:

1. Creating a space and opportunities for dialogue and problem-solving between all stakeholders and CSOs, in order to deepen and enhance the peace process at Track 1.5 and Track 2 levels and supplement the Track 1 activities.
2. Content-related and institutional capacity-building with key members of the five stakeholder groups and CSOs, in order to promote their open-minded participation in peace-relevant activities.

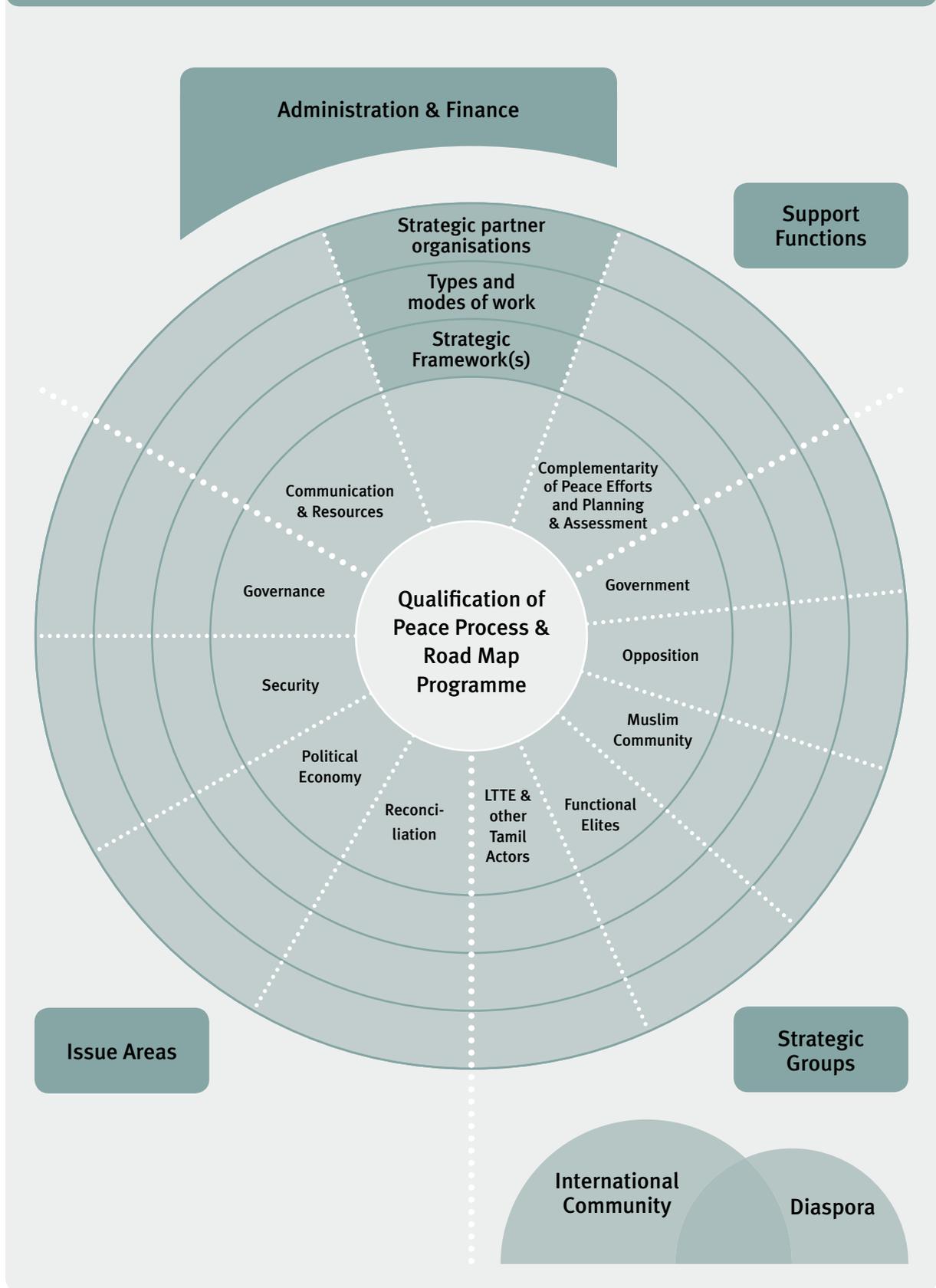
3. Support for the production of various models and perspectives for transforming the conflict and strengthening the peace process, as well as issues such as reform of governance, power sharing, federalism and political economy, in order to broaden and deepen the peace discourse in the country.
4. Working towards a “critical mass” of representatives of the stakeholder groups and agents of peaceful change who will engage on an ongoing and structured basis in the activities enumerated under (1) to (3), thus safeguarding their significance and sustainability.
5. Establishing an effective system for regularly reviewing the underlying peace and conflict analyses, for monitoring and evaluation, and for adapting the programme itself.

The RNCST was developed in several phases and is still work in progress. The first phase focussed on the goal of strengthening existing peace constituencies in Sri Lanka and assisting them to develop effective network structures. The key methods were capacity building, dialogue processes and the sharing of conflict management expertise. A small office was opened and young local academics were encouraged to gain further qualifications in this field and prepare for employment with partner organisations or in the Berghof’s local office.

The programme benefited from the fact that between January 2002 and April 2003, an ongoing process of bilateral peace initiatives and negotiations took place. The programme thus had the opportunity to support this process at Track 1.5 and Track 2 level, with the result that we and our partners became a kind of intellectual sounding board for the official negotiations.

The suspension of the peace negotiations since April 2003 (with an ongoing and protracted no war – no peace stalemate) has made it necessary to rethink the programme’s design. Instead of concentrating on strengthening peace constituencies in civil society and their sympathisers in the political parties, we decided to shift the focus towards the political parties and tackle the key conflict issues with them. The result was a comprehensive strategic concept which linked the five stakeholder groups with five conflict issues: (1) the peace process; (2) governance, especially power sharing and federalism; (3) security, especially confidence- and security-building measures, security sector reform and human security; (4) political economy, development and peace, and (5) reconciliation and transitional justice. The core idea was to involve an adequate number of representatives of all parties in longer-term issue-centred learning processes and, on this basis, initiate dialogue events which would allow shared learning to be translated into attempts at practical problem-solving (see RNCST Spider’s Web Diagram on the following pages).

RNCST Focal Areas



This was a very ambitious programme and we soon had to acknowledge that even with our resources, which are substantial compared with other peacebuilding projects, it was not possible to initiate a “critical mass” of transformative discourses with our partners in all five topics. This insight prompted us, in cooperation with colleagues from the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP), to undertake a joint systemic analysis of the drivers of conflict and the drivers of peaceful change. On this basis we then developed the five programme elements presented above.

As a result of the learning experiences gained with the RNCST, we were able to draw five key conclusions which have crucially influenced the development of the present concept of systemic conflict transformation:

1. After five decades of nationalist discourse and ethnopolitical conflict and two decades of war, the Sri Lankan “conflict system” – like many other protracted social conflicts – is fed from many sources and feedback loops. Some observers and commentators therefore describe it as “overdetermined”. At the same time, a more precise analysis of the drivers shows that there are various key factors which have a conflict-driving effect via several cause-effect chains. On the one hand, there is a deep-seated belief on the part of the south, especially among the political elite but also in large sections of the population, that Sinhala Buddhism has a natural claim to primacy. This belief is accepted as justification for the continued existence of the current central state and ethnopolitical majoritarianism, blocking reforms aimed at a genuine ethnopolitical division of power. In the LTTE and among large sections of the Tamil population, on the other hand, there is a belief that ultimately, only military means can achieve

recognition of their desire for a just solution. Both attitudes are mutually reinforcing. Systemic conflict transformation must focus on both of these factors and find a way to transform the two beliefs. In other words, nothing less is at stake than imagining an alternative system which reflects the perceived identity and enlightened interests of all stakeholders. This not only involves a comprehensive re-imagining of the state (or a confederation of states) – which poses a major challenge in terms of constitutional law and policy – but it also entails re-imagining disrupted/damaged relationships, neatly encapsulated by John Paul Lederach in the term “moral imagination”.¹⁸ This term offers a clearer focus on the non-rational, affective dimensions of transformation as well.

2. In view of the self-reinforcing, system-stabilising nature of protracted social conflicts as in Sri Lanka, it is advisable to design peace interventions in such a way that they have a “systemic” impact, so that they too initiate self-reinforcing and system-enhancing dynamics. This includes building a network of subsystems which institutionalise peace references. It also involves establishing informal, “systemically” inspired relationship networks as well as sustainable discourses on the core conflict issues in a process which involves regular participation, ongoing work in multi-party teams and organisations and the development of peacebuilding and institutionalised expertise. The logic underlying the institutionalisation of peace references has already been demonstrated fruitfully in a number of peace processes; the South African National Peace Secretariat is a case in point, although this was set up as an inclusive body from the outset. But even in cases such as Sri Lanka in which the parties have established their own separate peace secretariats and peace-relevant

18 cf. John Paul Lederach: *The Moral Imagination. The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, New York: Oxford University Press 2005.

think tanks, a platform for relationship-building among participating experts can be established and expert knowledge generated on the basis of a division of labour. A useful instrument here is to set up institutions such as the Berghof Foundation in Sri Lanka which, through its multi-ethnic composition and diverse links to stakeholders, can “import” elements of the conflict into the organisation. This presents particular challenges in relation to internal cooperation, but also allows the team to develop a space for experimental problem-solving.

3. The third insight relates to a specific subsystem, i.e. actual and potential drivers of peaceful change. Work on identifying and strengthening this group of influential persons was inspired by the concept of peace constituencies, especially in civil society. Our experiences have shown that within the parties themselves, there were many different persons who were searching for new approaches to peace. The challenge was to work with them to identify shared methods and approaches in order to establish their involvement on a long-term basis, foster cooperation among them, develop joint approaches, and maximise their influence. An appealing metaphor for this process was “critical mass”, which denotes a sufficiently large, influential, well-networked and creative group of strategically talented persons who, together, are able to influence change in a targeted way during a period of social upheaval.¹⁹ The starting point for this process is the hypothesis that in phases of complex non-linear change, actors are more open to new foci of action than in phases of social stability.
4. An important and – in terms of conflict resolution – obvious entry point for the RNCST involved the principles of multipartiality and

inclusivity. However, this was easier said than done. Firstly, all the parties find it very difficult to accept that the same group of people can show empathy for them and also for the opposing party in equal measure. Secondly, the proximity to the Track 1 level implied that parties not primarily involved in the negotiations would be treated as less significant. One of the insights gained from many protracted peace processes, however – including Sri Lanka’s – is that it is precisely these two principles which have system-transforming potential. Multipartial empathy means playing a key intermediary role between the parties, and inclusivity is an important instrument in overcoming the spoiler factor.

5. A further insight with “systemic” quality gained from the RNCST experiences is that any substantial engagement in this context involves reflecting on how intervention itself can be integrated into existing systems and can contribute to their transformation. In the context of a peace process, such as Sri Lanka’s, which is highly contentious in political terms, anyone wishing to undertake intervention must determine which normative and ethical criteria should guide their work. In this context, it is helpful to refer to the non-violence discussion and the ethical discourse which have already crucially influenced the conflict management movement, and also point out that systemic work aims to help generate new and innovative options.

4.2 Experience gained in the work and dialogue projects in Georgia-Abkhazia

The focus of activities in Georgia-Abkhazia is a combination of a broad-based capacity building programme run by Conciliation Resources (CR) and a high-level dialogue project (“Schlaining

19 Lederach proposes a combination of the terms critical yeast and critical mass, op. cit., p. 87-100.

process”) implemented jointly by the Berghof Center and CR. The systemic nature of these two complementary projects can mainly be encapsulated by the first three criteria defined for the Sri Lanka project:

(1) work on a comprehensive vision of a re-imagined relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia, (2) development of peacebuilding sub-systems, and 3) identification and promotion of a critical mass of influential persons.

CR’s programme of activities has existed since 1997. It originally began with a number of small-scale projects aimed at supporting local organisations and then evolved into a coherent programme involving more than 30 CSOs and media organisations in the region, partnerships with international organisations and NGOs, and relations with officials and politicians. The components

of the conflict transformation programme include: i) supporting CSOs and IDP communities (internally displaced persons) in Georgia and Abkhazia (e.g., through training measures, a small projects fund, a summer university, an NGO forum); ii) working with journalists and supporting media projects (transformative newspaper reporting, radio, television, development of community radio projects, documentary films); and iii) creating opportunities and spaces for dialogue, reflection and analysis (e.g., study visits, seminars, the Schlaining process).

The overall objective of CR’s work in the Caucasus is to improve the prospects of a just and peaceful transformation of the Abkhazia conflict and foster a culture of peace based on justice and mutual respect. From this overarching goal, the following objectives and strategies can be derived:

Objectives and strategies of the conflict transformation programme

To increase the ability of societies to deal with underlying factors that perpetuate conflict

- Supporting/accompanying local organisations to become more effective
- Linking partners/NGOs with other organisations and individuals with specific development, democratisation, human rights, rehabilitation expertise
- Creating a critical mass of change agents: working with influential social and political groups and individuals to build their capacity
- Broadening horizons and encouraging exposure to new ideas
- Engaging marginalised constituencies and groups that present obstacles to peace building

Influencing stakeholders conflict transformation strategies

- Creating opportunities for engagement across the divide: dialogue
- Encouraging speculative problem-solving: creating ideas
- Advocating approaches to policy change
- Providing exposure to comparative experience

To alter the public discourse around the conflict

- Improving the quality and diversity of media coverage in the regions
- Challenging stereotypes: engaging broader society in debate
- Stimulating debate on democratic and non-violent options for change
- Creating opportunities for ‘internal dialogue’ within the separate communities
- Providing opportunities for reflection and analysis for politicians, officials, civic activists and journalists
- Increasing public access to information within the communities and across the conflict divide

Influencing external conflict transformation policies

- Sharing expertise, analysis and contacts with INGOs, IGOs, Governments and academics
- Advocating approaches to policy change
- Linking external policy makers with voices from the region
- Maintaining links with a wide range of others working to influence policy
- Working to change donors' approaches to working in and on the conflict

The Schlaining process implemented by the Berghof Center and CR was initiated with support from the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR) in Stadtschlaining. As part of this programme, which was funded by the Church Development Service (EED), the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs (DFA), a total of 15 workshops were held between 2000 and October 2005. More than 80 participants were involved, including parliamentarians, ministers/deputy ministers, presidential advisers, officials and representatives of CSOs and the media (see further information on the methods deployed in the dialogue process in Section 5.3). The initial workshops focussed primarily on trust-building and establishing a shared understanding of the key conflict issues; at subsequent workshops, the participants embarked on a phase of speculative problem-solving and began to identify possible creative solutions to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.²⁰

So how can the dialogue workshops be linked, conceptually and pragmatically, with CR's conflict transformation programme? In answering this question, the following aspects can be emphasised:

1. As the Schlaining process is a forum for the analysis and discussion of all the sensitive issues associated with the conflict, it has played and continues to play a key role, both in the development of the conflict transformation programme and the practical efforts to bring constructive influence to bear on key stakeholders.
2. In the context of the dialogue workshops and their preparation (preliminary discussions, selection of participants), CR was able to establish working relations especially at ministerial and prime ministerial level and with other high-ranking politicians.
3. The CR programme, however, also enabled these contacts to be placed in a broader conflict transformation framework beyond the focus of the dialogue workshop, and, alongside political dialogue and analysis, allowed the discussion of further initiatives relating to the affected communities and their needs.²¹
4. The fact that CR is implementing a programme at Track 3 level was also important because it made it clear, especially to the Abkhazian side, that it was not a matter of

20 cf. Oliver Wolleh: A Difficult Encounter – The Informal Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue Process, forthcoming publication, Berlin: Berghof Research Center 2006.

21 In the words of Jonathan Cohen (CR), this offers very specific advantages: "An example of the way in which this bears fruit can be seen in the way in which meetings with senior figures in both Sukhum/i or Tbilisi at which the preparations for or outcomes of a dialogue workshop are discussed are also meetings in which permissions are agreed for Abkhaz to travel to Georgia or Georgians to travel to Abkhazia for participation in the production of joint TV documentary films or events such as the Summer University."

imposing a dialogue agenda at the expense of the Abkhazian community's interests. The work at local level resulted in a relationship of trust which could be reinforced through the dialogue workshops and vice versa.

5. Various political initiatives were launched as a result of the work undertaken in the dialogue workshops, such as the discussion pack²² and the informal group of experts. This is a group of Georgian experts, including an adviser to the National Security Council, who drafted a paper in 2003/2004 outlining a solution to the conflict and published it in May 2004. Although the draft was ultimately rejected by the Abkhazian side, it did contain very constructive proposals and elements. Four of the five experts involved in the group had participated in the Schlaining process, and the process was supported by CR.

4.3 Concepts of civilian conflict management

Besides the above-mentioned experience gained with the Berghof's practical projects, systemic conflict transformation also draws on concepts developed by CCM experts in response to the challenges mapped out in Chapter 2. These will be briefly presented below.

Definition: Interactive conflict resolution²⁴

"[...] facilitated face-to-face activities in communication, training, education, or consultation that promotes collaborative conflict analysis, problem solving, and reconciliation among parties engaged in protracted conflict in a manner that addresses basic human needs and promotes the building of peace, justice, and equality."

Interactive conflict resolution/ problem-solving workshops

The bases of interactive conflict resolution (ICR) and the related approach, i.e. problem-solving workshops, were developed in the late 1960s by John Burton, Herbert Kelman, Ronald Fisher, Edward Azar and others. Since then, this approach has been developed further and modified on the basis of wide-ranging practical experience.²³ ICR offers a confidential/informal dialogue format which is based on the involvement of all relevant conflict parties and seeks a solution to the problem while taking account of the conflict parties' basic needs for security, identity and participation.

ICR is not intended to replace formal negotiations, but to supplement them through alternative forms of interaction. ICR can thus be useful and effective in pre- and parallel negotiations and in the context of implementing peace agreements.

In ICR dialogue workshops, "success" is defined at three levels: the degree of trust-building between the participants, the exploration of different problem-solving approaches, and the identification and implementation of joint activities.

22 cf. Oliver Wolleh: A Difficult Encounter – The Informal Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue Process, forthcoming publication, Berghof Research Center, 2005.

23 cf. the overview presented in Norbert Ropers: Peaceful Intervention: Structures, Processes, and Strategies for the Constructive Regulation of Ethnopolitical Conflicts, Berghof Report No. 1, Berlin: Berghof Research Center 1995, p. 75-83.

24 Ronald J. Fisher: Introduction, in: Fisher (ed.): Paving the Way. Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking, Lanham MD: Lexington Books 2005, p. 2.

Ideal/typical phases of a dialogue workshop²⁵

1. Contact and confidence building
2. Empathy for the other side
3. Joint analysis of conflict issues
4. Explorative problem solving
5. Joint activities

One objection levelled at ICR dialogue measures is the problem of ensuring that the outcomes of the workshops are fed into *Realpolitik*. A further unresolved question is how dialogue measures – which mainly focus on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals – can contribute to the necessary transformation of structures and institutions.

The Berghof Center has worked with the ICR approach²⁶ in various field projects and has in some cases combined it with other concepts. Key factors for its further development in a systemic direction were the recognition – arising from this practical work – of the need for fundamental contextualisation of these activities, the need for a long-term perspective for the core group of key stakeholders, and the issue of linkage to the key actors driving the conflict/promoting peace. All this requires a broader framework both for analysis and for the overall architecture of the interventions.

This applies especially to the issue of cultural differences and power inequalities between conflict parties. As described in Chapter 2, key features of protracted social conflicts are their strong asymmetries in relation to power, governance and legitimacy. In terms of the intercultural dimension, they run the risk of being “culturalised”, with conflict parties utilising “cultural differences” for strategic purposes in order to fight for power, recognition, participation and other advantages. Members of dominating groups tend to individualise conflict elements, while members of dominated groups tend to generalise them.²⁷ The particular challenge in dealing with power asymmetries in dialogue situations involving facilitation, mediation and problem-solving workshops is to address these differences and enable the conflict parties to develop the rules for their negotiation. This itself is a challenge for the dominating group, as it regards its rules as universal. Simply by taking this step, the third party can be tainted with claims of “partiality” in favour of the dominated group.

25 cf. Clem McCartney: Human Rights Education, in: 11th Annual Report. Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights, London: HMSO 1986.

26 Besides the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and the conflict in Sri Lanka, experience with dialogue measures and problem-solving workshops was also gained in the context of the Romanian-Hungarian conflict in Romania. The approach was also tested with reference to Cyprus as part of a dissertation. See Petra Haumersen, Helmolt Rademacher & Norbert Ropers: Konfliktbearbeitung in der Zivilgesellschaft. Die Workshop-Methode im rumänisch-ungarischen Konflikt, Münster: LIT Verlag 2002; Oliver Wolleh: Die Teilung überwinden. Eine Fallstudie zur Friedensbildung in Zypern, Münster, LIT Verlag, 2002; Oliver Wolleh: A Difficult Encounter 2005, op. cit.; Charles Stewart Mott Foundation: Reaching for Peace. Lessons Learned from Mott Foundation's Conflict Resolution Grant Making 1989-1998 (conducted by CDR Associates and the Berghof Research Center), Flint 1999.

27 cf. Anja Weiss: Macht und Differenz. Ein erweitertes Modell der Konfliktpotentiale in interkulturellen Auseinandersetzungen, Berghof Report No. 7, Berlin: Berghof Research Center 2001.

However, the challenge in dealing with power extends far beyond such small-group situations. It raises fundamental issues such as how social change can be shaped productively at the various levels of society, especially under conditions of ongoing power inequalities and constant change. The issue of relevance to conflict management practice is to what extent an appropriate framework can be created in which conflict parties can negotiate “peace corridors” as a means of achieving more justice and less violence.

The ICR movement has made a significant contribution to the development of professional civilian conflict management. Its small-group framework is both its strength and its weakness. It is therefore ideally suited to the development of sub-system designs, but less able to contextualise these in the framework of a macropolitical design.

The three tracks of civilian conflict management

- Track 1** The field of official negotiations between the conflict parties (generally implemented with the support of external state actors)
- Track 2** Unofficial dialogue and problem-solving formats, in which multipliers and influential actors (intellectuals, consultants, leading religious personalities) take part
- Track 3** The range of activities implemented in and together with civil society (including institution building, training, peace education, “reconciliation”, private sector and media)

The introduction of the multi-track concept was one first important step towards a systemic understanding of conflict management. However, for a long time this remained an additive concept as little thought was given to precisely which measures should be combined on which tracks and how.

Strategies for peacebuilding

The central idea driving the development of the multi-track approach stems from the principle

Multi-track

The multi-track approach to conflict management is based on the fundamental understanding that, in order to transform conflict systems successfully, a whole range of other actors and instruments have to be mobilised alongside the official negotiations (Track 1) and ICR/problem-solving workshops (Track 2). While the multi-track diplomacy approach of Louise Diamond and John McDonald²⁸ featured a total of nine tracks (including media, business, religion, research), a split into three tracks has actually become the norm. The intermediate level of Track 1.5 is now also being used, denoting either unofficial dialogue processes with official party representatives or particularly high-ranking Track 2 events.

of complementarity, both in terms of the potential approaches to the actions pursued, and also the addressees to be reached. While the multi-track approach explores the options and scope of different actors, the approach of peace strategies ponders the question of which tasks have to be addressed when de-escalating and transforming violent conflicts. Johan Galtung described these tasks as peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding, a distinction analogous to that

28 Louise Diamond & John McDonald: Multi-Track Diplomacy. A Systems Approach to Peace, West Hartford: Kumarian Press 1996.

between conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation.²⁹

However, for the time being, the question of sequencing remains unresolved, namely which interventions have to take place and when. While, in the Agenda for Peace, Boutros Boutros Ghali placed peace strategies in a sequence of peacekeeping – peacemaking – peacebuilding, Ronald Fisher intermeshed them in a more complex form, placing particular importance on peacebuilding. These forms of intervention, which aim to improve relations between the conflict parties, tackle different escalation stages of the conflict in order to create the basis for essential and immediate de-escalation measures. These deliberations correspond with the requirements of de-escalating strategies in Friedrich Glasl's model of conflict escalation.³⁰

From a systemic perspective, the various supplementary peace strategy models provided better entry points as they were anchored in state, multi-lateral and societal interactions. Still, even they provided more taxonomies than strategies.

Infrastructure for peacebuilding

Restoring, healing and restructuring the relationships between conflict parties is also at the core of John Paul Lederach's approach to transforming protracted, violent internal conflicts. In his perception, the crux of the matter is that those affected by the conflict live in close proximity to one another and generally share a long

history of destructive interaction. For Lederach, this was the starting point for a framework concept that views protracted social conflicts as a "system" and seeks to transform them as such. He therefore develops analytical lenses to widen the issue-oriented focus of conflict management to embrace the relationship, sub-system and system levels, and also integrate the institutions and structures into the process of change.³¹ He identifies conflict as a process that goes through various stages in which the balance of power between the parties changes. For those working towards a constructive management of this process, he identifies different roles, functions and activities that are mutually dependent and enable the conflict to be transformed to the next level. This complex synopsis produces a continuum that places short-term conflict interventions, long-term peacebuilding and sustainable development in an undissolvable relationship, as: "Not one is conducted in a vacuum and each has the potential to move the conflict progression forward constructively or to contribute to a stagnating cycle of confrontation."³²

Combining structural and process-oriented perspectives creates an integrated framework concept for peacebuilding as already described by Lederach. However, as this was so complex, it was not applied in peacebuilding practice. What was taken up from his concept were the notions of the actor pyramid and peace constituencies, which were combined in the multi-track approach.

29 For a detailed description see Cordula Reimann: *Assessing the State-of-the-Art in Conflict Transformation*, in: Alex Austin, Martina Fischer & Norbert Ropers (eds.): *Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict - The Berghof Handbook*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2004.

30 For details see Barbara Müller & Christian W. Büttner 1996: *Optimierungschancen von Peacekeeping, Peacemaking und Peacebuilding durch gewaltfreie Interventionen? Studie zur methodischen und systematischen Operationalisierung dieser Fragestellung*. IFGK, Working Paper No. 4, Wahlenau: IFGK October 1996; Friedrich Glasl: *Konfliktmanagement*. 8th edition. Berne: Haupt 2004; Ronald Fisher: "Forging a Bridge from Peacekeeping to Peacemaking," in *Peace & Change* 1993, Vol. 18 No.3.

31 John Paul Lederach: *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington: USIP Press 1997.

32 *ibid.*, p. 74.

The structural perspective of conflict transformation, as promoted by Lederach, was taken up primarily in the context of development cooperation. Development cooperation endeavours to create the structural conditions for peaceful co-existence on a long-term basis by working on the structural causes of the conflict and developing or strengthening institutionalised forms of conflict management (e.g., democratic systems, a functioning judiciary). However, it is precisely due to the long-term nature of such endeavours that combining them meaningfully with peace dynamics has rarely been successful.

Linking tracks

There has been little systematic work on the question of how the different tracks can be linked meaningfully. John Paul Lederach developed initial approaches that advocated supporting and forming peace constituencies on the basis of 3 tracks (the conflict pyramid). He suggested that it would be make good sense to start with the mid-level decision-makers (more or less corresponding to the Track 2 level).³³ According to Lederach, the problem-solving capacities of mid-level decision-makers are much more flexible. These decision-makers generally also have good links to the top-level elite as well as to civil society and other regional and local organisations. The evaluation of the Life and Peace Institute's long experience in Somalia has since proved that peacebuilding activities that consistently begin at grass roots level (community-based bottom-up peacebuilding) can also have a significant reach and effect .

The idea of peace constituencies in Lederach's complex concept was incorporated in both literature and practice, and the Berghof Center has also used it as an entry point for its work. With the experiences gained from supporting peace activists in various conflict regions, this approach has also changed over time. Its focus has broadened beyond the actors addressed initially to embrace the context of the "peace potentials", which comprise more than the individuals and networks active in civil society. More and more, however, it is also including those actors who, while essential to the peace process, will not just simply engage in it or who even have an interest in the continuation or further escalation of the conflict. In this context, the Berghof Center's experience corresponds with the conclusions of empirical case studies produced by the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project. These showed that peace projects so far have taken too little account of the actors that profit from the conflict, such as militia, business elites, governments and diaspora groups. Hence, the extent to which projects succeed in curtailing the influence of conflict-driving forces is one success criterion, while another relates to the need for change in the institutions and mechanisms of a society. Thus, efforts to build institutions that are not relevant to the conflict can be seen as a waste of energy, time and resources³⁵.

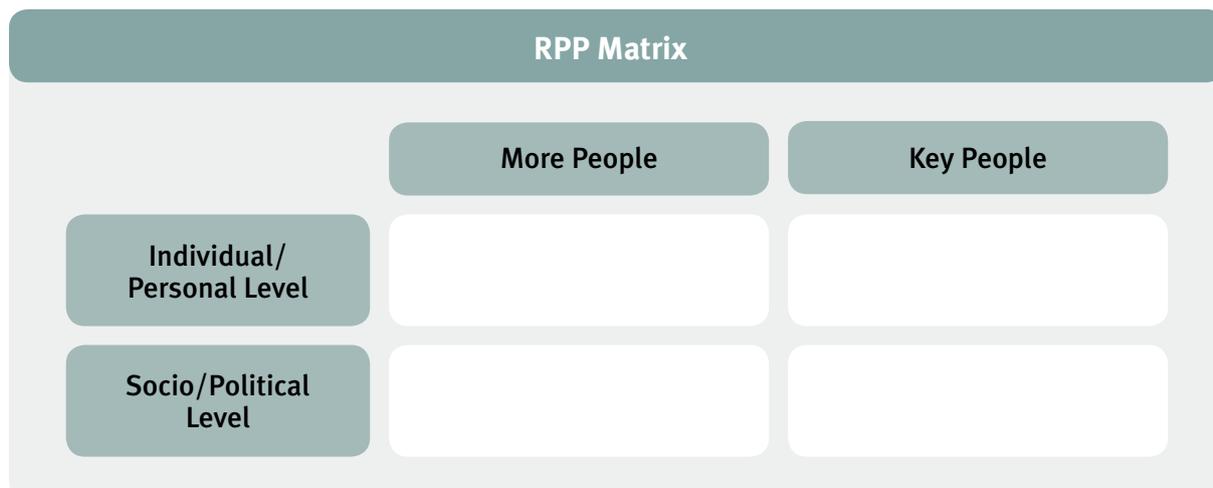
Like Lederach, the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP)³⁶ coordinated by Mary Anderson and Lara Olsen advocates linking the different tracks. Besides measures to change the attitudes and behaviour of individuals, it also endorses activities that help to transform structures.

33 *ibid.* p. 55-61.

34 Thania Paffenholz: *Community-based Bottom-up Peacebuilding. The development of the Life and Peace Institute's approach to peacebuilding and Lessons Learned from the Somalia experience (1990-2003)*, LPI 2003.

35 *Reflecting on Peace Practice Handbook*, Cambridge: Nov. 2004, Cambridge CDA Nov. 2004, p. 11, 15.

36 *cf.* Mary Anderson & Lara Olson: *Confronting War. Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*, CDA 2003.



This matrix is intended to assist practitioners in categorising and organising the different levels and target groups of peacebuilding measures, as well as identifying any gaps and reflecting on potential synergies. The RPP placed particular emphasis on the importance of transferring the changes in attitudes and behaviour on the individual/personal level to the socio/political level.

Although the complementarity of the different tracks is emphasised time and again, the question of “how” to achieve the synergetic linkage of tracks is rarely discussed. Two different concepts generally emerge from discussions on this matter. These differ from one another in terms of the question of steering structures (lead agency versus decentralised management). The suggestion of Martin Griffiths, the Director of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva, is an interesting example of the first approach. He proposes that, as part of the UN reform process, the UN should further extend its special mandate in the field of peacebuilding and take a leading role in linking mediation approaches of official and

unofficial actors.³⁷ Such a mediation network could enable the UN (as well as other states) to bring its particular strengths into play (acceptance, mandate, guardian and standard bearer for much of international legal framework of human rights, etc.) and also benefit from the flexibility, the often improved access to the conflict parties and the low-profile approach of non-state actors.

As an example of decentralised management, Robert Ricigliano proposes bringing different peacebuilding tracks together into so-called networks of effective action (NEA).³⁸ According to Ricigliano, NEAs are “essentially a communication network with a common goal [...] and some shared rules of the road.”³⁹ The intention of a NEA is to bring together international and local actors in a conflict region in a way that is neither random nor centrally coordinated (“chaordic”) and is based on the principles of voluntariness, decentrality in terms of decision-making, self-organisation and flexibility. Ideally, these networks should comprise organisations that are

37 Martin Griffiths: *Talking Peace in a Time of Terror: United Nations Mediation and Collective Security*, Geneva: HDC 2005.

38 Robert Ricigliano: *Networks of Effective Action. Implementing an Integrated Approach to Peacebuilding*, in *Security Dialogue* in: *Security Dialogue* Dec. 2003, Vol. 34 No. 4, p. 445-462.

39 *ibid.*, p. 457.

active in political, social and structure-oriented fields while also covering international, national and local perspectives.

Until now, all the conceptional attempts to link tracks, including our own reflections in the course of the Sri Lanka project in particular, demonstrate the need for a good balance between appropriately complex theories of change and the essentially always limited instrument of transformative interventions. In this context, the systemic approach provides the opportunity to

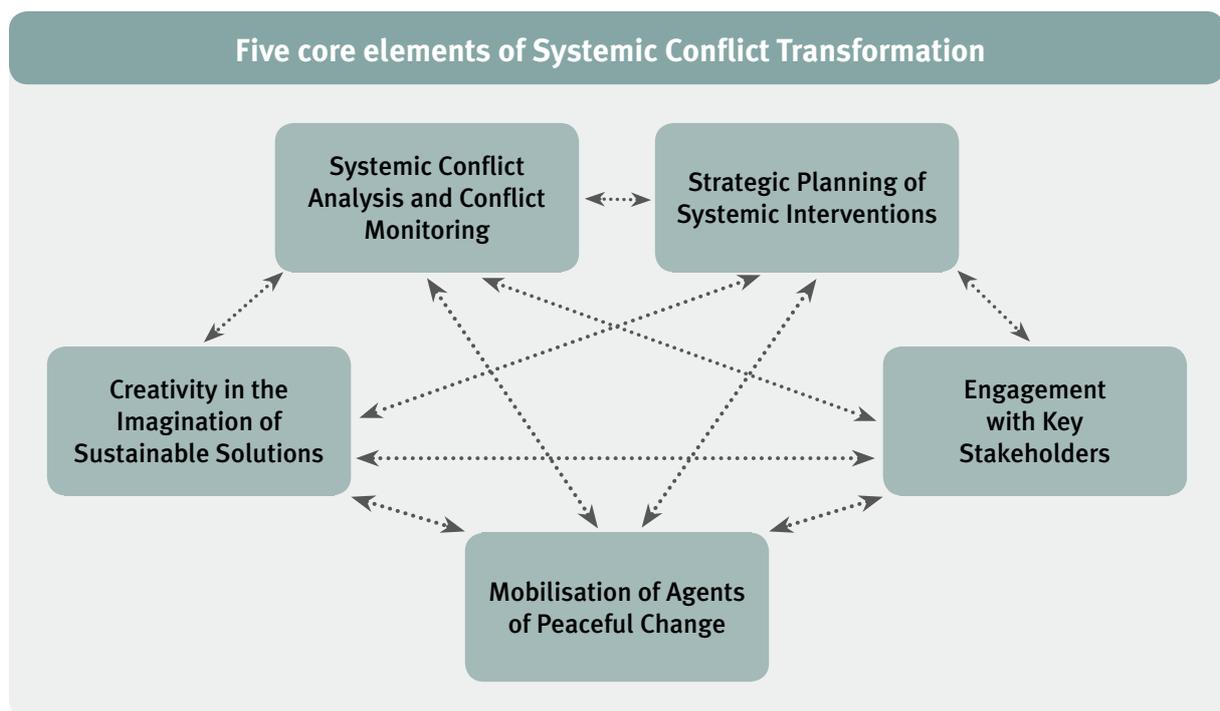
build an innovative and pragmatic bridge in a field of tension. This will be illustrated in the following chapter, in particular, where five core elements of systemic conflict transformation will be presented in more detail. These core elements describe a conceptual framework that includes the previously mentioned approaches and experiences from the field of CCM, complemented by approaches and methods of systemic practice that have been applied successfully in other disciplines.

5. Core elements of systemic conflict transformation

This chapter presents the following five core elements of systemic conflict transformation:

- Systemic conflict analysis and conflict monitoring;
- Strategic planning of systemic interventions;
- Engagement with key stakeholders;
- Mobilisation of agents of peaceful change;
- Creativity in the imagination of sustainable solutions.

As illustrated in the following synopsis, the need to both recognise the complexity of our work (complexify) and at the same time generate simple insights to guide our actions (simplify), are at the core of systemic conflict transformation and the five elemental areas of work.



A simple logic is applied to divide systemic conflict transformation into five core elements. The first two elements (systemic conflict analysis and conflict monitoring; strategic planning of systemic interventions) deal primarily with the

methodological aspects of analysis and intervention planning, whilst the other three are geared to the three main dimensions of all third party interventions:

- the process and relationship dimension: how and on what basis do we work with the conflict actors? (engagement with key stakeholders);
- the target groups for our actions (mobilisation of agents of peaceful change);
- the constructive management of substantive problems and issues (creativity in the imagination of sustainable solutions).

This list of core elements does not follow any stage or step model in terms of sequence and, in practice, it is not possible to separate these fields of work clearly as they all affect each other. However, all five elements must be taken into account in systemic conflict transformation.

As indicated in the above synopsis, the following descriptions of the core elements will contain introductions to and explanations of *concepts* such as agents of peaceful change and “critical masses”, *basic principles* such as perspective shifts, inclusivity and multipartiality, and *tools*, such as systems diagramming and scenario analysis.

Each of the five sub-sections will be introduced by a short summary of its contents to aid orientation.

5.1 Systemic conflict analysis and conflict monitoring

This sub-section deals with the analytical grasp of complexity. Besides explaining tools such as systems diagramming, perspective shifts and cybernetic analysis methods, the analysis places particular emphasis on the importance of demarcating system boundaries and integrating local actors.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, one of the great challenges of conflict transformation is the need to embrace the high degree of complexity of protracted social conflicts in order to be able to develop meaningful intervention strategies. The basis of systemic conflict transformation is a sound conflict analysis that aids the understanding of how the conflict system works internally and can help to create well-founded hypotheses on entry points and levers of system transformation.

The conflict analysis tool has been developed further in the last few years, bringing forth a whole range of methods and tools that can also be used for a systemic approach.⁴⁰ To thoroughly permeate and understand a conflict system, “joined-up” or systems thinking is required. It is also necessary to overcome the simplifying and linear cause-effect assumptions and consider the processes of complex and circular causality (taking account of positive and negative feedback loops as well as how they interact).

We consider that the following components are important in terms of a conceptual development of systemic conflict analyses:

- System boundaries;
- “Bird’s/frog’s eye view”;
- Cybernetic models of systems analysis;
- Taking account of resistances.

Experiences with systemic conflict analysis: systems diagramming

To date, there has been very little experience with systemic conflict analyses. However, problem-solving workshops are producing some very profound and complex conflict analyses that implicitly use basic elements of a systemic

⁴⁰ A good overview of the various conflict analysis approaches can be found in: International Alert, Fewer, amongst others: Resource Pack: Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding, Chapter 2: Conflict Analysis, np, 2004. Practical methods can also be found, in particular, in DFID: Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guiding Notes, 2002; and in the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (in cooperation with FriEnt and GTZ): Konfliktanalyse und Entwicklung von Handlungsoptionen für gesellschaftspolitische Kooperationsprogramme. Ein methodischer Leitfaden, Bonn, nd.

approach, although they are not described as such. The analyses developed by the conflict actors themselves aim to create awareness of both the root causes of the conflict and also the various interests and perspectives. The participants (rarely female) are encouraged by the facilitators to reflect on a whole spectrum of aspects, ranging from clarifying and making explicit their own biographical involvement with the conflict, to defining the key conflict issues and dynamics in the workshop. This analysis can be enriched in the course of further workshops by means of thorough examinations of other conflict contexts, which generally leads to a noticeable broadening of perspectives.⁴¹ The potential in problem-solving workshops to include the analysis of the gender dimension of conflicts⁴² has rarely been utilised.

The informal Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue process, for example, makes considerable practical use of analysing sub-systems, discussing how they are related to one another and determining their significance in the (overall) system. To facilitate the discussion, the systems and associated actors are often visualised in the form

of actor mapping. Depending on the issue, increasingly detailed definitions and more sophisticated sub-systems may be formed here, or a focus can be chosen that leads to a discussion of broader contexts.

The discussion – and also the method of visualisation – clearly illustrates the different interpretations assigned by the groups of participants to the systems analysed. For example, it may become clear during the dialogue that Georgian participants assume that the Abkhazians have predominantly been controlled from afar by Russia as an instrument of Russian politics since the start of the conflict. In this interpretation, the true nature of the Abkhazian problem is primarily based on a Russian-Georgian antagonism and is explained as an effort on the part of Russia to undermine the independence of the Georgian nation. In contrast, the Abkhazians present themselves as an independent actor within the framework of the dialogue, who possesses an independent political vision that is embedded within the Abkhazian population, and who is concerned about his independence, not only vis-à-vis Georgia but also Russia.

Systems diagramming

Workshop approaches to identify intervention opportunities, such as those implemented by the Conflict Management Group and INCORE staff in conjunction with regional experts, for example, aim to systematically record all the important factors of influence and reveal circular cause-effect chains and feedback loops within a conflict system (“systems diagramming”). With the help of conflict checklists, the main influencing factors are identified and hypotheses are then developed in small groups as to which social factors are self- and mutually reinforcing, which have a circular effect on one another and which contribute to the escalation of violence (e.g., “buying weapons reinforces the political influence of war entrepreneurs and increases the likelihood of an escalation of violence in rural areas”). Those factors that play a role within these loops are then refined, and an investigation is made as to whether these have a direct circular relationship with other feedback loops (e.g., “the extensive exclusion of the minorities of the northern province from legal trading is entrenching the positions of their political representatives in the capital city”) and whether they can be combined within a larger cycle (e.g., “buying

41 cf. Haumersen, Rademacher, Ropers: *Die Workshopmethode*, op. cit., 2002; Oliver Wolleh, *Difficult Encounter*, op. cit., 2005.

42 cf. Cordula Reimann: *Gender in Problem-solving Workshops: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?* Swisspeace, Working Paper 3, Bern 2004.

weapons and excluding the northern minorities from the economy is leading to an extensive political blockade in parliament”). Important feedback loops between conflict-escalating factors are thus made accessible.

As part of a systemic conflict analysis based on systems diagramming (see box), which was carried out by Peter Woodrow (CDA) in Sri Lanka in July 2005, both the driving factors of conflict and the driving factors of peace were discussed by the Berghof team. Reinforcing and counter-acting feedback loops were considered here, and the analysis workshop produced the following variables to be incorporated into our strategic planning:

1. The predominant mindsets and attitudes of political decision-makers, influential persons and functional elites that are shaped by majority and central state structures;
2. State structures and a public policy that have marginalised both minority and also some majority population groups;
3. The need to generate political will to change the structures and the network of relationships;
4. The requirement for parallel processes of political confidence-building and the need to achieve substantial results on the one hand and a gradual demilitarisation on the other;
5. The transformation of all stakeholders to bring about a genuine democracy and respect for human rights, pluralism and diversity as part of the peace process;
6. The need to also include the concerns and interests of the non-warring stakeholders in order to achieve just and lasting peace;
7. The need to respect the *Realpolitik* considerations of all the parties to make optimum use

of “objective” peace trends, and recognise any tendencies constraining BATNA (best alternatives to negotiated agreements). This analysis will be updated regularly in conjunction with the partners by means of a peace and conflict assessment to ascertain its current relevance; and

8. The necessity to combine rational and emotional programme approaches to achieve a sustainable change in the mindsets, behaviour and attitudes of the stakeholders.

Conflict analyses need to be adapted regularly to current political developments and trends, and sufficient time and resources should therefore be planned for this exercise. It is also imperative that systemic conflict analyses be implemented jointly with local actors. This is essential as, firstly, local actors possess the detailed knowledge required (insider knowledge on informal political rules and power networks), and secondly, it is they who have to accept and understand the “systemic model” being drafted (strengthening of ownership and acceptance). Local actors can be included either as colleagues in a project or programme team, via partner organisations or via representatives of the conflict parties. It should also be ensured that sufficient account is taken of the perceptions of the conflict, the political scope and the interests of all major actors (not just the state and non-state armed groups).

43 For pragmatic reasons (time and costs) it can be a good idea to carry out an initial conflict analysis in the form of a rapid conflict appraisal. This procedure was adopted in relation to the four short country studies during our project phase. These surveys carried out with the support of an expert on the relevant conflict and country are predominantly to be used to generate initial hypotheses (and as an efficient use of resources).

The relevance of system boundaries

A clearly established and defined reference system is a key element of a good strategic focus of peacebuilding projects and programmes. Which conflict system or sub-systems are the interventions intended to address? Which elements are part of the system and which are not? Which function does the reference framework play in the overarching (conflict) system? How are actions on the micro and meso levels of society connected to changes on the macro level?

In peacebuilding practice, the reference system is generally determined on a territorial basis. Sometimes, but more rarely, it is defined on an issue-related basis (“violence in schools”; “distribution of small arms”) or in relation to the actors (“Palestinian youth”; “refugee women”). Looking at violent conflicts within the context of the territory or area of sovereignty of the relevant state is an extremely pragmatic solution, although, needless to say, it should also be noted that

- in many cases, regional factors (e.g., via the engagement of actors in the neighbouring states) play an important role in the conflict;
- territorial borders themselves can be one of the conflict issues (as in the Turkey-Kurdistan conflict);⁴⁴
- also within the country’s borders, population groups and regions are affected to completely differing degrees; and
- the de facto sovereignty of the state is often limited to part of the country.

Similar criticisms can also be made in relation to thematic or actor-related boundaries. Nevertheless, is it important to demarcate the conflict system clearly and not fall into the trap of saying

that everything is ultimately connected to everything else, and the global economy and climate change should also be considered as part of the conflict system.

It should also be noted that defining system boundaries is a political construct and thus part of the dispute between the conflict parties. Thus dominating groups tend to attribute the causes of the conflict to the opposing group (e.g., their poverty, inadequate education, lack of civic-mindedness) and overlook their own part in it. By contrast, weaker groups frequently insist on including overlapping structures into the conflict analysis as well (e.g., interests of powerful third parties). The military engagement of major powers is sometimes an important factor when tackling local conflict scenarios. However, this factor is also occasionally used as a pretext for insufficient engagement, or constitutes a taboo issue in conventional development policy conflict analyses.

The issue of system boundaries plays a key role in systemic approaches. For Niklas Luhmann, for example, a constituent feature of systems is the “difference between the system and the environment”.⁴⁵ In the fields of family counselling and therapy and also organisational development consulting, it is important to decide which reference system should be used as a basis for the consulting activities and the identification of solution proposals. The categories “meaning” (German: “Sinn”) and “important interactions” are proposed to select the relevant boundaries: according to Luhmann, social systems constitute their boundaries according to the question of what their meaning should be and which elements and operations should and should not

44 cf. Michael Pugh and Neil Cooper with Jonathan Goodhand; *War Economies in a Regional Context: the Challenge of Transformation*, Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner 2004.

45 Niklas Luhmann: *Soziale Systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1984, p. 35: systems “maintain themselves by creating and maintaining a difference from their environment, and they use their boundaries to regulate this difference.”

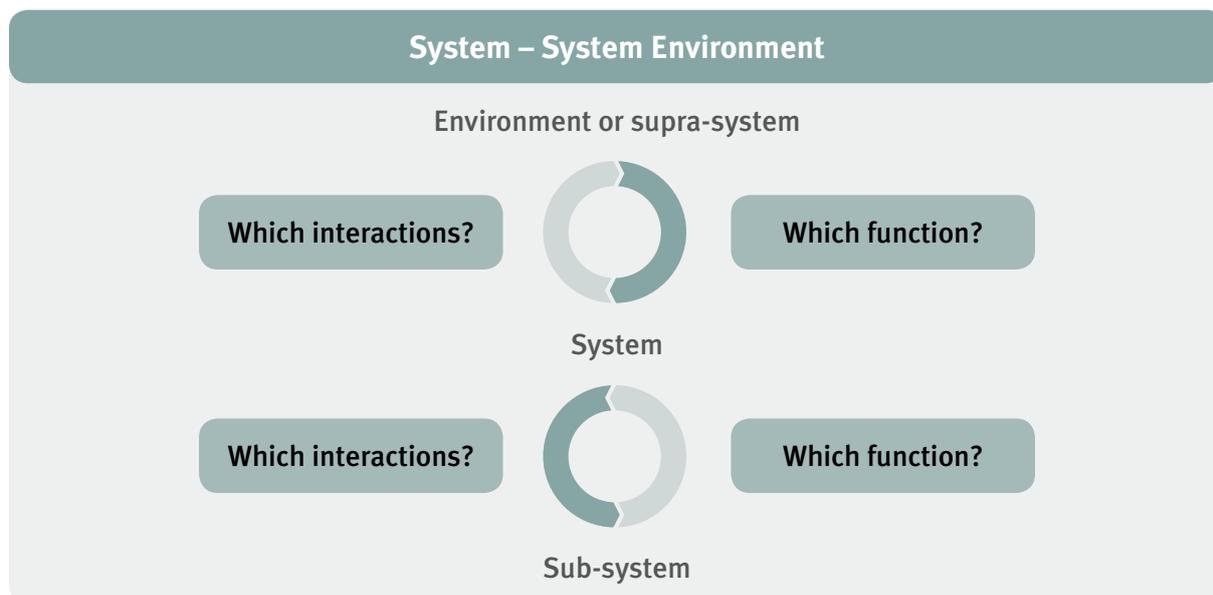
belong to them.⁴⁶ However, the “meaning” category is subjective and varies according to the angle of vision, perspective and issue. To specify which elements should be included as meaningful to system x, the organisational consultant Peter Senge suggests a pragmatic approach: “The key is the ‘principle of the system boundary’, which says the “interactions that must be examined are those most important to the issue at hand.”

With respect to the field of civilian conflict management (CCM), it is useful to qualify the interactions important for demarcating system boundaries even further:

- interactions between *actors* who are capable of contributing to the resolution of the specific conflict configuration.

- interactions communicated by *structures* that contribute directly to the perpetuation and reproduction of patterns of conflict and violence.

These qualifications enable us to define the system environments better. External actors who (consciously or unconsciously) contribute to reproducing conflicts are thus considered to be part of the conflict system. By contrast, political processes upon which local actors have no or very little influence – such as globalisation processes, environmental disasters (e.g., tsunamis) or U.S. presidential elections – must be assigned to the system environment. These factors can be part of the problem but not part of the solution. In analytical terms, it is important to note that the rules that apply to the interactions of the conflict system with the system environment differ from those within the conflict system itself.



46 Arist von Schlippe/Jochen Schweitzer: Lehrbuch der systemischen Therapie und Beratung, Göttingen: 2003, p. 59.

A meaningful definition of the conflict system's actors and structures is therefore key to systemic conflict management, and it is also important to distinguish between patterns of interaction within the system and those between the system and the environment. In a peace education project working with a target group of young Palestinians, for example, it is less meaningful to draw on the "Israel-Palestine conflict" as a reference system. These young people's conflict system will generally be characterised more by events in their social environment, school or parental home. The starting points for working with violence-prone youth will be more in the areas of: father's loss of authority, violence at school and within the family, experiences of discrimination and violence during contact with the Israeli military forces, etc.

It is imperative that the issue of system boundaries be clarified with and by local actors. Systemic models are only constructions of reality, so it is important for local actors to be able to work on the basis of their own system model and develop it further.

In doing this, intervening third parties cultivate their own consulting system with the local partner organisations for a certain period of time. The quality and effectiveness of this consulting system depends directly on the capacities and competences of the organisations involved, and the quality of both the support measures and

partner relationships. This requires, among other things, a high degree of transparency in relation to the third party's motivations and adherence to values, as well as clarity in respect of the limits of their engagement. Within the consulting system, particular care must be taken to avoid reproducing the power and leadership structures which are not perceived as unjust (e.g., between men and women, or international and local actors).

"Bird's and frog's eye view" and balancing different perspectives

A systemic conflict analysis must always take two things into account:

- the location (and function) of the reference system within the overarching system; and
- a balance between the different perspectives of the conflict actors.

A systemic analysis always contains a view of the system as a whole (bird's eye view) and also a detailed examination of sub-systems (frog's eye view). The functions and inter-relationships between the individual elements of the system can be determined by repeatedly switching between the bird's and frog's eye views and focussing more sharply each time. In this regard we suggest posing the question about the specific function of sub-systems in the context of the overarching system and exploring the inter-relationships with other parts of the system more deeply using "systemic" or "circular" questions.

Circular questioning

Circular questioning targets the function of the system along with the differing perceptions of all the relevant actors, and attempts to reveal the relationships between all those involved. In terms of managing violent political conflicts, it includes the above-mentioned systemic conflict analysis, particularly in the form of a participatory conflict analysis in cooperation with the conflict parties (which in this context could also be called "circular analysis"). Here, the potential for change can be found primarily in the challenge to recognise the various perceptions as part of "a system". The risk that generally arises when such methods are used, namely that the analysis escalates into attributing blame to those deemed primarily responsible for the conflict, can be controlled more easily with systemic analysis than with other methods, as it calls for people to look at all the conflict sub-systems as well as the contribution of all the actors.

Comparing different perspectives can identify patterns of communication and interpretation that are constantly reproduced by the conflict parties and therefore enable them to be managed. The Georgian-Abkhazian Dialogue Process implemented by Berghof and Conciliation Resources discusses these dissonances in perceptions, as the participating parties are often not aware that their actions contain elements considered as provocative by the other side. Therefore, they do not understand the reaction, or rather perceive it to be a negative action from the other side without recognising it as a reaction to their own actions at all. The discussions about so-called “trust-destroying rhetoric” reflect the asymmetry between the fears of

threats of the Georgians and Abkhazians. It is predominantly the Abkhazian participants who repeatedly give examples of statements that they perceive to be aggressive. The Georgians have only a very limited capacity to see matters from an Abkhazian point of view and to anticipate Abkhazian patterns of interpretation. When confronted with Abkhazian interpretations, Georgian participants often react with surprise, confusion and incomprehension.⁴⁸

A potential conflict itself often lies hidden in the conflict parties’ different interpretations of the actual conflict. The following section deals with “conflicts about the conflict”.

Conflict about the conflict: the example of Aceh

During the conflict analysis on Aceh/Indonesia, the differing interpretations of the conflict causes by the conflict actors were made explicit:

“As with many internal conflicts, identifying key causes of the conflict is fraught with controversy. For many Acehnese nationalists, especially those in GAM, the conflict is essentially about identity. They say it involves a “rediscovery” of an ancient Acehnese nationhood and a struggle for self-determination. For many other observers, including those from the Government of Indonesia (GOI), the conflict arises due to particular grievances in Acehnese society about economic, human rights, religious and other issues. Acehnese nationalists are apt to downplay grievances (except that they, in their view, typify the “colonial” nature of Indonesian control) and instead emphasise what they see as fundamental incompatibilities between Aceh and the Indonesian state. Supporters of the GOI downplay identity, instead pointing to grievances that (at least in theory) are amenable to resolution by way of technical policy adjustments. In fact, identity and grievance aspects of the conflict are inter-linked and mutually reinforcing.”

Cybernetic system analysis models

Cybernetic system analyses, especially those developed by Frederic Vester⁴⁹, constitute a conceptually and methodically interesting attempt to reduce the complexity of systems and take

account of non-linear cause-effect chains within controlling and planning processes. The method was refined and developed as a planning tool for private enterprises and development cooperation under the name of SINFONIE by the German

48 Analysing the patterns of communication makes a direct contribution to creating the improved political climate required to make negotiations conceivable. The facilitators can even go as far as to ask small groups to develop specific recommendations for action for politicians, e.g., the president, in order to improve the quality of future communication.

49 cf. Frederic Vester: Die Kunst vernetzt zu denken. Ideen und Werkzeuge für einen neuen Umgang mit Komplexität [The Art of Networked Thinking – Ideas and Tools for a new way of dealing with complexity] (Report to the Club of Rome), Munich: DTV 2002.

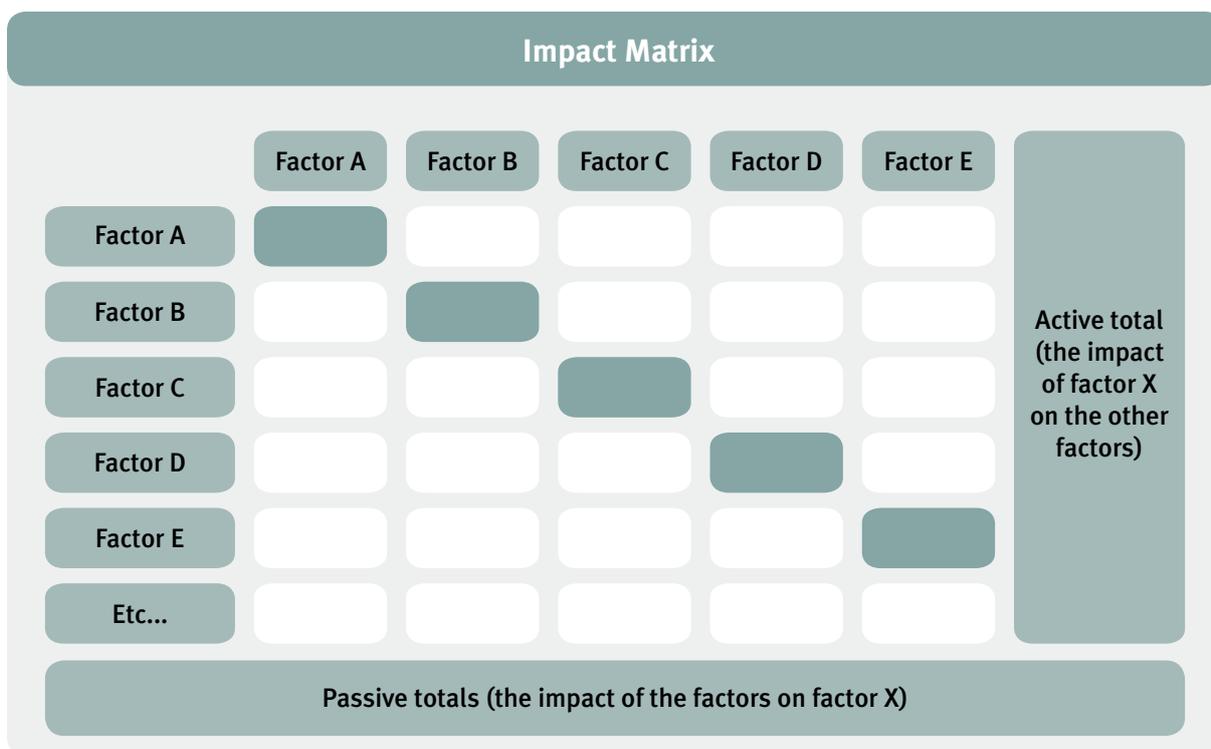
consultancy Denkmodell.⁵⁰ The Swiss development cooperation has developed a similar approach for participatory system analysis.⁵¹

However, to be meaningful, this method of analysis can only take a limited number of factors into account. Nevertheless it allows systems to be visualised and made accessible for further interpretation. The basic steps in relation to the three main visualisation methods are therefore presented briefly here:

- impact matrix
- impact system
- axis diagramme

Cybernetic system analysis has the specific aim of correlating elements of a system – or specific factors of these elements – and observing their inter-relationships. The factors themselves can be taken, for example, from a mind-mapping exercise or a strengths and weaknesses analysis, but should be limited in number.

An *impact matrix* is formed by correlating all the factors and determining the strength of each relationship (from 0-3) by asking the following question: how does factor X impact on factor Y? In this context, “0” stands for no impact, “1” for a little impact, “2” for medium impact and “3” for a strong impact.

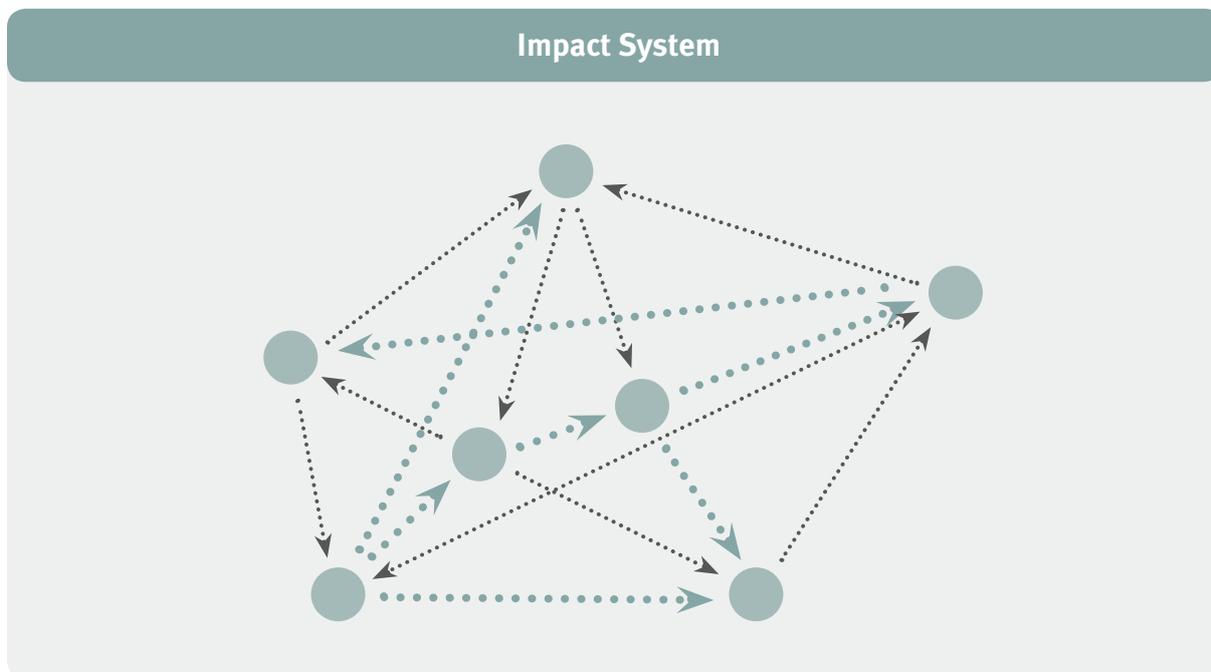


50 SINFONIE: “Systemische Interpretation für Organisationen und Netzwerke in Entwicklungsprozessen” [systemic interpretations for organisations and networks in development processes]

51 Karl Herweg & Kurt Steiner: Impact Monitoring & Assessment. Instruments for Use in Rural Development Projects with a Focus on Sustainable Land Management (2 Vols.), CDE & GTZ 2002.

A further step sees these relationships represented in an *impact system*, which allows an initial interpretation of circular closed loops and feedback loops in the system. To avoid overloading

the impact system, it can be a good idea to represent only impact levels 2 and 3. Hypotheses may be tested by means of cause-effect chains, and it is also possible to “walk through” the system.



An *axis diagramme*, based on the active and passive values of the factors, can also be created to aid visualisation. The active and passive values can be taken from the impact matrix and used to identify the degree to which factors affect other factors in the system (active impact) and are themselves affected by other factors (passive impact). The axis diagram provides an overview of the factors that are i) particularly active, ii) particularly passive, iii) critical (both active and passive) and iv) idle (neither particularly active nor passive). All these factors perform an important function in terms of the dynamics, sensitivity and stability of systems.

However, the fact that the number of factors is restricted means that this method is limited, and therefore appears suitable for analysing sub-systems only. An overall analysis would require a series of progressive analysis work-

shops, however this would tie up a lot of time and human resources.

Taking account of resistances

Studying resistances is an unorthodox approach to systems analysis. Resistances represent an interesting approach for systemic analysis and the identification of entry points for processes of change, as they relate to the deep structure of conflict systems. The term “resistance” is used in psychoanalytic psychotherapy to mean an antipathy towards making unconscious psychological contents conscious, and was coined by Sigmund Freud and developed further by his daughter, Anna Freud. In the field of social psychology, the subject of individual and collective defence mechanisms and resistances has been addressed by Alexander Mitscherlich, among others.⁵²

Resistances generally contain a good deal of potential energy and are therefore extremely dynamic and often highly emotionally charged. Accordingly, working on and with resistances can unleash a high degree of potential for change. Resistances frequently arise from the fear of losing the familiar. At this point, the function of the affects is to reject the unknown and alien, and to generate a collective feeling of identity.⁵³ It follows that resistances not only result from conflicts of interests but also from the emotional needs of humans living in groups. Resistance in this form protects a collective identity and simultaneously cements the system boundaries that appear to give humans protection and security.

Processes of change can utilise the dynamic of resistances but must do so with caution. It is necessary to reveal and examine both the fears hidden behind the resistances as well as the structures and patterns in which they are reflected. Mitscherlich stresses the need to develop a critical consciousness of one's own culture, both to illustrate that man's rules of order and social values are relative, and to break down intra-personal resistances so that things that are alien lose their "threat" and can be met with openness.⁵⁴ Like resistances, taboo subjects can also be highly emotionally charged, triggering fierce reactions in parts of the system and thereby possibly revealing potential solutions (the taboo subjects of constitutional reform in Nepal and federalism in Sri Lanka being a case in point).

Entry points for peacebuilding can comprise, for example, exploring "deep" structures of identity and gender construction and challenging their

function/role in the conflict. Dialogue formats can help here by discussing the issue of the myths, key narratives and symbolisms of the participating group's historical construction, thereby also identifying entry points for managing collective resistances and taboo subjects. In Sri Lanka, for example, there are still significant resistances to the term "federalism", particularly in the predominantly Theravada Buddhist southern regions. This resistance is understandable as far as it concerns the rejection of a genuine power sharing arrangement, and if so, it requires a political solution. However, it is also rooted in deep cultural and religious structures that have to be addressed differently, such that it may be necessary to tap into equivalent "resources" in the country's cultural and religious heritage.

There are also resistances to processes of change that feed on the fear of losing security, power, resources, prosperity and identity, as well as the fear of change itself. These resistances are well known in change management within organisations, however they also occur in peacebuilding. As a rule, forces that advocate and support change also exist. If a consultant or small group wishes to initiate a process of change, he/she would be well advised to find out beforehand which parts of the system support this process and from whom resistance should be expected and why. Such a procedure can be used to select the one change strategy out of many potential strategies that appears to be the most promising, on the basis that it has the most support and produces the least resistance. In cases where such a selection is not possible, knowledge of the supporting and resisting forces is still useful in terms of forging alliances with the former and tackling

52 cf. Sigmund Freud: *Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten* [Remembering, Repeating and Working Through]; in: S. Freud: *Studienausgabe Ergänzungsband*, Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer 1975, p.205-215; Anna Freud: *Das Ich und die Abwehrmechanismen* [The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence] Frankfurt/M.: Fischer 1984; Alexander Mitscherlich: *Auf dem Weg zur vaterlosen Gesellschaft*, München: Piper 1963.

53 cf. Mitscherlich 1963, p. 39.

54 *ibid*, p. 40.

the specific causes of the resistances and/or evading their blocking tactics. Kurt Lewin's force field analysis instrument can be applied here.⁵⁵ In the field of systemic conflict transformation, force field analysis can be applied on two levels:

- to assess the chances of success of a planned intervention;
- to assess the support and resistances to be expected from a specific form of conflict settlement (e.g., points on a negotiation agenda).

5.2 Strategic planning of systemic interventions

The focus of this sub-section is on reduction and simplification. The systemic approach to conflict transformation calls for the development of strategies and working hypotheses relating to suitable entry points and intervention levers. Flexible project planning methods are also presented, and lastly, the monitoring and assessment of systemic interventions are discussed.

One of the key challenges in peacebuilding practice is to derive concrete measures from the findings of conflict analyses that are, by necessity, extensive. These measures should reflect the complexity of the conflict system and be effective, therefore making a real difference. This leads to the questions of how to identify the relevant levers of conflict transformation and how different activities on different tracks can be strategically linked to one another. How can support measures be sequenced meaningfully? And how can the considerable dynamics of political conflicts be addressed in the project planning and implementation stages? Last, but not least, the issue of the measurability of conflict transformation actions is also included here.

We do not wish to suggest that the systemic approach to conflict transformation can already offer complete or conclusive answers to these questions. However, it is possible to draw a whole range of conceptual considerations, principles and methods from both the Berghof Center's practical experience and the systemic consulting practice of other disciplines, which, in our opinion, make an important contribution to the further development of this field. We would particularly like to discuss the following areas in this context:

- Defining the goals and strategy;
- Developing hypotheses on "neuralgic points" and levers of systemic conflict transformation;
- Process architecture and flexible planning;
- Monitoring and assessment.

Defining the goals and strategy:

As with "orthodox interventions", at least three groups of factors should be taken into account when defining concrete goals for system conflict transformation and selecting a meaningful and effective strategy:

- Substantive considerations: "What should be changed in the system and how?"
- Conceptual considerations: "With what means? Which intervention levers can we identify?"
- Pragmatic considerations: "What kind of access do we have to the conflict parties? What resources in terms of funding, time and personnel are available?"

The last point will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, and the following section will therefore deal primarily with the substantive and conceptual issues of intervention planning.

As already described in Chapter 3, the explicit aim of systemic conflict transformation is firstly to help reduce violence in conflicts. Secondly, the system's own internal resources should be

55 Kurt Lewin: Field Theory in Social Science (Ed. Dorwin Cartwright), New York: Harper & Brothers 1951.

mobilised to help establish or reinforce support systems that will promote the necessary political and social change towards a peaceful and equitable society. To this end, key local stakeholders and institutions in particular should be empowered to identify and implement forms and processes of power and resource distribution.

These goals have to be defined on a context-related and situational basis for each particular case, and it is imperative here that the partner organisations and key stakeholders are involved to the highest possible degree in coordinating the goals. Furthermore, the systemic approach calls for a clear definition of the system to be addressed (“which actors and issues are to be included and which are not”). In addition, it is extremely important to make the project’s objectives, fundamental strategic assumptions and explicit assumptions about its impact as transparent as circumstances allow to ensure an effective cooperation – based on partnership – with local and international actors. This also means that one’s own normative and ideological beliefs in relation to values and order should be clearly stated. A meaningful division of labour can only take place when the key strategic assumptions have been declared. Important learning effects can also be achieved by challenging and adapting the strategic assumptions.

The work of the Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation in Sri Lanka, for example, is based on the strategic hypothesis that identifying and supporting partners, intensifiers and mediators of change processes within the political elite is extremely important for the transformation of the country’s conflict. Agents of peaceful change (see Section 5.4) can, as strategically well placed advocates, carry out an extremely important multiplier role and enhance the sustainability of the measures.

Before discussing a few suggestions for identifying a suitable strategy for systemic conflict transformation, we would like to outline briefly four fundamental principles that should be used as a guideline for the strategic direction of interventions.

The need for a procedure based on complementarity and subsidiarity

Work that enhances and supports can only be achieved if the peacebuilding activities take sufficient account of the local and international actors. It is extremely counter-productive when new conflict transformation measures ignore or even replace existing activities. They should rather build on and enhance these, and thereby benefit from comparative advantages.

The need to plan intervention measures and objectives on a context-dependent and situational basis

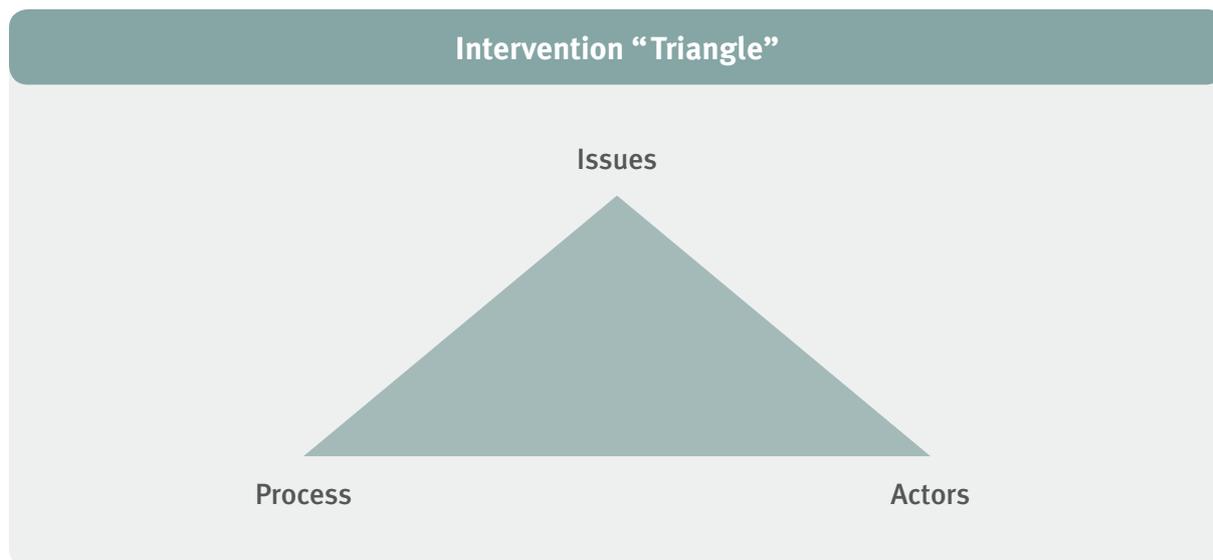
Reference to the principles of inclusivity and multi-track and multi-issue approaches is made in Sections 5.3 to 5.5.

The need to focus on the processes of interventions

As in all targeted endeavours to achieve social change and learning, effective conflict management depends on a longer-term and well structured process of engagement with a permanent group of people (at least at the core). The lack of such processes has to date been one of the greatest and most petty weaknesses of civilian conflict management. Too often, training courses, study groups, dialogue seminars and thematic workshops are carried out without sufficiently ensuring that the follow-ups, transfers, participant networking, repeat events and reviews are carried out.

The need to consider all three dimensions

- i) the work with the key conflict actors,
- ii) the support for generating solutions relevant to the issue and
- iii) a process-oriented procedure.



Developing hypotheses on “neuralgic points” and levers of system conflict transformation:

There are a number of approaches to help identify meaningful strategies and locate neuralgic points in the conflict system, which can be used to achieve considerable effects with relatively little effort:

Subjective and intuitive interpretation

Both local actors and accepted country experts generally have intuitive knowledge of and a good feeling for neuralgic points and effective levers. These intuitive assumptions can be used as a basis for the further specification and development of strategic entry points.

“Solutions are lurking everywhere” – using the system’s own resources

The systemic approach to conflict management assumes that social and political systems contain significant resources for adjustment and change. In cases of destructive and pathological loops within the system, it is worth looking for those resources in the system that could contribute to the transformation of precisely these mechanisms. The temptation to see the solution predominantly in the mobilisation of resources from outside is thus reduced.

Identifying particularly active factors of change

In line with the analysis and planning methods of the cyberneticists working with Frederic Vester, tools such as the axis diagram can be used to determine the passive, idle and active factors within a group of factors. The active factors constitute especially interesting leverage points for processes of change. These have a significant effect on the system but are themselves relatively insensitive to impacts from the system.

“Too much pressure generates counter-pressure”

As borne out by many day-to-day experiences with the reform processes of both states and companies, many change processes, after apparent initial successes, lapse perceptibly back towards the starting position. The system reproduces “proven” routines and structures, and fights back where appropriate. Rather than repeating the very common mistake of increasing input in cases of positive developments (thereby provoking counter-reactions), it is therefore better to identify several areas where gentle pressure can be applied.

Balancing and switching between different perspectives

As described in Section 5.1, balancing the conflict actors’ differing perspectives and switching between the bird’s and frog’s eye views can help

to generate and/or deepen hypotheses on meaningful intervention levers. The issue of resistances can also identify highly sensitive areas where pressure can be applied, but these can only be used with great caution.

Further strategic planning instruments: scenario analyses

Scenario analysis can also form the basis for strategic planning. A scenario analysis is interesting as it can be easily linked to systemic conflict analyses and allows different projections of potential future developments to be discussed with local and international stakeholders. The development corridors identified can be assessed in terms of whether it is likely and desirable (in the eyes of the analysts involved) for them to occur. The strategic steps necessary to increase the chances of the “desired” scenarios being real-

ised can be then be identified.

The following lessons learned can be derived from experiences with scenario analyses⁵⁶ (in Sri Lanka, among others):

1. The scenarios should not be developed in a single workshop. A longer timeframe is required to brainstorm, create the scenarios, and derive strategic decisions and implementing strategies;
2. Scenario analysis is most productive when carried out by a mixed team of external decision-makers and conflict party representatives;
3. A good scenario has the following features: plausible for an adequate number of decision-makers; consistent within itself; linked to the present; and challenging in terms of producing new and inspiring elements.

Scenario analysis in Sri Lanka

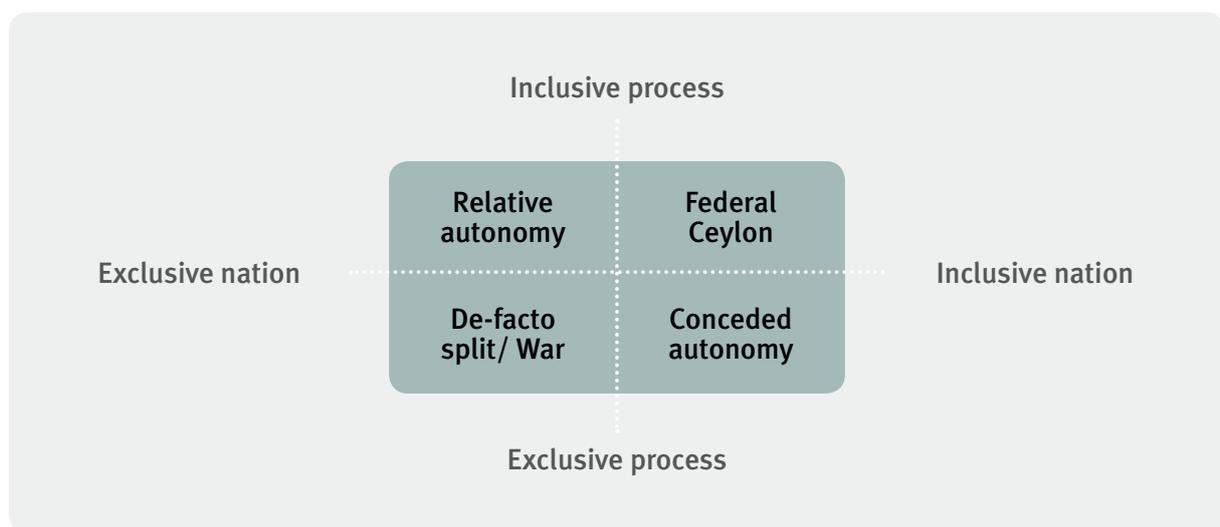
In the spring of 2004, the Conflict Research Unit of the Clingendael Institute was mandated by the donor working group in Sri Lanka to hold a scenario analysis workshop. This was intended to put the donors in a situation where they could develop a shared understanding of future trends, and better assess the possibilities and risks relating to monitoring the peace process.

The workshop was held over 2 days in June 2004 with the support of the Berghof Foundation, and 25 representatives from bi- and multi-lateral donor organisations and embassies took part. The following stages were implemented during the workshop:

- An introduction to scenario planning was given;
- The relevant factors to describe peace in Sri Lanka were defined;
- A brainstorming session took place on the possible factors that could affect the future course of the peace process;
- The factors relevant to the development of the scenario were selected;
- The participants were split into working groups to describe the scenarios, followed by a presentation in a plenary session;
- The participants worked on the scenarios and prepared the scenario narrative in their groups;
- The narratives were discussed in a plenary session;
- The scenarios were assessed in terms of their usefulness for monitoring progress in the peace process.

⁵⁶ cf. Adam Kahane: *The Mont Fleur Scenarios*, Global Business Network, 1999; Jonathan N. Maack: *Scenario Analysis: A Tool for Task Managers*. World Bank PSIA Tools and Methods, in: *Social Analysis: Selected Tools and Technique*, World Bank Social Development Paper No. 36; Kees van der Heijden: *Scenarios. The Art of Strategic Conversation*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons 1996.

Outcome: During the brainstorming unit, the participants put together a list of relevant factors from which they selected the variables of “in/exclusive nation” and “level of consensus building” to create the scenarios. In addition to the four scenarios developed, namely 1. “de facto split”, 2. “relative autonomy”, 3. “a federal Ceylon” and 4. “conceded autonomy”, they developed a 5th scenario: “resorting into intense military conflict”. A list of key factors relating to the future development of Sri Lanka was derived from these scenarios and the monitoring possibilities were discussed.



Process architecture and flexible planning

Intervention architecture is widely used to visualise systemic approaches. According to Königswieser/Exner⁵⁷ it is particularly good for this purpose as, just as a good architect creates spaces and benchmarks for all aspects of secure, functional, creative or fulfilled living in whatever form, systemic intervention is also concerned with creating framework conditions that bring about a constructive process for restructuring and changing the way people live together.

The architectural metaphor also offers three more aspects that illustrate characteristic features of systemic conflict intervention: architects help builders (= stakeholders of the conflict) to build or convert a building (= restructure

their relationships) for a limited period of time. A solid build requires the architects and builders to work within a joint process that is carefully planned but nonetheless often fraught with difficulties, from the consideration of various plans to the acceptance of a successful product. Architecture ultimately always involves making a decision from different options.

If this metaphor is used to illustrate conflict management as a whole, the fundamental challenge that many conflicts present becomes evident. It is as though an architect or team of architects is confronted with a group of builders who have to work together to build a house, but who have very different ideas about how it should be built and also about who should make which

57 Roswita Königswieser & Alexander Exner: Systemische Intervention. Architekturen und Designs für Berater und Veränderungsmanager, Stuttgart: Klett Cotta 2004.

decisions on the building. Systemic conflict transformation therefore requires a planning tool that goes beyond the “architectural drawing”⁵⁸ instrument and places more emphasis on the intervention processes; what is required is a “process architecture” instrument.

As helpful as overview diagrams can be, we caution against seeing the crucial key to conflict transformation merely in the use of several methods in parallel. In view of this, it is a good idea to always remember the starting point of systemic thinking in terms of the complexity of social change. John Paul Lederach suggested in this context that the essence of successful conflict management was probably not to be found in perfecting social engineering, but rather in the more challenging but at the same time much simpler capacity of moral imagination. He describes this as “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist”.⁵⁹

A flexible planning framework is also required to take account of the often high degree of political dynamics in conflict systems as well as the attempts of third parties to gain access to the conflict parties and create opportunities for constructive exchanges and dialogue. This should both consider the long-term nature and continuity of the engagement along with the objectives identified, and also allow activities to be adapted or new ones initiated in response to changes in the actual situation. The inherent tension between the continuity of the engagement and the requirement for flexibility in the use of political opportunities places huge requirements on the planning tool.

Therefore, a strategic planning framework should contain long-term goals for the individual components of the programme and at the

same time leave space for a variety of activities (“activity corridor”). This kind of procedure is sufficient as long as the peacebuilding measures of individual organisations are focussed on just one area. If, however, an attempt is made to intermesh different areas, such as work on the political and substantive level, (e.g., process support), the relationship level between the parties (e.g., problem-solving, communication, conciliation) and the structural level (e.g., capacity building), then a more complex planning instrument is required such as, for example, the strategic framework of the Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation in Sri Lanka.

In June 2003 a comprehensive strategic framework synthesis paper (SynStratframe) was produced as part of the RNCST project. The intention was to consolidate the strategic direction of the project into one document and adapt it periodically as both the team’s and the partners’ learning progressed. In line with the overall strategy, strategic frameworks were produced for the key fields of work, which – like the SynStratframe – should also be reviewed and developed periodically. In line with the continuing endeavours to focus the project on those strategic measures with the greatest potential impact, the project concentrates on three key fields:

- Monitoring and ensuring the quality of the peace process at macropolitical level (detailed in SynStratframe);
- Target group-specific capacity building for the stakeholders of the conflict (stratframes for the stakeholders concerned);
- Issue-specific capacity building in terms of state reform, power sharing, and political economy (issue-specific stratframes).

The medium term work plans of the project staff form part of these strategies, whilst the plans

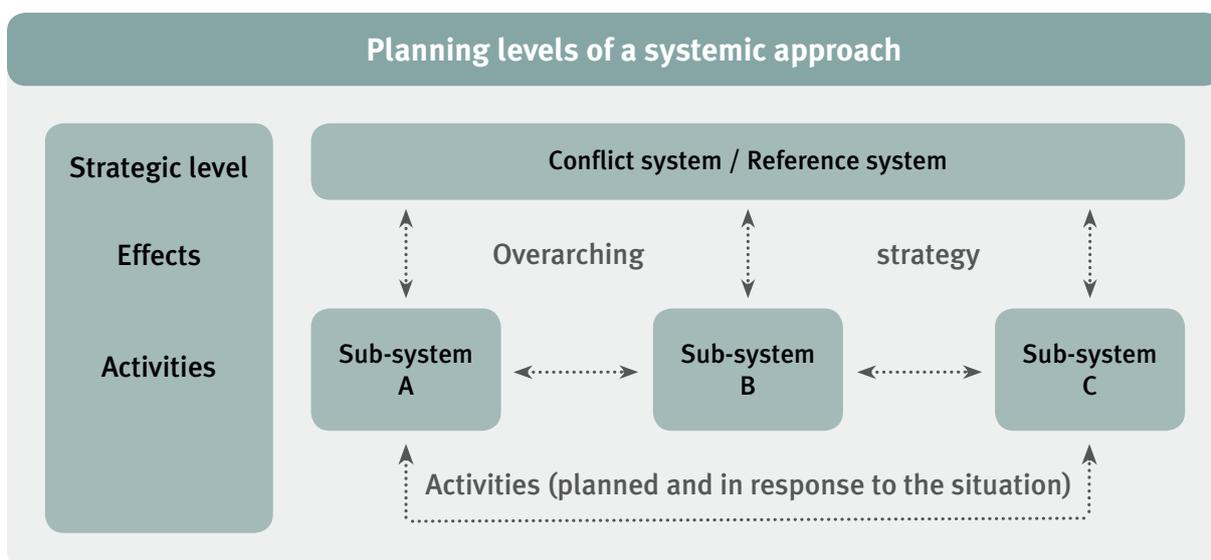
58 Königswieser & Exner 2004, op. cit., p. 58.

59 Lederach 2005, op. cit, p. 29.

for short-term work are generally created in conjunction with the relevant partners in the projects. This affords a certain degree of flexibility in the selection of measures. The coordination of activities with the local partners ensures and promotes the local ownership of the activities at the same time as creating transparency in relation to the progress of the work.

In terms of preparing a strategic planning framework, the main contribution of a systemic approach to peacebuilding is its analytical and methodical distinction between the various system levels. Long-term and strategic assumptions on the relevant entry points and methods of sup-

porting social change are placed on the system level addressed by the project/programme. However, the concrete activities and direct effects of the measures primarily take place in subordinate system areas. For a systemically inspired planning process, therefore, it is important to switch between the bird's and frog's eye views. It is also essential to question the significance and function of the relevant sub-systems in relation to the overarching system, and the way changes in and activities of individual elements in the sub-system impact on the other sub-systems and the system as a whole. By the same token, changes in the system as a whole also affect the sub-systems.



Long-term objectives should predominantly be formulated on the strategic level of the conflict system, whilst more flexibility is advisable for the sub-system tasks. It is therefore important to switch regularly between the frog's and bird's eye views, as activities in the sub-systems should be defined regularly in terms of their inter-relationship with both the other sub-systems and the overarching system. It should also be noted that the timeframe and dynamics in the different sub-systems and system levels can vary significantly.

Other flexible planning instruments: the road map programme

The purpose of the road map programme is to provide a sequence of processes and stages for conflict management measures. Papers on specific issues are produced within the programme, which design a road map for a specific issue that takes equal account of the conflict dynamics and the feasibility of the measures. The majority of these issue-specific papers are written by local authors in collaboration with external experts; they are presented for discussion at semi-public

events and subsequently revised with a view to making them available to all stakeholders. The road map programme is relevant in systemic terms as it focusses on the issues whilst simultaneously referring back to the overarching con-

flict system, and the papers in the workshops and seminars are discussed with a whole range of different local and international actors (reinforcing the ownership of the proposals and enabling the feedback to be incorporated immediately).

Experiences with the road map approach in Sri Lanka

Within the framework of the road map programme in Sri Lanka and parallel to the Track 1 peace process, a number of papers were produced in 2002 and 2003 that aimed “to support all stakeholders in their pursuit of a just and equitable negotiated settlement. Its rationale is to demarcate the steps that are required for conflict transformation on all tracks.” The Berghof Foundation and the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) in Colombo supported the programme.

The issues related to the organisation of negotiation processes (sequencing, selecting the issues, framework for the negotiations, facilitation, publicity etc.), selected substantive issues (human security in the regions particularly affected by the conflict, interim arrangements, “normalisation issues” = rehabilitation, reconstruction and resettlement, human rights, land rights issues etc.) and other issues relating to a lasting peace process (e.g., the involvement of the diaspora). The authors comprised both local and international experts.

In principle, all the papers aimed to document and analyse current factors and trends and, building on this along with a set of normative premises, formulate a selection of options on how the peace process in the area concerned could be developed constructively. The initial drafts of the papers were discussed with other experts and stakeholder representatives in semi-public workshops, and subsequently revised and made available to all stakeholders.

The road map process received a considerable response until the middle of 2003 as a forum for discussing the Track 1 peace process, which was taking place at the time. However it then lost the interest of the stakeholders as a result of the breakdown in negotiations. The attempt of a comprehensive policy paper entitled *The Sri Lankan Peace Process at Crossroads* by a group of five authors who had joined forces within a Peace Review Group (in January 2004), attracted considerable interest, however, in the absence of Track 1 activities, it could not revive interest in a continuous discourse at this level. Nevertheless, a new attempt is to be made in 2005 with a series of policy papers on the issues of interim arrangements, interim constitutions, alternative constitutional arrangements and international support structures.

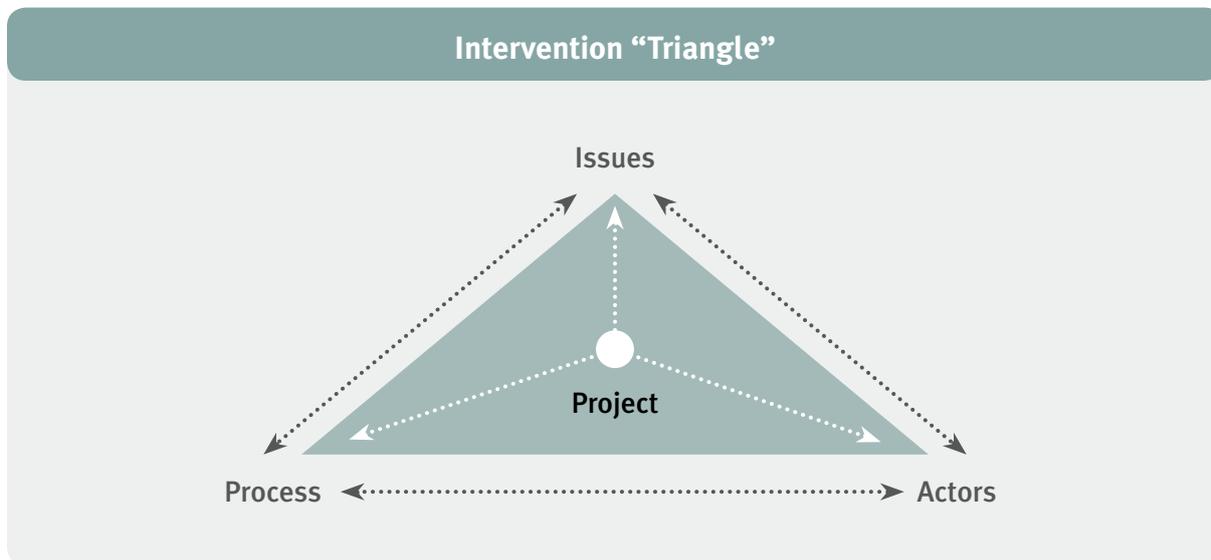
Monitoring and assessment

What can be derived from a systemic approach in terms of managing and assessing a conflict management project or programme? At this juncture it is of fundamental importance to distinguish between internal project monitoring and an external assessment.

Internal monitoring is the key controlling instrument of a project/programme. It is also important in terms of organisational learning, and also for reviewing and – where required – correcting the fundamental understanding of the system. Therefore, besides looking at the elements of the system (issues, actors, sub-systems), it is always important to consider the system as a whole. Change

can be very prolonged, however it can also be quick and sudden. Monitoring is intended to help place the project/programme within these

processes of change and create the basis to enable staff and partners to adopt a reflexive approach and support the change.



In respect of relevant outcomes, monitoring in a systemic approach should initially be concerned with:

- changes in the behaviour and attitudes of the stakeholders;
- generating new perspectives and options to resolve important substantive issues; and
- identifying suitable problem-solving processes and procedures.

However, the systemic dimension of intervention should also be considered. Open questions, which take account of several components, can be used here, such as:

- How have specific conflict areas been discussed?
- How have changes in stakeholder attitudes been achieved?
- How did the actors behave in order to bring about agreement on issue X?
- Which issue brought about which reaction in which actor?

In programmes such as the RNCST, which has the explicit aim of creating genuine network connection and partner orientation, monitoring activities should also look at the relationships with partners themselves and – in the spirit of a partnership-like procedure – identify areas where the monitoring of project activities and potential outcomes can be carried out on a joint basis. Care should also be taken to combine the monitoring approaches and the evaluation of projects and programmes with the regular conflict analyses.

A systemic perspective takes a sceptical view of whether external assessments can also be used to measure the impacts of peace policy at macro level. Firstly, in the brief period generally available for such a report, an external team can hardly be expected to obtain a sufficiently deep understanding of the “essence” of the conflict systems to be capable of making well-founded statements about impact cycles. Secondly, and more importantly, systemic approaches are based precisely on this criticism of simple, linear

and monocausal cause-effect relationships. Therefore, in the logic of systemic approaches, it is quite possible to make observations based on hypotheses if need be. Conflict systems are highly aggregated types of systems that are subject to such a multitude of internal and external influences and effects, that a plausible attribution of impacts at macropolitical level would exceed analytical capacities.

Nevertheless, an assessment of projects or programmes with a systemic approach should address the following areas:

The procedure's sensitivity to the system

- To what extent does the intervention consider the complexity of the conflict system?
- Which entry and starting points have been identified for CCM?
- Which culture of cooperation, partner relations exist?

Strategic assumptions and objective

- To what extent are the strategy and objectives plausible, comprehensible, realistic and sustainable?
- Which assumptions determine the selection of which levers, issues, partners and actors?

Linking the system levels

- Is the relationship between the various sub-systems and the reference system being considered on a comprehensive basis?
- To what extent can interventions at micro level be linked to processes of change at macro level without lapsing into simple cause-effect patterns?
- To what extent have we succeeded in establishing a strategic link to actors on other conflict management tracks?

The procedure's capacity for learning and ability to be linked with other procedures

- How are the project's experiences and assumptions about its impacts prepared and considered?

- How strong is the desire or ability to enter into cooperation structures with other local and international actors?

Quality of the "consulting system":

- Transparency; partner orientation; process responsibility; local ownership; gender sensitivity.

5.3 Engagement with key stakeholders

This section deals with the question of how to work in a constructively critical way with conflict actors based on the principles of inclusivity and multipartiality, as well as the resulting dilemmas. A multi-stakeholder approach and various forms of network management are also presented.

Building relationships is one of the key components of systemic conflict transformation. In terms of the character of the conflict, its purpose is to counteract the division of societies by using dialogue work, networking etc. based on the principles of multipartiality and inclusivity to increase the capacities and competences of all those conflict actors who lack these. Yet how can these principles continue to be applied in view of the polarising tendencies of protracted conflicts described above, and the pronounced economic and political interests in continuing the conflict?

Based on the practical experiences of both the Berghof Center and partner organisations in Sri Lanka, we would like to offer initial answers to these questions while also illustrating other dilemmas in relationship building. The following components, in particular, will be discussed:

- Inclusivity and multipartiality
- Critical and constructive engagement with political stakeholders
- Multi-stakeholder dialogue
- Network management

Inclusivity and multipartiality

The two principles of inclusivity (of the peace process) and multipartiality (of the third party) constitute important aspects of systemic conflict transformation. Inclusivity encompasses the fundamental necessity to consider the legitimate interests and needs (including different gender perspectives) of all – or as many as possible – of the relevant actors in the conflict system and integrate them into the peace process. Some conflict parties attempt to exclude opponents from the negotiations on the basis that it would be easier to resolve the problem without their involvement. This ignores the fact that the adversary also has interests in, is a part of and influences events in the conflict. A sustainable solution to a conflict can only be achieved when all the issues have been dealt with and all the interests have at least been recognised. However, in reality, it is often neither possible nor (for reasons of efficiency) desirable to get all the possible conflict actors to the negotiation table.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in this case it is essential that the actors who are not represented are included indirectly, either via the chief negotiator, via parallel talks or through their sequential inclusion in the implementation phase (as is at least partly the case in the Sudanese peace process).

For practical reasons, in order to be able to select the principal actors to be included in the peace process, it may be meaningful to categorise these in accordance with various criteria. For example, a Clingendael Institute study proposes classifying the actors according to whether, firstly, they are pursuing a political agenda, secondly, whether they are waging a “normal” or a brutal war and, thirdly, whether they possess a

high or low degree of legitimacy (within the population). According to the study, the best negotiating partners are primarily those actors who possess a programme, are moderate in their warfare and have a high degree of legitimacy. By contrast, extremist groups with a low substantive profile, brutal warfare and little support from the population tend to be excluded.⁶¹

However, these attempts at categorisation should avoid the broad brush approach and leave room for dynamic changes, both within and outside the armed organisations. The discussions on the international community’s association with the Palestinian Hamas movement during the elections to the Legislative Council in January 2006 show how difficult it is to exclude organisations from political negotiations. They also illustrate how the relatively broad international consensus to consider Hamas as a terrorist organisation and isolate it politically was called into question by the election result. The Hamas movement was able to achieve the majority vote in free and fair democratic elections and formed the Palestinian government in March 2006.

The issue of how to deal with those violent actors with predominantly economic and profit-related interests (“entrepreneurs of violence”) is also difficult. It is possible that these actors will see little point in taking part in negotiations. The context of the situation will help to determine whether it is meaningful and possible to eliminate the scope of these actors by means of strict rules and controls, or whether it is necessary to provide them with alternative scope and options in order to reduce violence. A combination of the two strategies appears reasonable.

60 cf. Emeric Rogier: *Rethinking Conflict Resolution in Africa. Lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Sudan*, The Hague: Clingendael 2004, p. 19f.; the author refers here to the example of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, in which 350 delegates took part and which, after 40 months, produced a less than satisfactory result. He also mentions the fact that the appeal of being able to take part in negotiations contributed to the formation of new armed groups.

61 *ibid.*, p. 35ff.

Whilst the principle of inclusivity relates primarily to the political integration of all the main conflict parties and the interests they represent, the principle of multipartiality mainly refers to the fundamental position and willingness of the third party to work and enter into a critical and constructive dialogue with all the conflict parties. Due to the strong polarisation tendencies in protracted violent conflicts, it is necessary to preserve the principle of multipartiality and to communicate this to the various actors, as the third party is often accused of partiality and sympathising with the “opposition”.

The experiences of the Berghof Center’s work in Sri Lanka show that it is extremely important to adhere to the principle of multipartiality. Nationalist Buddhist groups, in particular, accuse the RNCST of partiality towards the LTTE, and all contact is perceived as support for the “illegitimate” interests of the LTTE. In this context it is important to succeed in convincing organisations and actors on both sides of the conflict that contact with the other side is not threatening but beneficial to the transformation of the conflict. This includes the maintenance of a memorandum of understanding with the Sri Lankan government that emphasises the necessity of also working with the LTTE.

It is also important to forge contacts with and establish communication channels to political hardliners to ensure the multipartiality and inclusivity of solutions. Experience in Sri Lanka shows that open hostility and campaigns against third parties can arise very quickly in times of great political tension. It is also essential to find contact people in extreme groups or in organisations close to these in order to anticipate these developments.

Critical and constructive engagement with political stakeholders

In practice, the implementation of a critical and constructive engagement with all key actors of a conflict faces the *Realpolitik* obstacles of a world dominated by states. Whilst integrating the state actors is part of international norms and proce-

dures, the so-called non-state actors (state opponents in so-called internal or intra-state conflicts) are either ostracised on the basis of insufficient international or, more often, internal legitimacy, or forced into illegality as terrorist organisations. It is rather difficult to cooperate with both. The more the non-state actors strive for international recognition of the legitimacy of their cause and the acknowledgement of their role as representative of one or more oppressed groups of people, the more insurmountable the obstacles appear.

In contrast to the naming and shaming approach of humanitarian agencies and organisations that focus their intervention on the condemnation of human rights violations, the Berghof Center’s work in Sri Lanka is led by the conviction that the admonishments and warnings will fall on deaf ears if it does not seek a targeted strategy of engagement with the actors. Emphasis is placed on the following components in this process:

- Trust-building with all the key conflict protagonists;
- Increasing both the personal (e.g., training in negotiation techniques) and substantive (e.g., exploring various decentralisation and autonomy models) capacities for problem-solving and dialogue by empowering the actors;
- Increasing the potential for a transformation towards pluralist, democratic and inclusive institutions with an explicit obligation to respect human rights.

The interaction between all three aspects characterises the philosophy and strategy of critical and constructive engagement. Contradictions and dilemmas also arise, as the following section explains.

Trust-building with all key conflict actors

Actors will only open themselves to a third party when they accept it (which requires a certain degree of initial trust) and do not suspect any hidden agendas. The non-state actors in particular regard the third party with scepticism and every activity arouses suspicion. Being schooled

in friend-foe patterns of war makes the actors think only in terms of winning or losing, and any intervention is interpreted as interference aimed at weakening their own positions. As a result of the unequal distribution of power, non-state actors are particularly cautious during ceasefire periods as they feel robbed of their conventional instruments of power, and fear that a policy of rapprochement will neutralise them.

Trust-building with actors is subject to certain basic principles:

1. Trust-building is a long and not always linear process that is subject to political fluctuations; continuous nurturing of these relationships is essential;
2. Developing relationships centres and depends on people, as relationships are built up between individuals and not organisations. In the event of personnel changes (within the third party or conflict actors), new contacts must be identified and new communications channels opened;
3. Trust-building means predictability, transparency and honesty. Third parties must be predictable and reliable in the eyes of the actors, and the conflict actors must know what they can and cannot expect from the third party. False promises made to increase appeal are generally short-lived and undermine any trust already built up.

As borne out by the Berghof Center's work in Sri Lanka, a deep empathy must be built up in order to gain any substantial access to the conflict actors' decision-making entities. Affinity and friendship are used to build deep relationships in Sri Lanka. Working with political actors therefore requires the third party to find a balance between "friendship" and critical distance, a task that sets high professional demands. It should also be noted that influential persons on higher decision-making levels can perceive deep empathy to be confusing and therefore threatening.

Increasing problem-solving and dialogue capacities by empowering the actors

Capacity building measures with conflict actors aim to locate other ways to achieve political aims and therefore reduce the disposition towards violence. They do this by identifying and formulating solution models as well as ways of implementing these options. It is assumed here that learning about methods of conflict management (e.g., negotiation techniques based on win-win models) and conflict resolution (e.g., exploring various decentralisation and power sharing models) will make the actors stronger when they enter the negotiations. Any disparities relating to their knowledge of the issues can also be ironed out. Capacity building measures should be directed towards the needs of the actors, thereby increasing their commitment and ownership. However, it is also important to reflect self-critically on the argument that offering programmes to conflict actors is tantamount to rewarding them for their unethical, undemocratic and authoritarian acts, and encourages them to continue with these appalling deeds.

Increasing the potential for a transformation towards pluralist, democratic and inclusive institutions with an explicit obligation to respect human rights

The critical and constructive approach deals with the needs of the actors in an empathetic way and uses transformative conflict management strategies to illustrate the comparative advantages for them. However, critical engagement also means calling for a change in the practice of violating human rights and disregarding international humanitarian standards, and articulating this clearly and unambiguously. This is particularly fruitful when incentives to change their practices are offered alongside clear criticism. However, a change in the practice and strategy of the actors generally takes place from within.

It is important to define rules of engagement before each new approach in order to combine the two roles of empathy and critical distance. There must be clear answers to the questions of why we are working with a certain target group

(individuals and not just parties are meant here), with what objective, and where the boundaries of the engagement lie.

Promoting a comprehensive dialogue between local and international actors: the One-Text Initiative in Sri Lanka

The One-Text Initiative in Sri Lanka is an interesting attempt to support a comprehensive dia-

logue between the relevant conflict actors, Sri Lankan civil society and international actors. This multi-stakeholder approach is based on the idea of providing a platform for exchanging ideas and facilitating a continuous problem-solving dialogue with the help of the computer applications, Info Share.

The One-Text Approach

The Sri Lanka One-Text Process space was designed to facilitate dialogue and stimulate the exchange of ideas based on a One-Text Process. The one-text procedure is a systematic process to elicit underlying interests and needs of parties and providing a mechanism and space to jointly explore and develop many options and decide on one. After eliciting the issues and interests of all the parties, the nominated Process Managers and Technical Experts draft a proposal and present it to the parties as a draft for their input and criticism.

Using the Technical Experts for the on-going re-drafting of the one-text proposals would provide the parties with the freedom to criticise and discuss the drafts freely without damaging their working relationships. It will hopefully enable the parties to discover common needs and interests – although they might disagree about the means used to achieve them.

The Process Managers and Technical Experts will continue to revise and re-submit drafts to the parties until the parties believe the draft they have reflects the best they can do to meet all parties' interests.

The work in this process and space will be offered to the Sri Lanka Track 1 negotiators as resources, guides and means to explore major issues before they reach the negotiations table. The participants in this space are Technical Experts, Policy Advisors, Process Managers, Researchers, Technology Support Consultants and individuals associated with the major political stakeholders or parties.

In creating the One-Text space for high-level negotiations between the various political stakeholders in the Sri Lankan Peace Process, Info Share needed to create a virtual negotiations table that would enable the stakeholders to discuss issues freely and frankly, and most importantly, privately, without worrying about the security of their communications. This need led to the creation of the Sri Lanka One Text Process Groove space.⁶²

The One-Text Initiative was created following the February 2002 ceasefire and began its activities in 2003 with the support of the most important political groups in Sri Lanka. It was originally funded by USAID, the Appeal of the Nobel Peace Laureates Foundation and the company Groove Networks.

Participants in the One-Text Initiative include representatives of the political parties and NGOs, as well as their nominated experts, consultants and academics.⁶³ The subjects and political issues are determined by the participants and, in 2005, discussions took place in seven Standing Committees (Human Rights, Strengthening Ceasefire Agreement & Monitoring, People's Participation,

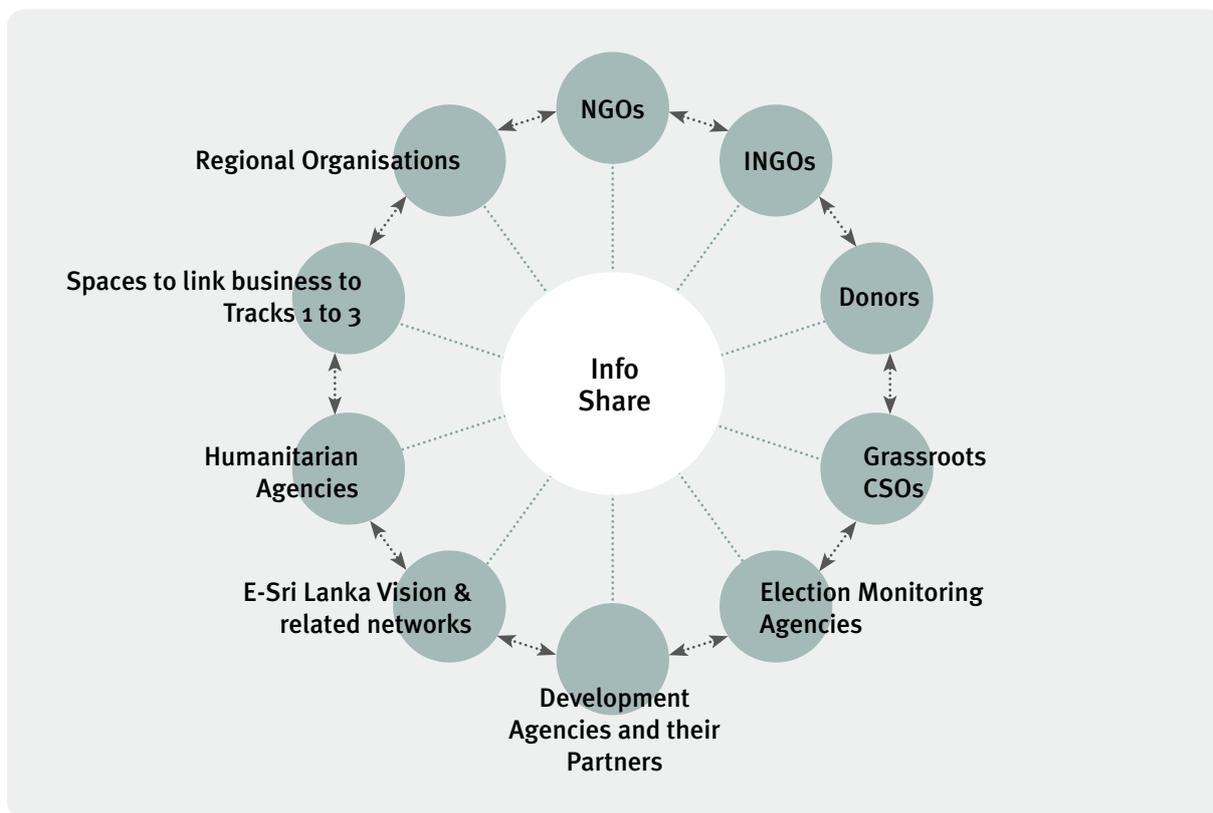
62 cf. www.info-share.org.

Peace Structures, Muslim Peace Process, International Resource Partners, Future Scenario Planning and Optioning) and four thematic groups.⁶⁴

What has the One-Text Initiative achieved in terms of outcomes? Firstly, it has succeeded in creating a number of information sharing networks on politically relevant issues, involving actors who would otherwise communicate little or not at all, who have different backgrounds in terms of organisations (donor organisations, NGOs) and who sometimes operate far apart geographically. Secondly, a high degree of coordination and agreement has been achieved in individual thematic groups and committees, which also resulted, among other things, in the

founding of the Muslim Peace Secretariat. Finally, the use of joint data records and studies has created increased transparency.

What is systemic about the One-Text Initiative? The initiative has created a framework in which many relevant state and non-state, local and international actors with specific concerns can play a part. An essential part of this multi-stakeholder approach is that the issues, priorities, and extent of the discussions are proposed and determined by the actors involved. The openness and complexity produced here is organised by Info Share on a technical level, and, in terms of the process, the actors work on a text that sets forth the essential points.



63 In 2005, the SLFP, UNF, TNA, SLMC, NUA parties, the Peace Secretariats and a number of civil society organisations took part. The LTTE, JVP and JHU were present as observers and plan to take part at a later stage.

64 In 2005, the issues dealt with were Interim Self Governing Authority, Negotiations Framework and Agenda for Talks, Strengthening Ceasefire & Monitoring, and Southern Consensus.

Network management

In civilian conflict transformation, such as in Sri Lanka, the actor environment is characterised by a multitude of national, international, state and non-state actors, and small groups of stakeholder representatives. Inadequate exchanges and a lack of common goal orientation mean that their engagement often runs the risk of becoming less effective and/or counterproductive. There are a number of reasons for this lack of coherence and complementarity, including structural and organisational factors, negative competition and disparities between external and internal actors, and conflicts relating to goals and priorities (cf. Section 2). Strengthening and developing networks is one entry point for counteracting these tendencies. In a broader sense, networks can be interpreted here as the communication between members of state, non-state and external organisations present in a conflict country, which interact primarily on the basis of sharing information and knowledge on an informal basis.

The systemic approach to conflict management gives priority to the use of the system's own resources and strives towards a comprehensive approach for managing networks. Systemic network management is therefore based on identifying the trends of change and areas where pressure can be applied on the micro level of the political system, as well as locating the underlying networked engagement of small groups. These can then be developed and strengthened by means of effective network management – strategically supporting and connecting actors and issues – to produce synergy effects.

Systemic network management attempts to promote a culture of cooperation based on strategic partnerships and alliances with local and international actors, as well as the support for networks of action. In this context, culture of cooperation

means a trust-based, medium to long-term cooperation of varying intensity, particularly between local actors interested in a sustainable peace solution, including agents of peaceful change (cf. Section 5.4). NGOs should not be seen simply as implementing agencies of official policy or subcontracting partners here. Their importance on the input side of politics should also be recognised.⁶⁵

Three kinds of network have been identified that are particularly important for systemic interventions:

1. Networks of effective action (NEA): these comprise networks in the above-mentioned sense, however their members also pursue a common goal and have certain common principles for action. It is not a priority for NEAs to coordinate the activities of the organisations involved. One example of networks of effective action is the Peace Review Group (PRG) in Sri Lanka, which consists of five representatives from important civil-society CCM organisations. The PRG meets regularly to reflect on the status of the peace process and jointly coordinate activities. The group is neither controlled centrally nor structured hierarchically – the common maxim that guides their actions is civilian conflict management to achieve just and positive peace in Sri Lanka.
2. Strategic partnerships or alliances that aim to increase efficiency by cooperating on a specific project. The Berghof Foundation in Sri Lanka has supported a number of strategic project partners, and not only in financial and organisational terms as it has also planned and implemented projects with them on a regular basis. This includes the Social Scientist Association (SSA) and the Center for Policy Alter-

65 cf. Cordula Reimann & Norbert Ropers: Discourses on Peace Practices. Learning to Change by Learning from Change?, in: Paul von Tongeren et al (eds.): People Building Peace II. Successful Stories from Civil Society, Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner 2005.

natives (CPA), among other organisations. For example, not only has the Berghof Foundation worked with the CPA on the road map programme (see above), but it has also cooperated closely with it on issues of peace process monitoring or the development of federal power sharing approaches during discussions on state reform.

3. Strategic alliances in an international/regional context, which both assist with the joint lobbying work in the political arena with national or international institutions, and also organise the exchange of information within the region. Among others, the Berghof Foundation in Sri Lanka has strategic alliances with the Norwegian facilitation and its team, the like-minded donors in the donor working group and the direct donors of the RNCST Project.

To ensure effective cooperation between state and non-state actors in a conflict region, our experiences to date have shown that it is beneficial to develop a joint theory of action and also establish the goal of collaborating in a network of effective action.⁶⁶ The intention of a NEA is to bring together the most diverse actors in a conflict region in a way that is neither random nor centrally coordinated (“in a chaordic fashion”: decentralised decision-making, self-organisation, flexible form). In the words of Ricigliano, NEAs are:

“(...) essentially a communication network with a common goal (...) and some shared rules of the road. Members of a NEA may choose to coordinate with each other, but are not required to do so.”⁶⁷

NEAs should ideally comprise organisations that are active in the political, social and structural areas of a society, cover national and local perspectives and work together on a process-oriented basis. NEAs and other networks are particularly effective when there are no excessive expectations of immediate success from an association, but more of a successive development of good practices and a learning process between the participants. Other prerequisites for successful cooperation are the existence of actors with facilitation capabilities and capacities, who are prepared to champion the network, are accepted in their function and also bring resources for developing the institutional capacities of other members of the network.⁶⁸

5.4 Mobilisation of agents of peaceful change

This sub-section contains a more detailed description of the target groups of systemic conflict transformation and presents the concepts of agents of peaceful change and “critical mass”. The need to link dialogue measures and capacity building when working with these agents is discussed along with their institutionalisation.

How can local actors be given sustainable and effective support in such a way that they make a significant contribution to transforming the conflict? While the concepts of peace constituencies and peace potentials are primarily based on strengthening the social peace forces that are ready for change, systemic conflict transformation explicitly assumes that it is essential to identify agents of change amongst the political decision-makers and support them. The following components will therefore be described:

66 cf. Ricigliano 2003, op. cit.

67 Ricigliano 2003, op. cit., p. 457.

68 Reimann & Ropers 2005, op. cit.

- Agents of peaceful change
- “Critical mass”
- Linking dialogue and capacity building
- Institutionalisation and support by means of organisational development

Agents of peaceful change

A general feature of violent political conflicts is the desire of strategically influential groups from contentious parties to maintain or change an inherited balance of power. Within this field of tension between “agents of continuity” and “agents of change”⁶⁹, small groups are also campaigning for amicable, inclusive and compromise solutions. These agents of peace are often perceived as small and less influential groups, as attention is primarily focussed on the articulate civil society elite. In systemic terms it is interesting to broaden this concept to one of agents of peaceful change, which can then embrace many members of functional elites as well as moderate representatives from the direct conflict parties.

The RNCST Project in Sri Lanka is based on the hypothesis that it is possible to identify, support and strategically consolidate agents of peaceful change. Under the generic term “100+”, its intention is to identify and bring together at least 100 key people in strategically important and politically influential hubs. Important people are sought within the stakeholders, the civil society elite and also the traditional change-resistant tiers such as the Buddhist clergy and the public services. The individuals identified stand for different ideological, political and nor-

mative concepts of change. However, they stand out as agents of peaceful change (AoPC) due to the fact that, among other reasons, they all represent a minimum consensus; they are ready for peaceful change, they accept the equality of all ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka, and they recognise the need for achieving a just solution for peace.

One of the most challenging aspects of the Berghof Foundation’s work was to subject the AoPC within the stakeholders to a continuous screening process. Degrees of influence and political power alter in a constantly changing political landscape. Influential politicians, consultants or civil servants can lose their influence as a result of government reorganisations, and then potentially regain it at a later stage or in another capacity. It is therefore necessary to build up as large a network of AoPCs as possible, such as in 100+ in our case.

In summary, AoPCs have the following characteristics:

1. They comprise men, women or organisations willing and able to introduce and support political changes.
2. They are not coherent in their composition and require various forms of support such as logistics, concept development, methodological training.
3. They do not necessarily have to have the same ideas and visions of the changes required as those of a third party intervening in a conflict

⁶⁹ The concept of agents of change is rooted in business studies approaches in terms of identifying “innovators” or “catalysts” to explain market trends, and was adapted in the DFID’s drivers of change concept for the field of development work. DFID developed the drivers of change model in 2001, allowing for an improved explanation for the persistence of poverty structures in terms of the political system and social institutions in developing countries. A key aspect is the open-ended outcome of social change and the important role of institutions (social rules) as facilitators between structures and actors. In practical application, very broad groups of actors were identified as drivers of change, such as the media, civil society or youth. In our experience, these large groups are too broad for systemic conflict management, which is why we are limiting our concept of agents of peaceful change to strategic groups/organisations and influential people with privileged access to political, economic and military sources of power.

with a view to transforming it. However, in order to allow a cooperation over a period of time, they must share at least a minimum number of ideas in terms of, e.g., the need for peaceful change, the acceptance of an equal, multi-ethnic society.

4. They are extremely important for systemic conflict management as partners, intensifiers (advocates) and mediators (multiplier function) of processes of change within the political elite.
5. They help to assess the attractiveness of political conflict resolution methods and can observe the relevance of these in their respective fields of influence.

AoPCs can generally be found within the political elite in the groups often described as “moderates” or “reformers”. However, from a systemic perspective it is also advisable to look at hardliners (also described as non-like-minded)

and consider how these groups and individuals can be strategically involved in the conflict management process. As borne out by historical experiences, hardliners who decide to switch to non-violent solution strategies in critical situations, can generally push these through more easily on the basis of their popular support (as in, e.g., Richard Nixon’s policy of East-West détente, Charles De Gaulle’s Algerian policy or Yitzhak Rabin’s peace policy). Can we support these processes of “shifts in historical perspective” by, for example, cooperating with influential consultants and think tanks in the more conservative political spectrum? How are strategy options for non-violent conflict resolution best prepared and communicated in order to be heard by a broad spectrum of actors? Even when, in many cases, access to hardliners may not be available, it is certainly worth considering a strategy of engaging with hardliners in situations where influence appears possible.

Agents of peaceful change in the Georgia-Abkhazia Programme

The development of the CR-Berghof Schlaining process, as with all areas of CR’s work in the Caucasus, has been shaped by a variety of partners, people who perceived the need for an engagement of this sort with their own political establishments and who saw the need for external interlocutors in driving it forward. The political instincts of these partners and their analysis of the developments and needs of their respective societies were instrumental in the development of the Schlaining process (as well as informing much of CR’s overall work).

Working across a conflict divide and with a range of partners, there is a question as to whose agenda one is working to: are we trying to reconcile opposing agendas? Often we have seen the need to support partners in working to their own agendas while at the same time creating a space in which mutually distinct agendas can be discussed. In working on a range of issues with partners it is also important to respect their capacities – they are working to change their societies but are also having to juggle the demands of partners and donors from outside and this can lead to a degree of overstretch. The criteria for selecting participants in the Schlaining process are driven by the politics of the situation. People are selected on the basis of their relation to the political process within their own communities, their relation to the conflict and peace process and their capacity to engage with the opportunities and obstacles within the peace process. While people take part in their individual capacities it has always been important to invite participants who perform functionally relevant tasks and those who have the scope to impact upon public opinion. In selecting participants CR has always consulted widely in order to develop a vision of who the influential figures within both communities are. It has been important to achieve a balance between different forces within the respective political communities – government and opposition, politicians, officials and civic actors. As noted above we have attempted to widen and deepen the circle of participants, maintaining relations with previous participants and drawing new people in as the political landscape in each community evolves. While CR consults with the political

leaderships of the respective parties and discusses participants from the other side we have sought to avoid a situation whereby the participation of individuals can be refused – in particular in regard to the participation of IDPs we have sought to push at the boundaries imposed by the Abkhaz (and in doing so over time there has been an evolution in the range of participants; people who have taken part in meetings in 2003-5 would certainly have been unacceptable in earlier meetings) while not proposing people who we knew it would be politically difficult for the Abkhaz to meet.

One area in which it has been harder to find the appropriate balance has been in regard to gender: the predominantly male politics of Georgia and Abkhazia has meant that most of the participants have been male and those women who have taken part have more often than not been civic activists – reflecting the fact that in much of the post-Soviet world women have been instrumental in the growing influence of civil society.

Critical mass

A second category for identifying agents of change in a broader sense is that of the “critical mass”. This is defined as the number of agents of peaceful change required and the degree of potential influence necessary for this group to be taken seriously as an actor of social change. Based on revolution research theses and the chaos theory, it can be argued that relatively small groups can have a disproportionately high degree of influence in phases of complex social upheaval. A critical role can be played if they are successful in offering convincing visions of control and direction in this process of change and are able to develop effective cooperation networks. One question that remains unanswered is how much external help strengthens the potential of a social movement and how much weakens it politically, i.e. calls its legitimacy into question. External support must therefore consistently avoid any allegations of outside control or relationships of financial dependency in order to push through its own political or economic ideas.

In this sense a key goal of systemic conflict transformation is to strengthen and support the agents of peaceful change to such an extent that they can act as a “critical mass”, and, as a group, develop the capability of influencing the attractiveness and acceptance of power sharing con-

cepts for the benefit of social change. John Paul Lederach prefers the term critical yeast in this context to emphasise the aspect of quality (the power sharing concept) over that of quantity (the number of persons engaging for the benefit of this concept).⁷⁰ The strategic goal of the Resource Network for Conflict Transformation and Studies in Sri Lanka is to combine both aspects: developing the concept in such a way that the problem-solving potential for the ethnic conflict gains a “critical power of persuasion”, and mobilising so many representatives in influential positions that, together, they attain a new collective power of definition.

The concept of “critical mass” also relates to the question posed by the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) project, namely whether more people or key people should be involved in the work (cf. Section 4.3). As the systemic approach to conflict transformation seeks primarily to influence political decision-makers (Track 1.5), the agents of peaceful change selected here belong to the key people category. However, it is a good idea to pose the question again in relation to politically influential actors: is it advisable to work towards “recruiting” certain very influential agents of peaceful change in key positions? Or does it make more sense in the long-term to support agents of peaceful change in all key substantive

⁷⁰ Lederach 2005, op. cit., p. 87 ff.

areas of the conflict? The answer to this question ultimately depends on the context of the situation and, among other things, is governed by the approaches and access possibilities to the political elite as well as the fundamental strategic direction and resources of the project.

Combining capacity building and dialogue

A traditional form of linkage in conflict management is that between “capacity building/training” and “dialogue work”. Here, a conflict-related educational event comprising members of different conflict parties is used both for dialogue purposes and to apply the knowledge acquired to their own conflict. There are various opinions in the conflict management profession as to how meaningful this combination is. From a systemic perspective, it is very promising as it calls for the participants to repeatedly switch between perspectives and/or systems in order to apply what they have learned to their “own system”.

This can be illustrated in the example of the work in Sri Lanka, as one of the key areas of the Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation is to combine the promotion of the discourse on power sharing and federalism with the reinforcement of local capacities to support constitutional reforms in order to achieve these objectives. This issue was derived from the working hypothesis that an essential part of a just and lasting peace solution is to favour power sharing and federalism concepts in the reform of the Sri Lankan state. In doing this, RNCST makes a point of not propagating a federal solution, but ensures that this term includes several power sharing concepts (which is also why the term “multiple futures” is used). These include asymmetrical autonomy models for the Northeastern Province, various degrees of decentralisation and regionalisation, a federal state in a narrower sense, and can also contain confederal arrangements. The parties themselves have to decide and discuss which of these should ultimately be used as the basis for a solution.

The starting point here is the fact that negotiations at the official level cannot do justice to the extensive challenges of such a far-reaching constitutional reform. What is required, in fact, is a broad discourse – involving society as a whole – on different power sharing concepts, and a variety of places and forums where this issue can be discussed in detail, i.e. where it can be “developed” as a non-threatening, legitimate and efficient state constitution. Besides the traditional instrument of expert workshops, this will involve a wide range of activities: integration in the training and further education programmes of, among others, lawyers, administration officials, journalists, and teachers, studies on partial aspects and alternative concepts, publications for various target groups, media programmes, public forums and panel discussions etc. These diverse activities need the cooperation of various organisations, which is why the goal of the RNCST in this context is to develop a network organisation under the working title of a “Sri Lankan Association of Federalists”.

However, such work with agents of peaceful change, including the processes of social and political change (initiated through the combination of capacity building and dialogue measures) can be successful only if a longer-term process with a detailed structure is established.

Institutionalisation and support through organisational development

One form of effective and sustainable cooperation is that of institutionalisation. This can take various forms, ranging from establishing think tanks close to the stakeholders to support their negotiation strategies, organising inclusive peace secretariats, and creating institutions to prepare and popularise constitutional reforms and power sharing concepts etc.

A key architectural element of the RNCST’s concept of federalism is to develop institutionalised forms of cooperation involving a core group of people who share the vision of resolving the conflict by means of power sharing concepts, and

together will organise a process based on the division of labour. It began with those institutions that had already committed to this issue in the past, such as the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA), as well as a more precise definition of their potential and plans for expanding this field. The next step was to identify those areas of society in which institutionalisation would have particular added value. This resulted in support for the founding of a training centre for members of the public services who had committed to promoting federalism (Institute of Professionals in Public Administration, IPPA).

The Berghof Foundation is currently supporting the institutionalisation of think tanks close to the stakeholders. Among the issues being discussed is the possibility of these establishments being merged into a common multi-ethnic and politically diversified institution.

The founding of the Muslim Peace Secretariat, which was supported by the RNCST, is another example of combining agents of peaceful change – identified within the Muslim community in Sri Lanka – with the development of institutional resources. This process was initially seen within the project as an attempt to help give a voice to the sufferings of the Muslim minority, something that has been largely ignored to date in Sri Lankan society. In the course of the developing institutionalisation of agents of peaceful change networks, the Muslim Peace Secretariat has, in some areas, already been able to play a lobbying role for the political concerns of the Muslim community vis-à-vis official political decision-makers, and will certainly not remain without a voice when official peace negotiations are resumed.

Generally, certain key experiences from the fields of organisational development and change management can be applied to the process of institutionalising support and network structures of local actors:

1. External actors should not only support the institutionalisation of support and network structures on a financial basis but also offer their expert knowledge and advice with regard to processes. Many conflict countries with weak or inefficient state structures often lack the resources for and expert knowledge of precisely this transition phase from short-term, project-related work to medium and long-term institutionalisation, which means that external actors have a special role to play here.
2. Funding should not take place in accordance with the ‘watering-can principle’ and should also not lead to the unquestioning support of individual institutions reputed to be working well. According to Peter Senge, a classic mistake in reform projects and organisational development is to only react to positive developments by increasing input. The systemic approach to expert and process consulting therefore focusses on repeatedly referring to the interacting factors of the conflict system and taking account of these when developing support structures and planning work.
3. The design and implementation of organisational development processes must be aimed primarily at the needs and interests of the local partners or agents of peaceful change, without losing sight of relevant learning experiences from other international peace processes or the systemic principles of multi-partiality and sustainability.
4. Organisational development processes must develop various strategies in line with the objective of the organisations, whether they are intended to fulfil more of a facilitation function in public life (e.g., to popularise certain issues such as federalism), whether they should be informal, specialist and administrative support structures (think tanks, peace secretariats) or whether they

should institutionalise creative techniques for conflict party representatives to generate lasting solutions. Account must also be taken of the important issue of personnel selection and placement.

5. A sufficient level of trust should first be developed in order to engender cooperation between actors and stakeholders who have very different degrees of access to resources or whose relationship is perceived to contain considerable power asymmetries. Secondly, an accepted person should be made available as process facilitator. This structure should be established in institutional terms. To avoid leadership disputes that may damage the outcome-oriented work, it is also essential within heterogeneous networks to gradually develop leadership roles that take account of specialist skills.
6. Systemic planning and systemic learning by means of routine methods is often a long drawn-out process and requires sufficient space and support to enable actors to think out of the box and then refocus on concrete political situations. One example of this is the Peace Review Group, which brought together very different political perspectives. A creative work process developed which, with the aid of adequate moderation and support, promptly resulted in a joint publication. One motivational factor was the common vision of using the window of opportunity at the time prior to the resumption of the official peace negotiations planned for April 2004.

5.5 Creativity in the imagination of sustainable solutions

This sub-section underlines the need to assist conflict actors to develop constructive solutions. This not only involves managing substantive and affective resistances and blockades but also – and especially – taking account of ownership by stakeholders. What is required, then, is an open-

ended shared learning process that can be stimulated by means of “paradoxical interventions”, creative techniques and knowledge transfer.

One feature of violent conflicts is the entrenchment of the conflict parties’ positions. This is especially true in the case of protracted conflicts where there is minimal willingness to generate and test new creative solution models. This would be perceived as a loss due to the conflict parties’ tendency to play the role of victim (whereby the consequences of violence are seen as costs for their own group) and the position of “all or nothing” would dominate. Third parties also have the challenge of contributing to the development of issue-related proposals that are both relevant to the context and acceptable to the actors. Adopting standard solutions or imposing their own ideas for solutions on the conflict parties generally falls on deaf ears or has to be enforced against the actors, as seen in the example of international interim administrations.

Reference will be made to the following components:

- Paradoxical interventions
- Impulses, creative techniques and knowledge transfer
- “Pushing frontiers, not solutions”

Paradoxical interventions

As, by definition, the systemic approach to conflict transformation deals with the interdependencies of various thematic discourses in a “system sensitive” way, it is therefore well placed to identify “blind spots” in the thematic discussions and support the actors in developing creative and viable solutions.

Isolated and insufficiently complex interventions in protracted social conflicts, which are highly self-reproductive internally and very resistant to change, are less effective and can also trigger counterproductive effects. What is required are interventions that are “adequate to the system” or, more precisely “disturb the system”, which

counteract the self-reproductive nature of the conflict and are capable of inducing a system transformation. “System-disturbing” interven-

tions are not necessarily those that tackle resistances but those that allude more to paradoxes and seek to cause creative confusion.

Paradoxical interventions

Paradoxical interventions are all those forms of intervention that aim to send a signal to the client system that is contrary to its expectations: you can only change if you stay as you are. It is widely assumed, particularly in systemic consultancy work relating to double bind situations, that interventions of this type can use strong resistance to change to bring about creative confusion: is it not better for you if the conflict persists? This makes those parts of the conflicts relating to the winners and losers more accessible, along with the fact that conflict management will change this balance.

Paradoxical interventions also include the intervention techniques of reframing, and positive connotations (emphasising good features of certain conflict factors) etc., which aim to develop creative solutions and options.

Impulses, creative techniques and knowledge transfer

Other options are available to third parties to help them support the generation of creative and relevant solutions for complex conflicts. Three of these will be presented in the following section:

1. **Introducing impulses into the conflict system:** The insights and hypotheses obtained by means of systemic analyses (in terms of the system’s own resources) are fed into the conflict system, for example, in the form of studies. This occurred in Sri Lanka in the form of a study on the peace process that was written in conjunction with prominent intellectuals, and which attracted a good deal of publicity.⁷²

2. **Using creative techniques within dialogue workshops:** working with metaphors, mind-mapping, visual synectics (work with pictures), etc. The perspective shift method has proved to be a key and often very effective instrument within problem-solving workshops, dialogue facilitation and mediation, as it can help the conflict actors achieve a much broader view.⁷³
3. **Reflecting on and contextualising experiences outside the system:** learning about and reflecting critically on lessons learned from other conflicts or experiences with other solutions allows the actors to deal more creatively with their own situation (avoiding the blind spots). However, it is important to follow this up by translating these experiences into the context of their own conflict, and where possible, deriving spontaneous conclusions.

“Pushing frontiers, not solutions”

A key feature of sustainable problem-solving processes is the fact that a shared learning process takes place between the stakeholders and

72 Tyrol Ferdinands, Kumar Rupesinghe, Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Jayadeva Uyangoda, Norbert Ropers: *The Sri Lankan Peace Process at Crossroads: Lessons, Opportunities and Ideas for Principled Negotiations & Conflict Transformation*, Colombo 2004.

73 cf. Ljubjana Wüstehube: “Konflikt-Perspektiv-Analyse (KPA) – ein mediationsanaloges Instrument zur konstruktiven Analyse und Bearbeitung von Konflikten”, in: *Perspektive Mediation* 2004, Vol. 1.

with the third party. It makes little sense to push through contents or apparent solutions without taking account of the essential ownership by the conflict parties. Affective reservations and resistances must also be considered and handled constructively, which sometimes requires the third party to have very high degree of sensitivity to the processes being pursued.

In the course of the Berghof Center's work in Sri Lanka, the more general term "power sharing" (as well as "multiple futures" in relation to constitutional reforms as a whole) was chosen over the term "federalism" due to the political reservations about the latter. As the conflict in Sri Lanka is primarily about issues of political power sharing, a constructive solution is highly likely to contain something that looks very much like a federal structure. Many variations of fede-

ral systems have been mentioned in academic debates on current constitutional systems.⁷⁴ Third parties should make use of this wealth of options and assist the conflict parties in finding a relevant and acceptable combination of institutions and regulation.

In principle, there are various ways of supporting the generation of creative solutions by means of seminars, problem-solving workshops and study trips, etc. One stage of systemic conflict transformation would be achieved if, despite external political pressure and internal divisions, it succeeded in establishing these creative processes on a long-term basis, for example in the form of cross-actor networks or other support structures (peace secretariats, specialist think tanks).

⁷⁴ cf. Thomas Fleiner and Lidija R. Basta Fleiner: *Allgemeine Staatslehre. Über die konstitutionelle Demokratie in einer multikulturellen globalisierten Welt*, Berlin: Springer Verlag 2004 (3rd edition).

6. Fields of application and framework conditions

This chapter focusses on the framework conditions required for the use and application of systemic conflict transformation. We will discuss both the limitations of the approach and the matter of possible access for third parties, and will also draw on the findings of the four short studies.

6.1 Use and fields of application of systemic conflict transformation

The systemic approach to conflict transformation, as presented in this study, is of particular benefit to those intermediary organisations (and their partners) engaged in the field of peacebuilding and CCM. The approach offers a variety of starting points to improve practices, for example in the areas of conflict analysis and strategic intervention planning, and can also be of benefit to donor organisation staff. As described in more detail in Chapter 7, it can be used both on the level of management and planning and also for the further development and strategic use of peacebuilding instruments. Lastly, trainers, conflict researchers, mediators and other multipliers involved in CCM and peacebuilding can also benefit from the systemic approach's many innovative ideas for using and developing systemic methods.

Which type of conflict and which conflict phases particularly benefit from the systemic approach?

In principle, the systemic approach improves our understanding and offers guidance for action in relation to all violent inter-group conflicts. This is especially true for conflicts concerning the issues of identity, territory, security and the governance system.⁷⁵ Certain constraints exist in international inter-state conflicts, as the international political system has developed a number of well-established regulation procedures solely involving actors from the UN and the warring states. In inter-state conflicts, it is therefore relatively difficult to identify links to other peacebuilding tracks, for example, although systemic planning and analysis processes may still prove very useful here. However, it should also be noted that some conflicts share features of both inter-state and intra-state conflicts (e.g., in the Balkan region, Caucasus).

The opportunities to apply a systemic approach to peacebuilding can also be restricted in those violent conflicts characterised by state failure and/or the strong economic motives of the conflict parties. The violent actors' strong focus on resources makes a coherent approach on the part of the donor community absolutely essential. However, external political pressure and sanction measures limit the possibilities of constructive engagement, which presents a challenge for an inclusive peacebuilding approach. The same applies to situations of state collapse. Here, the additional issue of the security situa-

⁷⁵ According to Marshall & Gurr: Peace and Conflict 2005, op. cit., there were 25 armed self-determination conflicts in 2004.

tion severely restricts the scope of both international and local actors when violence escalates or reaches high levels (cf. also Section 6.2). In phases of escalation, certain organisations, such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC) in Geneva, try to open up corridors for humanitarian aid and use these interactions to motivate the actors towards more far-reaching measures.

The systemic approach to conflict transformation can, however, be used meaningfully and effectively in the majority of current violent conflicts. As shown in the short studies on Nepal, Sudan and Aceh/Indonesia, this also applies to politically loaded conflicts, for example in Nepal, where the issues relate to the governance system. The systemic approach can be used here by donor organisations to plan and coordinate a coherent strategy. It can also help intermediary organisations and local actors to work together to identify and strengthen agents of peaceful change, and build up key capacities and support/network structures to transform the conflict.

The situation in Aceh/Indonesia and Sudan is somewhat different, as in both cases a peace agreement between conflict actors is already in place (MoU between GAM and the Indonesian government and the peace agreement between SPLA/M and the Sudanese government). In both conflicts – which are essentially about issues of identity, the governance system, economic marginalisation and the fair distribution of natural resources (crude oil and natural gas) – the situation is politically extremely fragile, and an outbreak of a new spiral of violence is a very real risk. There are two important aspects in which Sudan and Aceh differ: a) the power asymmetry, which is extremely prevalent in Aceh/Indonesia and must be taken into account in future con-

flict management activities, and b) the existence of several other escalations of violence and smouldering conflicts in Sudan, one consequence of which is the fact that, if the current peace process is to be successful, it must also integrate the other regional conflicts into the process.

In summary, the systemic approach to conflict transformation is suitable for the pre-negotiation, negotiation and post-negotiation phases of conflicts. It can play a particularly important role in the transition from peace negotiations to the so-called post-conflict phase. This phase in particular often sees a change of policy on the part of the international community. The intensive diplomatic efforts are replaced by reconstruction measures, and external pressure and sanction regimes are lifted as a reward for the peace agreement. The difficulty here is that the actual redistribution processes (of power and resources) are only just beginning, and the conflict parties will try to qualify their agreements, or delay or even totally suspend implementation. This phase contains the greatest risk of renewed outbreaks of violence. All too often it is only possible for some of the peace agreement conditions to be implemented, and sooner or later it is not uncommon for them to erode.⁷⁶ A systemic approach by the donor community should therefore aim to ensure that the knowledge of any weak points and cracks emerging in the negotiation phase is communicated responsibly so that particular attention can be paid to these issue- and process-related aspects. It is also important in this context to build up effective communication structures to include local non-state actors and also develop an adequate peace monitoring mechanism.

76 cf. for example, Barbara Walter's investigation into peace agreements in 72 civil wars in the period from 1940 to 1992. In 62% of cases where formal peace negotiations were held (which was the case in more than half of all civil wars), an agreement/accord was signed. 57% of these agreements were implemented successfully and 43% were not; Barbara Walter: *Committing to Peace. The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2002.

On which conflict management tracks can the systemic approach be applied meaningfully?

In principle, systemic conflict transformation offers entry points on all tracks of conflict management and the approach can also be used productively on all tracks. A conflict analysis that is as comprehensive as possible is essential to the work on all levels. Based on this analysis, hypotheses should then be derived on relevant system levers, areas in the system where pressure can be applied, and opportunities to identify and support agents of peaceful change, etc. It is also advisable to demarcate the boundaries of the relevant consulting system as precisely as possible and regularly cast an analytical eye beyond the limits defined by the system. The third parties naturally have specific scope, restrictions and rules of engagement (such as diplomatic conventions) on each of the different tracks, and the systemic approach to conflict transformation must therefore be adapted to these contexts of application.

However, the core challenge of a systemic approach to conflict transformation is to link the activities on the different levels in such a way that they help to mobilise the system's own resources to transform the conflict.

Third parties generally act on only one track or in the border area between two tracks, and a key requirement of a multi-track approach is therefore a communicative network between different actors. It is important to identify any unutilised potential ("blind spots") beyond the exchange of the various analyses, impact hypotheses and relevant intervention strategies, and clarify the actual and potential interfaces of the respective consulting systems. In this context, multi-track approaches are characterised by three components:

- i) widening the strategic perspectives of the actors working on the different tracks to enable key developments taking place on other tracks to be considered and "borne in mind" (track sensitivity);
- ii) identifying common objectives and effects on a cooperative basis to produce synergies between two or more tracks (track cooperation);
- iii) enabling actors working on different levels to implement joint concrete activities, e.g., supporting the same group of agents of peaceful change (track collaboration).

These types of track networking can take place either within more or less formalised networks (peace support groups) comprising different actors or – more systematically – by bringing in expert and process-specific advice. However, this requires the clear consent of the actors involved.

6.2 Which framework conditions must be in place?

The following section presents the framework conditions required so that a systemic approach to peacebuilding can be implemented meaningfully. It also deals with the fundamental challenges arising from the differences in the roles and functions performed by the intervening actors.

Access and mandates

Access and mandates for peacebuilding activities are very important issues, especially in the context of protracted conflicts with a high potential for escalation. Lack of access to the territory makes the work more difficult although not impossible (activities with proxies, in neighbouring countries or abroad, by local partners, etc.). However, as a multipartial approach, systemic conflict transformation depends on access to the conflict parties as well as their acceptance and support of the measures.

Many factors can complicate or hinder access to the conflict parties. These include:

- a high escalation of violence (security situation);
- resistance to external intervention, defence mechanisms (e.g., in Indonesia, Sudan);
- sanctions on non-state armed groups (NSAG) by listing them as terrorist organisations (for

example, discussions are currently being held in respect of upgrading the current restrictions on the LTTE);

- a high concentration of power-political interests, through UN, NATO or OSCE missions (e.g., in Georgia/Abkhazia).

When determining whether there is adequate access for a systemic approach to conflict transformation, a number of assessments have to be made. These relate to the “acceptance” of the intervention by the country affected by the conflict, and the means of creating a transformative synergy between the international and local actors. It goes without saying that the question of access is largely dependent on the specific situation and can therefore only be answered meaningfully on a case-by-case basis.

As on the Track 1 level, the acceptance of any intervention is very much determined by *Realpolitik* parameters. Nevertheless, inter-societal actors can either achieve greater degrees of scope here (their engagement is perceived as less “threatening” than that of foreign states or IGOs and/or the state concerned lacks the instruments to control them), or, conversely, they can be viewed by one of the conflict parties as a particularly problematical “interference” and rejected. The example of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict shows that, despite an environment dominated to a large extent by different power-political interests, non-state activities at Track 1.5 level perform an important function as they constitute an equivalent to the absent official negotiations. They can therefore act as an essential release valve in terms of crisis management, and also open up communication channels to avert and prevent further escalations of violence.

As already mentioned, an inclusive approach to peacebuilding cannot be implemented if there

is no access to a key conflict party. In phases of conflict escalation, as is currently the case in Nepal, both (or all) sides attempt to prevent any cooperation with the respective opposite side in the fear that their mobilisation capacity will be weakened. However, in some cases, there can be a desire for third parties to help open or maintain unofficial communication channels (back channels). A division of labour is also feasible in other cases, where various organisations work with the conflict parties and coordinate their activities closely. For Nepal, this research project proposes that a strategy of coordinated action on the part of the international community be established, and that the negotiation and conflict management structures (e.g., mediator networks, peace secretariat) be supported and strengthened.

Closely linked to the acceptance in principle is the need to establish a clear mandate to work with the conflict parties. Without such clarification of the tasks and roles, it is difficult to repeatedly justify that the “multipartial” approach requires us to work closely with all the main conflict actors as a matter of principle. The quality of the mandate can vary significantly and can involve a local contract, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) as well as informal arrangements. Besides the conflict parties, it is also important to come to arrangements with other international actors (regional powers, negotiators, friends groups), although it is not usually necessary to obtain mandates from these actors.⁷⁷

There is also the question of whether it is even possible to help transform a conflict by means of a systemic approach if there are no official negotiations at Track 1 level and/or no mandate from the decision-makers for a systemic intervention. As proven by experiences from the fields of organisational development and change man-

⁷⁷ In countries under an international protectorate, it is advised to obtain mandates from the relevant missions that perform quasi-state functions.

agement in particular, sustainable processes of change can only be implemented with the top-level management of an organisation, and not against it. In answering this question, it should be conceded that a sustainable peace process undoubtedly requires official negotiations and agreements between the parties. However, a particular feature of protracted conflicts is the fact that the conflict parties (including the political decision-makers) are trapped in mindsets and actions of violence and counter-violence. There is thus not only a moral but above all a substantive need for the third party to help break through and overcome these spirals of violence.

It is also generally true that conflicts have seen a multitude of experiences with official negotiations that have failed for a number of different reasons. From a systemic perspective, a thorough analysis is therefore required, not only of the reasons for the failure of the earlier rounds of negotiations, but also of the effects on the conflict system. New Track 1 initiatives will then have to take account of the consequences for the actors, issues and potential processes.

When dealing with a refusal to negotiate or a delay in negotiations, the best Track 1 strategy to use depends on the context of and opportunities in the relevant conflict. It is also important to recognise which Best Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) the parties possess, and to analyse these thoroughly. However, it is not always possible to clearly determine the effectiveness and risks of these BATNAs. This opens up opportunities to engage with the parties on Track 1.5 to clarify options, costs and

risks. Track 1.5 and Track 2 processes can also play an important preparatory role in this respect, even when the parties are not ready for official negotiations.

In some cases, a long preliminary phase is required before third parties can expect any formal mandate from the conflict parties. For example, as clearly shown in one of the short studies on Sudan, third parties here have to cooperate very closely with local partners (including political elites) and include the amount of time required to build trust in the planning process. In North Sudan in particular, a high degree of suspicion and mistrust of the objectives and motivation of foreign actors is apparent.⁷⁸

Besides coordinating with the key conflict parties or their proxies, it is also important to take account of the external support structures and incorporate these where relevant. In Sudan, these include the Donor Working Group for Sudan and the IGAD partner states, for example, as well as the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and the AU mission in Darfur. In Aceh/Indonesia, the EU/ASEAN implemented Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) is also a key actor within the conflict management structure.

Despite the overall positive results of UN missions⁷⁹, long-term UN observer missions can themselves become part of the problem, as in the case of UNOMIG (United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia) launched in Abkhazia/Georgia in 1993. This is because they initiate and implement many tasks and responsibilities that would otherwise be assumed by local elites,

78 cf. "Sudan: Conflict Analysis and Options for Systemic Conflict Transformation. A Northern and a Southern View". The study cites the following reasons for the suspicion of foreign actors: "presence of foreign troops; luxury in which donors and INGO staff live; lack of 'win projects' quickly prepared and easily implemented; fundamentalists promote hostility; perception of the exclusiveness of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement as a product of external pressure; flow of aid through third parties, i.e. INGOs; role of external actors in Afghanistan and Iraq; up to date there has been no flow of aid."

79 cf. Human Security Report 2005 (www.humansecurityreport.info); James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones et al: The UN's Role in Nation-Building. From the Congo to Iraq, Santa Monica CA: Rand Corporation 2005.

NGOs or political institutions. However, by doing this, they reduce the political pressure to achieve the requisite comprehensive peace agreement. On the one hand, the issue of legitimate access to the conflict parties is important to systemic conflict transformation in such politically loaded environments. On the other hand, in situations where the conflicts are not resolved but merely frozen, it is also imperative to reflect on new stimuli for these frozen conflict systems. However, the international actors involved have to accept and support this.

In summary, for a systemic approach to conflict transformation, it seems important to consider the overall scenario of the conflict concerned and then decide whether access is feasible and can be adequately planned. In many cases a phased entry is advised along with a rolling planning process geared to the windows of opportunity and feasibilities in the conflict concerned. Access can be gained by thematic approaches, core competences or innovative project methods, and will always require a relationship with the conflict actors or the groups, organisations and individuals close to them.

The time and “ripeness” of a conflict

A few years ago a popular conflict management concept put forward the idea that conflicts have to be “ripe” for management. According to William Zartman, a conflict is ripe when the conflict parties are ready to fundamentally review their political positions and strategies. This occurs, on the one hand, when a position of mutually hurting stalemate has been reached. This is when both parties realise that they cannot achieve their aims by their own efforts, they cannot resolve the problems or they cannot win the (military) conflict. On the other hand, the conflict parties are more prepared to challenge

their position on the use of violence when the conflict escalates or is on the brink of a catastrophe. When both sides see that they cannot afford such a catastrophe, they will be more likely to allow conflict transformation interventions by third parties.⁸⁰

A fair criticism by some authors is that the ripeness concept is very static. Are external actors therefore expected to wait for the moment of ripeness without acting at all? It appears to be more advisable for the third parties to take over the important tasks of acting on the conflict parties’ patterns of perception and making them aware of the consequences of their actions, as well as highlighting options and creating incentives to induce “ripe” behaviour.⁸¹ International pressure and incentives can also make a direct contribution to the creation of ripeness, as Emeric Rogier remarks in relation to Sudan: “Ripeness in Sudan is closely linked to the willingness of the Islamic regime to improve bilateral relations with the United States after September 11th 2001 and avoid potential retaliation.”⁸²

Security regimes

In contexts of weak or collapsing states, systemic conflict management projects can only operate if certain minimum criteria are fulfilled. These include, for example, the existence of state contact persons in order that bilateral framework agreements can be concluded and the implementation of measures coordinated. Certain minimum security standards should also be in place for staff, and a sound knowledge of the political and military actor environment is essential. In cases of systemic interventions in collapsing states, it is very important to have a clear understanding of and communicative engagement with the local non-state armed groups (NSAG).

80 cf. William Zartman: *Ripe for Resolution. Conflict and Intervention in Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989.

81 cf. Fen Osler Hampson: *Nurturing Peace. Why Peace Settlements Succeed or Fail*, Washington: USIP Press 1996.

82 Rogier: *Rethinking Conflict Transformation* 2004, op. cit., p. 23.

Furthermore, in highly escalated conflicts, radical and extremist forces use the opportunity to discredit this kind of intervention as “unreliable foreign interference” that benefits the other side. In cultures of violence in protracted conflicts, this causes security risks of differing degrees of severity for the staff concerned, similar to those for members of humanitarian organisations. It is essential here to undertake a continuous and thorough risk analysis, and use the comparable experiences of humanitarian organisations and non-violent movements to provide an adequate security regime.

Implementation capacities

A systemic approach is challenging. If it is to be used as a basis for a coordinated process involving various actors, it is necessary to ensure that the required capacities are in place.

There is often a lack of skilled international and local personnel in conflict contexts. If “systemic conflict management” is applied as an additional component of existing bilateral development cooperation projects, there is a risk that resources will be lacking in the areas of networking, analysis and the further (political) education of staff, as these do not form part of (traditional) development cooperation. At the same time, from a macropolitical perspective, there are consistent references to the high degree of as yet unrealised potential – in terms of the project staff’s knowledge that could be used for systemic peace interventions – within the decentralised structure of bilateral development projects. To utilise this more fully requires close coordination structures between projects engaged in working in conflict as well as key individuals from the agencies active in the country, embassies and ministries involved.⁸³

When developing a systemic CCM approach from the perspective of the external actor(s), there is a risk that the local partner organisations will either be challenged too much or too little. On the one hand, they are given the task of being the “actual” agents of conflict transformation, with the external actors merely providing them with conceptual and strategic backstopping along with resources. On the other hand, the external actors often consider the level of engagement of the local partner organisations to be unsatisfactory. They then find themselves in danger of taking on more tasks themselves, thereby unintentionally taking power away from their partners. It is therefore advisable to implement a planning process at an early stage that reflects these considerations, and also to initiate timely training and capacity building measures for partners (cf. also Section 5.4).

6.3 Challenges and dilemmas in the role perceptions of international actors

From a historical perspective, while the CCM movement has its roots in the OECD countries, the majority of CCM activities took place in non-OECD countries. The remarkable popularity of CCM approaches along with the criticism of the quasi “colonial” structure of this type of peaceful intervention has since led to a reduction of this asymmetry. However, in principle, there is still a clear dominance of “northern” CCM-NGOs engaged as external actors in southern and eastern conflicts. In the initial phase this often involved the foreign NGO either organising local short-term training courses in CCM and dialogue and problem-solving workshop methods, or inviting partners to similar events in the north.

⁸³ Other questions are: which role do objective and subjectively perceived political and security risks (in Germany and locally) play in DC engagement in the field of systemic conflict management? To what extent should systemic approaches financed by development policy pursue their political goals solely to complement the other bilateral development projects?

The criticism of this “paratrooper” model has since led to two different models for a more adequate local presence. The first comprises a local institutionalised cooperation with one or more local partner organisations, which helps to ensure the legitimacy and quality of the external actors’ engagement. The other model involves founding a local office for the external actors in the conflict region, generally with a mixed team of external and local people. Both models have their advantages and disadvantages and are also combined frequently.

One of the most difficult challenges is to clarify the roles to be combined within a CCM project. The RNCST project attempted to combine roles when working with stakeholders, in terms of the joint capacity building activities and the facilitation of dialogue and problem-solving workshops. How useful this is, if at all, has long been the subject of controversial debate.⁸⁴ The first challenge is that effective capacity building in cooperation with stakeholders requires a process of gradual trust- and relationship-building. The majority of partners in highly escalated conflicts find it difficult to see how the members of an organisation can achieve this with all the other party members at the same time. They question the confidentiality of the information, the loyalties and the partners’ “own opinions”. Because of these concerns, the capacity building activities of enemy parties are often implemented by different organisations.

The second challenge comprises the extent to which the facilitation task is compatible with capacity building. In principle, this combination

can arise in two different forms. The first is as multi-stakeholder capacity building where members of different parties take part, for example, in the same training course. The presence of the warring parties allows their own conflict to be used as a case study in the training course. Secondly, there is the “traditional” dialogue or problem-solving workshop with representatives of several conflict parties. Experience has shown that a facilitator and capacity builder is only credible here if all the parties involved have been able to benefit from the capacity building.

Some CCM schools argue that it is useful to separate these roles completely. This would both enable the facilitation role to be mandated in a more defined way, and also avoid potential friction losses resulting from the overlapping of these two roles. The opposing view is that it is often only the capacity building process that creates the level of trust required for the facilitation. Our experiences to date have shown us that both viewpoints are valid. From a systemic standpoint it is therefore recommended to discuss the relevant roles with the partners and elicit their thoughts and reservations in joint consultations.

The challenges outlined briefly here are also relevant for donor organisations involved in international cooperation. The next chapter will discuss the ways in which these organisations can use the experiences of systemic conflict transformation, and also present the starting points and restrictions of the approach.

84 See Haumersen, Rademacher, Ropers: Die Workshopmethode, op. cit., 2002.

7. Benefits and limitations of the approach for international donors

The intention of this chapter is to illustrate how donors can benefit from the experiences and new ideas that emerged during the development of a systemic approach to conflict transformation. We will primarily focus on the Swiss and German institutions, especially BMZ and DFA, the sponsors of the study. We will refer to the activities that help to fund, plan and implement civilian conflict management initiatives and that frequently take place in the field of development cooperation, but will not include the good offices and political dialogue of diplomacy. If appropriately transferred, these ideas could be of benefit to other donor organisations.

Systemic conflict transformation can be used both as an analytical approach on the meta level (e.g., for the strategic placement of donor-financed interventions), and also as a methodological approach for developing interventions. In practice, there can be overspills between the two levels, however to present them more clearly we will separate them into sections 7.1 and 7.2.

Before presenting the practical benefits and limitations of the approach, it should be mentioned that the opportunities to apply a systemic approach to conflict transformation naturally depend on the context of the relevant conflict. Other restrictions also apply in conflicts dominated by different power-political interests (see

also Chapter 6). The following considerations must therefore be reviewed in the context of the situation to which they should be applied.

7.1 Strategic planning, political management and coordination of donor contributions to peacebuilding on the basis of systemic conflict transformation

Systemic conflict transformation can provide practical ideas for the strategic planning, management and coordination of donor contributions. As emphasised in both the OECD/DAC guidelines on crisis prevention and the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, peacebuilding measures can be effective if they are applied strategically, and planned and coordinated on the basis of a joint conflict analysis. Although the majority of donors, including DFA and BMZ, have subsequently produced strategy documents and planning concepts⁸⁵, in practice the strategic design and management of concrete measures still presents a great challenge.

The highly and frequently recommended joint conflict analysis constitutes a good entry point. It is produced by the donors, if possible as a group, and is intended as a starting point for their planning and coordination activities. It has proved useful in peacebuilding to focus the analysis on the general understanding of the

⁸⁵ DFA: Bill to parliament concerning a credit facility for measures relating to conflict transformation and the promotion of human rights (Oct. 2002, passed by parliament in Dec. 2003), BMZ: Sector strategy for crisis prevention, conflict transformation and peacebuilding in German development cooperation, June 2005.

conflict structures and dynamics, the role of the international community, the need for peacebuilding and the requisite strategic entry points. This information is equally valuable for all donors, even though the analysis is generally coordinated and funded by either a single donor or a small group of donors.⁸⁶

Preparing a conflict analysis should not be a one-off activity and should be repeated regularly to enable the evaluations to be reviewed on an ongoing basis. In Sri Lanka, this exercise has been carried out by the donor community every 5 years, utilising the same methods and lead expert consultants to ensure the relative comparability of findings.⁸⁷ The donor community in Sri Lanka also mandated the Center for Policy Alternatives, a political research institute, to produce quarterly monitoring reports to ensure that all the organisations receive the same information on the conflict situation at the same time. While the exchanges about these analyses are well organised within the donor community, the documents are only distributed to a limited extent outside this circle. The strategic conflict analysis is published but this has not been the case so far with the monitoring documents. There is unrealised potential here as these could provide opportunities to enter into dialogue with the conflict parties and/or non-state conflict management actors, and the analyses could also be used as a basis for developing solutions. However, one must also bear in mind the diplomatic considerations of holding this dialogue publicly at a time when the peace process has stagnated.

The joint activities take place in the so-called Donor Working Group on the Peace Process (now called the Donor Peace Support Group), which is coordinated by each of the donors in

turn. From a systemic perspective, it is interesting to note that

1. the group was set up as a technical coordination group and is mainly attended by conflict advisers from the embassies and donors. In this scenario, a good cooperation with the ambassadorial level is essential to ensure that the information and coordination activities flow into the international community's policy positions. The work here should focus specifically on developing expertise in relation to conflict and peace.
2. the donor group represented reflects the traditional understanding of development cooperation, but not the group of international and regional stakeholders. In order to adequately incorporate the conflict system environment into the analysis and, above all, the coordination activities, any group with such an objective would have to include regional hegemonial powers, such as, for example, China and India, which do not (yet) rank among the traditional donor representatives. This is currently being promoted with India in the case of Sri Lanka, and the peace process between North and South Sudan also offers exciting opportunities to include different interest groups.

Many of the donor group activities described here take place in conjunction with the RNCST, and it is helpful from the point of view of the donor community to incorporate advisory services. In the context of a systemic approach to conflict transformation, it is useful to include the international community as an important stakeholder in one's analysis and, where relevant, activities, as well as to engage construc-

86 Details on the methodology of conflict analyses can be found in Chapter 5.

87 Jonathan Goodhand: *Aid, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka*, London: CSDG - Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, University of London 2001, and Jonathan Goodhand et al.; Bart Klem, et al: *Aid, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka 2000-2005*. Colombo: Asia Foundation 2005.

tively to generate empathy and inclusive action within this heterogeneous group of actors. The example of Sri Lanka shows exactly what influence the donor community can have on the course of the peace process.

Furthermore, the Berghof Foundation in Sri Lanka has particularly close relationships with the two donors, both in terms of information sharing and advisory activities, which go beyond the local monthly meetings and half-yearly meetings at their headquarters.

7.2 Opportunities for the German and Swiss peacebuilding instruments to use systemic conflict transformation

Besides applying systemic analysis and methodology to the strategic management and coordination of international cooperation, the systemic approach can also stimulate ideas for designing peacebuilding instruments. The following section focusses on the instruments, thematic priority areas and “vessels” of German and Swiss peacebuilding, however the different ministerial responsibilities limit the extent to which they can be compared.⁸⁸

As is common in international cooperation (IC), the instruments of the two donors are still in the development phase. The last 10 years have seen an intensive debate on issues of conflict sensitivity and the mainstreaming of this theme within IC, and guidelines and concepts on the subject are available in both countries. Both donors also play an active role on the international level, for example in the OECD. However, the practical use of these guidelines is less advanced, as is the

practice of reviewing existing IC instruments and adjusting and tailoring them for the purposes of conflict transformation.⁸⁹ The following considerations will hopefully be incorporated into both the current development phase and the reflections on initial experiences with the existing approaches, as well as being used to stimulate further discussion.

At this point we will also mention the political risk for state international cooperation portfolios and diplomatic relations resulting from the support for conflict transformation activities during acute crises in peace processes. This risk not only relates to the unpleasant fact that third parties are often criticised more for their engagement in such critical phases. On top of this, transformative principles such as inclusivity and constructive engagement with non-state armed groups constitute huge challenges for state funding instruments, which are primarily committed to the state’s diplomatic obligations and justifying expenditure to voters and tax payers. So the extent to which the principles of systemic conflict transformation can be maintained by state actors, and how far the state’s funding regulations hamper the non-state agencies’ ability to adhere to these principles, must be examined on a case-by-case basis.

For Sri Lanka, the actual situation is demonstrating that international sanction mechanisms, by the EU for example, can severely restrict the opportunities for individual donors to support long-term conflict transformation activities. This gives Switzerland, as a “neutral/multipartial state” more scope in terms of decision-making, enabling it continue to play an active role in guiding and supporting the peace process.

88 We will use the terminology in the respective common parlance.

89 We will primarily make reference to thematic priority areas, instruments and forms of funding here, as the methodological discourse on the further development of PCIA, for example, is already illustrated extensively elsewhere; see, for example, Alex Austin, Martina Fischer & Oliver Wils (eds.): *Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment – Critical Views on Theory and Practice*, Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series No. 1, Berlin 2003 and current contributions under: www.berghof-handbook.net.

The German instruments

The recommendations for the German instruments are primarily geared towards developing strategies on specific priority areas to further reinforce the areas of crisis prevention, civilian conflict management and peacebuilding. This is achieved by using development cooperation (DC) instruments in the field of conflict transformation, and creating institutional framework conditions within the DC institutions. As in the previous sections, rather than focussing on the establishment of conflict sensitivity as a cross-cutting function of DC, we will examine the targeted use of DC to build peace (identified at project level with the marker C1).

Identifying thematic priority areas

When identifying priority areas and developing strategies, the experiences of the RNCST in particular offer exciting ideas for linking priority areas thematically. In terms of thematic priority area, the project in Sri Lanka has moved closer to the area of governance, especially the promotion of democracy and decentralisation. This is not surprising in an ethnopolitical conflict that is essentially about constitutional issues and power sharing. By contrast, the other activities in the actual priority area of PACT (Poverty Alleviation and Conflict Transformation) produce significantly fewer synergies. It would therefore be interesting for a systemic approach to consider focussing more on this key area. Similarly, linking transformation activities with relevant governance aspects in Aceh could also prove useful, as decentralisation is an important issue here as well.

Another important example of linking areas thematically within priority strategies is the support of independent media, peace journalism and balanced reporting. Although relatively ignored in German development cooperation, this area should not be underestimated in conflict transformation. It can give the role of spoilers more importance, work on resistances and, last but not least, increase the acceptance and tolerance of DC contributions to conflict transformation.

It is the last reason in particular that is prompting the RNCST to consider undertaking activities in the field of journalism/media cooperation.

An important instrument used in German development cooperation to determine thematic priority areas are priority strategy papers (Schwerpunktstrategiepapiere – SSP). BMZ uses these to present the fundamental issue-related problems of the relevant country and propose strategic criteria for state development cooperation. (These papers also offer guidance for non-state development cooperation.) They are coordinated with the state partners and discussed with German civil society. Conflict-related SSPs are produced for all countries in which civilian conflict management constitutes a priority area of German DC. As a key coordination instrument of the BMZ, SSPs offer a variety of opportunities to initiate and implement a systemic approach to conflict transformation. This involves preparing a systemic conflict analysis (including scenario planning) and specifically focussing the implementation strategies on “multi-issue” and “multi-track” approaches. Particular emphasis is placed here on deepening the interfaces between the different thematic approaches (e.g., conflict management with governance, media, poverty, environment, gender). The process of producing the SSPs could be broadened even further to comply with the principle of “inclusivity” (e.g., consultations with national, non-state partners of German DC). Furthermore, SSPs provide a too rarely used basis for coordinating activities with other bilateral and multi-lateral actors and thereby increasing the coherence and complementarity of the joint process.

Forming networks

It has become apparent in Sri Lanka – and also from previous experiences in Sudan – that insufficient account is taken of the vertical connections between the tracks when planning projects, and also that the resources required for subsequent consultations and coordination are relatively high. However, the Berghof Foundation has developed a good practice for cooperation, for

example in the FLICT project (Facilitating Local Initiatives for Conflict Transformation), which is predominantly active at Track 3 level and manages a peace fund. It is advisable to establish the links between the tracks at the outset, and not to focus on German DC alone. Account should also be taken of other donors' activities within similar fields of action as well as those of INGOs financed by other donors, such as International IDEA, Conciliation Resources, International Alert or Asia Foundation.

INGOs represent important partners locally but do not really play a role in donor coordination at political levels, even though they handle the peacebuilding contributions of many bilateral donors. Consideration should therefore be given to how these organisations can be involved more in the coordination activities, both locally and also in Germany (or Switzerland – see reference to strategic partnerships).

In Germany, the Working Group on Development and Peace (FriEnt) establishes round tables on specific countries to improve the communication and coordination between the state and non-state organisations engaged in civilian conflict management. Here too, there is potential to further deepen this cooperation by creating “networks of effective action”, enabling joint conflict analysis and monitoring activities, the discussion of strategic issues, and exchanges of “good practices” and learning experiences. Admittedly, there is still the problem of how to communicate the discussions held in Germany to the local actors. As an alternative, some countries have already initiated approaches to use regular and jointly implemented conflict and environment monitoring activities to deepen the dialogue between the actors engaged in managing the conflict, thereby establishing a common basis for forming strategies and making decisions.

Complementarity of state and non-state actors

The increased coordination within German DC should not mean that the organisations con-

cerned should give up their original approaches and methods. They should rather consider a meaningful division of labour between the individual actors within a “multi-issue” and “multi-track” approach. This becomes especially clear when dealing with non-state actors. The aforementioned challenges in relation to dealing with non-state armed groups suggest that the limitations placed on activities of non-state actors, both in terms of constructive engagement and supporting the transformation of NSAGs, are less restrictive than those placed on official DC instruments. Because of this, the separation of the RNCST from the official DC has long been a matter of importance. However, the potentially imminent EU listing of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation is a problem, as the state funding of the project will also restrict its scope. Creative solutions must be found here if state actors want to provide targeted and reliable support for engaging with and transforming non-state armed groups.

Given these restrictions on inclusive and multi-party processes for official DC, it would appear particularly beneficial for the instruments of political foundations, the German Development Service (DED) and the Civil Peace Service (ZFD), to adopt the principles and normative foundations of systemic conflict transformation. Up until now, an instrumental gap has existed in terms of combining specialist expertise and consulting activities with adequate funds to support the local partners of all parties, and institutional independence to avoid being tied to a single sponsor close to a conflict party. It would be interesting here to consider combining the individual instruments in a targeted way. However, it should be noted that cooperation between different institutions requires an even higher degree of the already high level of resources needed for political management and coordination, which can only be reduced to a limited extent by the division of labour and clarification of roles.

Linking the various levels of systemic conflict transformation

German DC has an extensive portfolio in the majority of traditional fields of international cooperation, such as primary education, income promotion, resource management, poverty reduction, the promotion of self-help groups and civil society, decentralisation, good governance etc. Many of these approaches tackle the root causes of violent conflicts and/or work on the so-called Track 3 level, and some may also tackle particular sub-systems of the conflict. Up until now, there has not been sufficient strategic application of such measures in civilian conflict management. The “C”-marker introduced in 2005 attempts to indirectly raise the conflict relevance of these initiatives as a “cross-cutting issue”. However, this procedure is unable to ensure the required systemic and strategic intervention planning described in Chapter 2. Systemic conflict transformation too must submit even more sophisticated concepts here, enabling the three tracks of conflict management to be integrated on a deeper level within a systemic process of planning and action.

Institutional framework conditions

Although this chapter focusses on BMZ initiatives, this does not mean that other fields of politics do not demonstrate significant points of systemic conflict transformation. Not only should the Federal Foreign Office instruments (FEM [budget line for peacekeeping measures], funds for small-scale initiatives for embassies) be specifically integrated in the country-related planning and coordination of DC instruments, but consideration should also be given to combining the instruments at a conceptual level. The targeted use of these funding instruments – for example for long-term strategic partnerships with peacebuilding actors, or to provide focussed support for selected peace processes – would help to raise Germany’s profile in the field of peacebuilding.

Conflict transformation requires a very large number of highly qualified and well-informed staff. Donors often employ special expert advisers who

can help to manage the projects professionally and also become involved in political analysis and policy making. The German Federal Government is facing particular challenges in view of the configuration of its ministries. Nevertheless, in order to develop its own competences further, it would be useful to evaluate the experiences of other donors, such as Switzerland, in conjunction with its political consultants at the embassies or the DFID.

Training

Over the last few years, several forums for the training and advanced training of specialist conflict management staff have emerged in Germany. These all have their own specific target groups and include the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), InWent – Capacity Building International, and the Academy for Conflict Transformation for the Civil Peace Service field. InWent, in particular, offers regional advanced training courses on this subject area, which are directed towards peace activists and experts from the conflict regions. Here too there is potential to promote the developing networks of participants more in terms of “networks of effective action”. Another possibility would be to combine these training courses more with dialogue formats and “systemic relationship work” between conflict party representatives.

Similarly, advanced training and training concepts can also produce interesting initiatives. It is noticeable here that the German programmes are more or less geared to the DC instruments on a technical level, but concern themselves little with macropolitical issues such as constitutional/state models and electoral systems, or legal foundations such as international law. Yet these subject areas are generally at the centre of violent political conflicts.

The Swiss instruments

This section will focus on the instruments of those Swiss institutions primarily involved in CCM, such as the DFA’s Political Affairs Division IV (“Human Security”), the Conflict Prevention

and Transformation (COPRET) department of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the Center for Peacebuilding (KOFF) of swisspeace, the Swiss Peace Foundation. The following instruments will be divided into “thematic priority areas” (support of Tracks 1, 1.5 and 2; constitutional issues, decentralisation and power sharing) and “existing vessels” (training; peacebuilding advisers; strategic partnerships; PAD IV-NGO meetings).

Supporting Tracks 1, 1.5 and 2

One of the main responsibilities of the Political Affairs Division IV is to support Tracks 1, 1.5 and 2 in peace processes. Current discussions revolve around the ways to specifically improve the horizontal and vertical linkage of Tracks 1-3, and promote a multi-level policy. Tangible overlaps with the systemic approach can be found here in terms of the “multi-stakeholder dialogue” and “network management” issues encountered by PAD IV programme staff when contacting and selecting local partner organisations. Discussions with local Track 1-3 actors on issues of “developing and institutionalising a support system” and “inclusivity” would also offer potential starting points.

Constitutional issues/decentralisation/power sharing

For the DFA, the issues of “constructive engagement”, “inclusivity” and a “multi-stakeholder dialogue” are of key importance in this field, particularly in view of the current discussions about the role of “Switzerland as a pro-active peace actor”, and the matter of dealing with non-state armed groups.

The question of how far Switzerland should – more explicitly than previously – act as a “pro-active peace actor” also forms part of the current debate on mediation and the specific role of Switzerland in international mediation processes (this discussion is being followed by the Mediation Support Project (MSP) of swisspeace). “Combining dialogue

and capacity building” is an important discussion point within PAD IV, particularly in relation to the development and increased institutionalisation of the PAD IV staff’s mediation competences.

The DFA’s engagement in mediation raises key issues in terms of how it sees itself politically, not least in view of its work with “non-state armed groups”. The ongoing work with NSAGs in the PAD IV country programmes provides important opportunities to intensify the debate on systemic conflict transformation, particularly in terms of “systemic relationship work” and “constructive engagement”. Ideal and direct links are also apparent in the SDC’s long-standing work with NSAGs in the field of “humanitarian aid”, “democratisation” and “demobilisation, decommissioning and re-integration”, where issues of “inclusivity” and “constructive engagement” form important cornerstones of its work.

Non-state armed groups also play an important role in terms of the political significance of the diaspora and their integration into the peace process. The PAD IV is currently using the example of the Sri Lankan diaspora in Switzerland to discuss the extent to which the diaspora can and should be more involved in peacebuilding activities. KOFF is also tackling “non-state armed groups” as a new field of work for 2006, and the lessons learned from the inclusion of NSAGs in international peace processes are to be at the forefront of these activities. Furthermore, ways to include this subject more in the KOFF instruments are also being explored, such as in the geographical and thematic round tables.

Training

In many aspects the training course of the “Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding” (SEP)⁹² already takes a holistic approach and therefore provides good opportunities to discuss the principles and core elements of the systemic

92 In conjunction with SWISSINT, Ministry of Defence.

approach. The systemic approach could be accentuated more in the form of substantive modules on issues of “inclusivity”, “constructive engagement” and “multi-stakeholder dialogue”. This could be achieved by using concrete examples from Sri Lanka, Georgia-Abkhazia etc., together with practical exercises, such as “scenario building” or systemic conflict analysis. Similar starting points can be found in the annual KOFF training courses on conflict analysis and the SDC’s “mediation” training series”.⁹³ The key challenge for all training modules will be to follow them up in the form of political and analytical support as well as regular monitoring.

Peacebuilding Advisers (PBAs)

Until now, the experiences in Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Columbia, Guatemala, the Balkans, the Middle East, Nepal, Central Asia and Angola have shown that PBAs have already done and are still doing important work in relation to the systemic approach, albeit with differing levels of intensity. Concrete examples include their experiences with non-state armed groups, “multi-stakeholder dialogue” processes and questions of “inclusivity”. Their experiences highlight the importance of the political and professional supervision and support from the PAD IV. A first step would have to be to systematically evaluate the PBAs’ previous experiences in terms of their impact and effectiveness. This could clarify the extent to which their impact could be increased even further by a systemic approach to conflict transformation. In addition, consideration should be given to how far additional human rights advisers could complement and support PBAs in their “systemic relationship work” (human rights advisers can

currently be found in China, Vietnam and Iran, and are expected soon in Sri Lanka).

*Strategic partnerships*⁹⁴

The concept and selection of “strategic partnerships” can be seen as a successful attempt on the part of the PAD IV to build up and support “agents of peaceful change” in terms of a “critical mass”, and enable a “comparison of different perspectives”. The PAD IV is already holding discussions with its strategic partners on issues of “constructive engagement”, “multi-stakeholder dialogue” and “network management” in the context of the systemic approach. The geographical and thematic round tables organised by KOFF, among others, play an important role here.⁹⁵

PAD IV-NGO meetings

The regular meetings between the management of selected NGOs, relief organisations and PAD IV allow the targeted discussion of issues of “systemic relationship work”, “network management” and “multi-stakeholder dialogues”.

The issues of “thematic priority areas” and “existing vessels” exemplify the fact that core elements of the systemic approach are already inherently contained in the portfolio of the Swiss institutions concerned. Still to be explored is the extent to which the experiences already gathered with the systemic approach in Sri Lanka, Georgia-Abkhazia etc. can be utilised in an even more targeted fashion for the existing portfolio. There is also the question of how far the starting points in the above two areas can help to develop the systemic approach further.

93 See the programme for the series “Modulare Ausbildung Mediation 2005-2006” under http://www.sdc.admin.ch/ressources/deza_product_de_711.pdf

94 See <http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/e/home/foreign/humsec/frpziv/sp.html> and http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/e/home/foreign/humsec/Public/focusblaetter.ContentPar.0040.UpFile.tmp/dc_050928_sp_e.pdf

95 See also recommendations from the KOFF Evaluation Report <http://www.swisspeace.org/koff/uploads/website/KOFFEvaluationberichtFinal.pdf> (German) http://www.swisspeace.org/koff/uploads/website/ZusammenfassungKOFFevaluation_e.pdf (English summary)

8. Summary and recommendations

8.1 Summary and analysis of results

This study is based on the premise that new and innovative peacebuilding strategies are required in order to constructively and successfully transform violent conflicts on a long-term basis. On the one hand, these strategies must take account of the high level of complexity and dynamics of conflicts. On the other hand, given the sometimes extremely difficult *Realpolitik* circumstances (domination of power-political interests in conflicts, lack of regulatory framework, “discourse on terrorism”, etc.), they must also be able to offer local actors and international third parties a conceptual framework to enable them to

- i) identify highly effective and efficient entry points for peacebuilding programmes and measures,
- ii) develop a clear and comprehensible peacebuilding strategy, and
- iii) create a framework to help establish and promote communication, cooperation and partnership with other local, international, state and non-state actors.

The basic principles, conceptual foundations, necessary framework conditions and methods of systemic conflict transformation have been presented against this background. These are based on the recent debate of academics and practitioners involved in civilian conflict management, as well as the experience and knowledge gained by the Berghof Foundation in both Sri Lanka and the Caucasus. Although this study is an initial conceptual appraisal and more practical experiences would have to be gained, we believe that the elements of systemic conflict

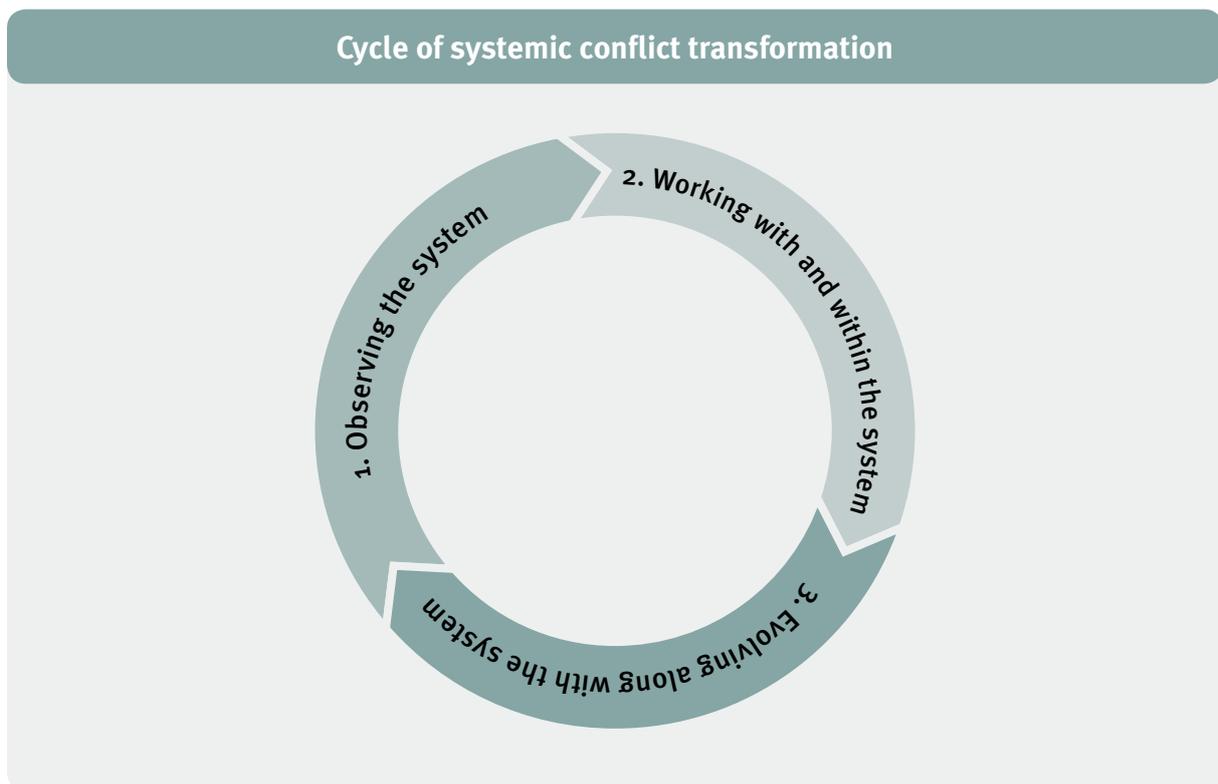
transformation presented here illustrate its significant innovative potential. They also show that this approach can identify new perspectives in peacebuilding analysis and practice, and open the door to creative thinking and flexible action.

Above all, we believe that the systemic approach has the following five strengths:

1. The systemic approach to conflict transformation guides individuals, organisations and networks towards an open-ended and “complexity-sensitive” way of thinking and acting, without blurring the necessary focus on specific details and factors.
2. The systemic approach to conflict transformation is flexible and integrative, therefore inviting a creative, inter-disciplinary exchange.
3. In terms of analysing and assessing complex situations and dynamics, as well as developing scenarios for the future, systemic conflict transformation offers a multitude of important initiatives and stimuli for both third parties and local actors.
4. By applying methodologies which encourage “thinking out of the box”, a shift in perspective and challenging of accepted ideas, systemic conflict transformation can help improve intervention methods; some systemic tools (e.g., the fishbowl method) are already being applied in workshops and dialogue processes, however there is much demand for them to be developed further.

5. Systemic conflict transformation makes an important contribution to establishing a strategic planning framework to coordinate and link different activities, levels of activity and actors.

In summary, the systemic approach to conflict management represents a dynamic, non-linear approach that can be characterised by the following stages:



Cycle of systemic conflict transformation

1. Observing the system

- regular analysis, monitoring and assessment
- understanding the complexity (“complexify”) and identifying doable intervention strategies (“simplify”)

2. Working with and within the system

- critical-constructive engagement
- understanding of own role and its constraints
- supervision and “outsider’s perspective”

3. Evolving along with the system

- joint learning processes with partners and anticipation of reactions from the system
- flexibility
- adapting intervention strategies

It could be argued that the main weakness of the systemic approach is the many conditions which must be in place to facilitate its application. This has less to do with the minimum requirements derived from the operation of the conflict system, and more to do with the difficulty of embedding them in practical routines:

1. Systemic conflict transformation requires substantial inputs of time and resources:
 - i) As CCM initiatives generally take place in a highly dynamic political environment, it is important for these to be flexible, responsive to new scenarios and also capable of effectively using the emerging windows of opportunity (which is what they are working to create). A flexible approach can only evolve fully if a long-term engagement is possible or intended, and fundamental objectives and strategies do not have to be adapted too often;
 - ii) Systemic approaches are set up so that different instruments can take effect on different tracks, i.e. the individual actors are afforded greater flexibility in terms of methodology. In order to respond to new challenges, it can be necessary to access the special expertise of other organisations and therefore integrate these into the systemic approach as additional partners;
 - iii) The project implementation phase also requires high levels of resources for consistent partner orientation, network maintenance, confidence/trust-building and information sharing. However, the systemic approach may also help to achieve savings in the medium term, as processes aimed at continuous partnerships or, at the very least, cooperation can enable individual actors to concentrate on core competences.
2. Systemic conflict transformation presupposes that organisations involved in international cooperation will rethink their attitudes and undergo a change in mentality – shifting away from unilinear planning feasibilities

towards sensitive and long-term process monitoring, and also away from thinking in terms of “our project” towards engaged and credible support for local partners. The aim is to achieve a strong cooperation culture and partner orientation. Furthermore, because external notions of regulatory structures and process designs cannot simply be transferred and imposed on a conflict system, it is also necessary to focus on the problem-solving capacities of actors from the system.

3. Systemic conflict transformation requires very well-trained key personnel who display a high level of openness and have the excellent process and mediation skills needed to implement systemic approaches. Occasionally, external expert and process moderators (and possibly a “system consultant” for network processes) have to be brought in for peace-building projects and programmes. Moreover, the essence of systemic conflict transformation cannot be contained in a simple method box. On the contrary, the ‘one tool catches all’ philosophy is diametrically opposed to its very nature.
4. Not a weakness, but certainly a difficulty of the approach, is how to communicate and define key concepts clearly. As systemic approaches have become so popular, the notion prevails that: “everything is systemic, but what exactly does systemic mean?” Therefore, types of systemic approaches and key categories such as agents of peaceful change should be defined and communicated clearly. These definitions should also continue to be refined in conceptual terms over and above the findings of this study.

8.2 Unresolved issues and perspectives

We believe that the following three areas are vital to the further development of systemic conflict transformation:

Firstly, the practical application of the systemic approach would benefit from more learning experiences and further conceptual development, particularly in the area of conflict analysis and project planning instruments (including “systemic M & E”). Existing systemic planning methods (including SINFONIE⁹⁶ and the scenario analysis method) could be applied here, as well as the experiences gained from using “simple” systemic conflict analysis tools. The issue of a systemic monitoring approach, or rather a monitoring system for the multi-issue and multi-track approaches that are increasingly being implemented by organisations involved in international cooperation (e.g., within integrated or cross-sectoral concepts), will continue to occupy the field for the next few years. In the context of the static debate on PCIA/PCA⁹⁷, systemic conflict transformation could also introduce new and essential stimuli into the field.

Secondly, we consider that the systemic approach has very great potential for networks and other cooperation structures. This should continue to be explored in the areas of cross-organisational analysis, strategy planning and management, and defined further in conceptual and methodological terms. We were unable to achieve this within this study as it would have required further empirical investigations and a clear mandate from the organisations involved. In terms of a systemic approach to peacebuilding that spans organisational interests, we can see entry points both in multilateral frameworks (CPN, CPDC/DAC) and also in a national context (e.g., in the form of multi-track approaches and strategies).

Thirdly, in the area of systemic network management, a more thorough analysis is required, particularly of the formal and informal coordination and support structures in peace processes – those of the international actors as well as those used for the communication, coordination and interaction between international and local actors. No investigation yet has systematically evaluated these experiences (those of the donor working groups, friends groups, peace commissions and support structures for the mediators and facilitators), both in terms of their roles in the peace process, and the internal learning experiences gained.

8.3 Recommendations

Which further steps and activities can be derived from this study? We would like to make the following recommendations, which, on the one hand, relate directly to the systemic approach and on the other, also reflect certain matters of principle. The recommendations are addressed to us (BFPS) and other intermediary organisations interested in applying and developing the systemic approach to conflict transformation further, as well as the two donors in the study, DFA and BMZ.

Recommendations to BFPS and other CCM organisations

We are convinced that the systemic approach to conflict transformation will make a significant contribution to the conceptual and strategic development of peacebuilding practice. Building on the results of this study, the systemic approach can and should be defined more precisely and also modified, both in terms of its concept and its application. We are therefore proposing the following areas for our future engagement, and wish to promote an intensive

⁹⁶ cf. Section 5.1 for details on SINFONIE, the method developed by Denkmodell.

⁹⁷ For details on the debate on PCIA and PCA, see most notably the discussion contributions in the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation: www.berghof-handbook.net.

exchange of experiences and knowledge with BFPS partners and other interested organisations working on conflict:

1. To *produce, develop and adapt systemic methods of conflict transformation*, especially in the fields of conflict analysis, intervention planning (e.g., process architecture) and systemic impact monitoring. Methodological development should take place, for example, within the framework of BFPS's field projects and also in cooperation with the Berghof Research Center.
2. A *greater systematisation and application of systemic methodologies and conflict transformation approaches in dialogue and problem-solving workshops*. Besides Berghof's own experiences, a more intensive exchange should be sought with partner organisations, such as Conciliation Resources, One-Text-Initiative or Crisis Management Initiative (CMI).
3. To *reinforce and promote the systematic management of learning experiences*, we propose integrating learning loops and action research components into all major long-term and methodologically innovative peacebuilding projects and programmes. With support from action researchers, regular reflection on the projects could take place to achieve systemic knowledge management, thus systematising learning outcomes (which only then allows the transfer of experience) and also offering feedback on the projects/programmes themselves. It is in complex programmes in particular that conflicting goals between different programme components can be better understood and evaluated, and potential linkages to other projects and activities identified.
4. We want to continue and intensify the *dialogue about systemic conflict transformation* through publications but especially through workshops and seminars. These seminars can be used as exchange forums between organisations with

similar experiences and knowledge. However, we also feel it would be meaningful to link the exchanges on systemic conflict transformation with further educational components, as planned with DFA and BMZ, for example.

5. As regards the practice of systemic conflict transformation, we will continue to offer support and *advice for other international organisations and donors*, e.g., in the context of donor working groups or with respect to the development of other peacebuilding structures (peace support groups; peace secretariats, etc.).

Recommendations to donor organisations

6. To facilitate the use of the systemic approach by donors, clear entry points should be identified. A distinction should also be made between the fields of application at the level of political management and coordination, and the use of the systemic approach for the further development of tools. To further clarify how the approach should be applied, for example, *a pilot project on systemic conflict transformation* could be incorporated into an existing peacebuilding programme and targeted advisory services offered in the fields of application mentioned above.
7. We recognise that there is a considerable need for action on the part of the international community in facilitating the transition from peace negotiations to the *post-conflict phase* (both in the development of support structures and in process monitoring). We therefore recommend that the applicability of systemic approaches be tested in multi-actor contexts, specifically in this transitional phase, which is highly sensitive in political terms.
8. The application of systemic approaches requires all those involved to show flexibility, openness and creativity in developing viable solutions, which may also necessitate greater inputs of time and resources. We therefore recommend that donor organisations provide

the resources necessary for a comprehensive analysis of the conflict system, strategic planning, reflection and learning when undertaking pilot projects and implementing systemic approaches. However, these analyses and learning experiences should also be made available to other organisations so that, on balance, no additional resources are spent on activities that are not widely used.

9. The systemic approach is largely based on inclusivity and cooperation. This requires working in partnership and greater incentives for coordination and cooperation as the basis for fruitful inter-agency dialogue between local and international actors. Alongside a minimum level of transparency and trust as well as the right balance of commitment and autonomy on the part of the actors involved, it undoubtedly also requires *incentives from the international donor community, such as explicit support for networks and joint activities involving different actors*.
10. The use of systemic conflict transformation at management and instrumental level should be linked with *advanced training for donor organisations' staff* in these areas. This would involve clarifying the components that are particularly relevant to the systemic approach, and the framework in which this advanced training could take place (internal working groups or operational circles, further training for PBAs, internal teams responsible for crisis prevention/conflict management). Consideration should also be given to whether systemic conflict transformation components could be integrated into the regular in-house training activities.
11. However, the implementation of systemic approaches to peacebuilding also places huge requirements on project personnel (expert, methodological and process skills). We therefore recommend that *capacity building and training measures be provided and promoted for actors from the conflict countries* at a very early stage. Participants in these measures can then help to develop a programme of systemic conflict transformation in their own countries.
12. To support the proposed training measures, we strongly encourage a process of reflection on *support and funding for south-south cooperation*. Regional networks and exchange programmes between actors in conflict countries can help to reduce the existing dependency relationships between the south and the north. This greatly benefits systemic approaches in many ways, especially because actors from the region have a far greater knowledge of the political, historical, economic, cultural, social and religious structures in which the conflicts are taking place. Furthermore, actors from the south can facilitate access to complex conflict systems, e.g., in the Islamic regions, which are less accessible to actors from the north.

Annex 1: List of abbreviations

AA	German Federal Foreign Office
AoPC	Agents of peaceful change
BFPS	Berghof Foundation for Peace Support
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CCM	Civilian conflict management
COPRET	Conflict Prevention and Transformation Department of the SDC
CR	Conciliation Resources
CSO	Civil society organisation
DC	Development Cooperation
DFA	Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
DFID	UK Department for International Development
FEM	German budget line for peacekeeping measures
FriEnt	German Working Group on Development and Peace
ICR	Interactive conflict resolution
IC	International cooperation
KOFF	Swiss Center for Peacebuilding
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NEA	Networks of effective action
NSAG	Non-state armed groups
PCIA/PCA	Peace and conflict impact assessment/peace and conflict assessment
RNCST	Resource Network for Conflict Studies and Transformation
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SSP	Priority strategy papers (of German DC)
ZFD	German Civil Peace Service

Annex 2: Glossary

Peacebuilding	medium and long-term measures to i) establish interest-reconciliation and constructive conflict management mechanisms, ii) overcome the structural causes of violent conflicts, and iii) create framework conditions suitable for peaceful and equitable development.
Conflict transformation	comprehensive term for measures and processes that aim to transform conflict systems with a high degree of violence. Conflict transformation aims to change both the structural causes of conflicts and the attitudes and behaviour of the conflict actors.
Multi-track approach	a conflict management approach on several tracks that attempts to combine the activities on these different tracks.
Problem-solving workshops	confidential/informal dialogue workshops between conflict actors that aim to seek a solution to the problem while taking account of the conflict parties' basic needs for security, identity and participation.
Track 1	describes the field of official negotiations between the conflict parties (generally implemented with the support of external state actors).
Track 1.5	denotes informal dialogue and problem-solving formats with high-ranking politicians and decision-makers (participants of Track 1, methodology of Track 2).
Track 2	includes unofficial dialogue and problem-solving formats, in which high-ranking multipliers and influential actors take part (intellectuals, consultants, leading religious personalities).
Track 3	describes the range of activities carried out in and with the civil society (institution building, training, peace education, "reconciliation", private sector, media, etc.).
Civilian conflict management	collective term for the short-, medium- and long-term non-military measures to both contain and transform conflict systems.

Annex 3: List of organisations contacted

ACCORD

Alliance for International Conflict Prevention and Resolution

Aria Group

Carter Center

Center for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town

Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Center for International Conflict Resolution

Collaborative for Development Action

Center for Peace Research and Strategic Studies

Institute for International and European Policy (University of Leuven)

Community of St. Egidio

Conciliation Resources

Conflict Transformation Program, Eastern Mennonite University

Crisis Management Initiative

INCORE

International Alert

International Crisis Group

International Development Research Centre - Peacebuilding Programme

International IDEA

International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO)

Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy

Mercy Corps Conflict Management Group

Partners for Democratic Change

Project on Ethnic Relations

Responding to Conflict

Saferworld

Search for Common Ground

United States Institute of Peace

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Political Affairs Division IV, Human Security