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Reflection Paper – Pathways to Peace: Defining Community in the Age of Globalization

1.   What lessons, both positive and negative, have you drawn from your academic research and/or practice in the field?

Peacebuilding practitioners must make human rights a central piece of their discourse and action.

The goal of preventing violence that characterizes the "peace-building" field is frequently situated in contradiction with the goal of justice claimed as a priority by the "human rights" field. It is usually argued that it is not possible to achieve peace if justice is not served first. The counter-argument is that stopping violence is a pre-requisite to obtain any kind of justice, even if that means that human-rights violators should be sat at a dialogue table bring hostilities to an end.

I do not believe there is such a dichotomy. Basic human needs have been crystallized in a body of human rights, internationally recognized in 1948 as the first global project of human dignity (Toro, 2007). Human rights are mankind's ethical project and cataloguing them as a "field" does not bring light to this issue.

An unfair social structure that precludes satisfaction of the most basic human needs configures a situation of structural violence (Galtung, 2000). In many situations, direct violence is the evidence that the capacity of human beings to adapt has reached its limit. Peacebuilding efforts will always fall short if they are restricted to the prevention of direct violence, as commendable as this goal may be. Conflict transformation goes well beyond. With a long term vision, it intends to transform confrontational relationships into collaborative ones for peaceful, just and equitable coexistence. Social peace in a given territory is not only the absence of violence but the effective realization of the human rights of its inhabitants.

So, rather than posing a "human rights vs. peacebuilding" dilemma it is more useful to tackle the challenge of combining coercive and persuasive methods to realize human rights. (Schirch, 2008).

Those organizations who have focused on coercion have adopted human rights as the central axis of their discourse, up to a point where they have earned the title of "human rights organizations". Meanwhile, those organizations who have taken up persuasion as their main strategy have been too shy to incorporate human rights in their discourse and strategy. Those of us who work in dialogue, crisis prevention, consensus building, and public policy dialogue need to revisit our beliefs about neutrality and impartiality, and very explicitly embrace human rights as our goal. We have obsessively struggled to stay true to a clean third party role and may have, at times, lost sight of the true purpose of our work. We must be willing to step out of our neutral facilitator roles and design processes where we can genuinely and transparently convey where we stand and still help parties to engage constructively. In this respect, the experience of the "peacemaking circles" (Pranis, K., Stuart, B., & Wedge, M. - 2003) is worth considering.

Attempts to achieve convergence of both approaches do not abound. Yet, it is their balanced coordination what will catalyze the potential of social conflict to change the social order without direct violence and realize human rights. More should be done to open up dialogue spaces between "coercive" and "persuasive" practitioners.

2.   What barriers need to be overcome and/or questions need to be answered to make progress in environmental peacemaking?

Good governance is central to environmental peacemaking. It requires plenty of patience, professional capacity and financial resources. I am particularly interested in finding ways to improve philanthropic and development cooperation efforts to support good governance.

It is encouraging to see a growing interest from philanthropists in the need to address conflict and its horrendous consequences for the most vulnerable. I am personally grateful for it. Yet, addressing conflict effectively is not always an easy fit with common grant-making practices. Philanthropists and all types of donors could make even better contributions if they would consider making the following changes in their common practices.

Trust the power of well-driven processes. We repeatedly hear that conflict prevention and peacebuilding are about building trust, social capital and accountability, putting together an institutional infrastructure, strengthening

governance and the rule of law, sustaining dialogue, and implementing inclusive public policies. These intangible components are critical to the success and long term sustainability of the more physical and humanitarian investments in conflict settings.

Commit to longer-term initiatives. It is very difficult to sustain these processes and make any significant progress in this field if grantees are to frame their activities into 1 to 2-year projects, with directly measurable outcomes in that time period. It can typically take months to research specific conditions, conduct consultations, plan for implementation, and build a team to set up an effective dialogue or project process for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Second-phase fundraising often must begin before first-phase implementation is well underway, making demonstration of impact all the more difficult. And stakeholders in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts often say it is better not to start a process that cannot be continued for a longer time than to raise and then fail to meet expectations by prematurely ending efforts before results can realistically be expected to materialize and be sustained. There is good evidence from existing efforts that processes need to be sustained for a minimum of five years.

Flexibility over results is a must. Peacebuilding processes are usually more about being there than about producing specific outputs. Crises do not wait for money and when they happen we need to be there on time. There are plenty of early warning systems but very few, early action or rapid response mechanisms. This is not say, however, that concrete outcomes should not be pursued and monitored. On the contrary, if realistic time frames and appropriate funding are provided, grantors and grantees should engage in a learning process by monitoring progress from a good baseline, through specific indicators. Also, more ample time-frames allow for unexpected impacts, a very common positive externality of grant-making, to be seen.

Avoid yielding to the temptation of a single-sector approach. Addressing conflict is all about complexity. In line with the reflection made in the response to question 1, policy analysts, human rights workers, dialogue promoters, and many other practitioners from a myriad of fields of expertise need to come together and work collaboratively if a difference is to be made in a certain conflict.

Unless this is rethought, grant-makers will continue to receive a good amount of unrealistic project-proposals. We should look forward to more dialogue opportunities between grantees and grant-making organizations where these and other conditions for success can be thoughtfully addressed.

3.   Please reflect on how linkages among different levels (individual, community, state, international community) and topics (environmental, development, conflict, peace) are made and sustained and the barriers to creating such linkages.

I believe that environment, development, conflict, peace are cut across by <u>culture</u>. The human species will set itself up to fail if it is not capable of harnessing the power of culture to catalyze the collective action that is needed to address the most daring challenges that we face.

Much has been written about culture and conflict. Yet, humanity does not seem to know yet how to proactively operate that link in a way that will goes beyond explaining the cultural drivers of conflict and truly builds an international community. We need to realize the bonding power of identity in a globalized world.

Culture is about meaning and value. And cultures are dynamic. Over time, a certain group may no longer consider certain things as meaningful or valuable. While this has always been the case (Durán, 2009), during our times, the acceleration of trade and population flows has certainly impacted cultures in ways that we have never imagined making it very difficult to make conscious collective decisions about what will not be considered meaningful any longer by a given group. It has become an alienating experience for many and the barriers between ethnic groups are rapidly melting. Different coping strategies have been chosen around the world. Some groups have been overwhelmed by the external influences and are struggling to maintain what they believe is the core of their identity. Others have been able to hold to the essential elements of their identity while adapting to – and in some cases even embracing- alien cultural trends. And, finally, others have decided to avoid any contact with other cultures and seclude themselves as much as possible.

There is certainly no point in making a judgment about what coping strategies are the most adequate for this ever-changing world. At the same time, it is growingly difficult to dispute the fact that cultural "hybridation" (García Canclini, 2001) is now a common denominator in most of our populations. In Ecuador, for example, a young "quichua" who was born in the Province of Chimborazo and moved to Quito for whatever reason, may still wear traditional clothes but will listen to "reggaeton", will enjoy car-tuning contests, and will probably marry an Ecuadorian "mestizo/a". They may migrate to Spain together to meet the rest of their family and find work. If their economic situation allows for it, their children might attend a

Spanish school and may build ties with kids from Northern Africa. This is no longer an exceptional story. Many thousand indigenous peoples live in Quito. And a million Ecuadorians now live in Spain. What does it mean to be a "quichua" or "mestizo" in this reality? And this is just an example of what is happening to thousands of populations all around the world.

What is meaningful to our group? What is meaningful to our society? What is meaningful to humanity? A fruitful dialogue across cultures about these questions may not necessarily produce the solutions to the challenges that we face but will certainly create the resilient linkages that are needed for the long-desired global understanding and cooperation across topics and levels.

References

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