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Potential cornerstone of infrastructures for peace? How local peace committees can make a difference

Paul van Tongeren*

Co-founder, International Civil Society Network on Infrastructures for Peace, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

In many conflict-affected countries local peace committees (LPCs) have an impact on local communities by keeping the violence down, solving community problems and empowering local actors to become peacebuilders. Of course, committees like these are confronted with many challenges; the biggest challenge is that they are very dependent on the broader, political or conflict environment. If that environment becomes very polarised or violent, they will be gravely affected. LPCs are committees or structures formed at the level of a town or village with the aim to encourage and facilitate joint, inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding processes within their own context. The article describes 10 examples of LPCs in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia and Afghanistan. It is remarkable to see that in those countries hundreds of LPCs exist, with in most cases limited impact. The article describes as well a broader framework of infrastructures for peace, as it is implemented in several countries, such as Ghana and Kenya. This is a promising approach. The article concludes with some conclusions and proposals to enhance LPCs and infrastructures for peace nationally and internationally.

Keywords: local peace committees; local peace communities; infrastructures for peace; local peace building

Introduction

In many conflict-affected countries local peace committees have an impact on local communities by keeping the violence down, solving community problems and empowering local actors to become peacebuilders. Of course, committees like these are confronted with many challenges but a surprisingly large number of them are successful. So far, not much international attention has been dedicated to this relatively new phenomenon, so it is time to have a closer look.[1] In countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Colombia and Afghanistan hundreds of remarkably diverse local peace committees exist. By their nature, they are also a potential cornerstone of a national infrastructure for peace. This article is written from a practitioner's perspective. It consists of two parts; the main part focuses on local peace committees and indicates their strengths and weaknesses. The second part summarises the potential broader framework of infrastructures for peace.

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*Email: paulvtongeren@gmail.com

[1]In an article on infrastructure for peace (*Creating Infrastructures for Peace: Experiences at Three Continents*, *Pensamiento Propio* (to be published February 2013), www.CRIES.org,) I dedicated some attention to LPCs. Because of their importance I decided to focus on LPCs in the present article.

I.   Informal local peace committees

Local peace committees (LPCs) can be found in many countries, and are also often called local peace zones and/or zones of peace. They can either be completely new initiatives or have roots in traditional structures like a council of elders. LPCs can be part of a national infrastructure for peace (I4P) with a mandate of the national government, which gives them a *formal* role. They can also be independent and driven by the local community, which makes them *informal* LPCs in that they are not formally recognised by the state. Informal LPCs may have good working relations with local or district governments (while lacking a national mandate) or act in a completely independent way, without any government involvement.

The informal nature of many LPCs is both a strength and a weakness. Informality means the committee is less indebted to political and governmental actors. Often their members are volunteers with a high level of trust and commitment. The weakness is that they often lack the clout to deal with government and political leaders and are easily ignored. This article focuses on informal LPCs, working with or without local government involvement, but lacking a national mandate. Based on experiences in 13 countries Odendaal and Olivier describe LPCs in their paper as 'committees or other structures formed at the level of a district, municipality, town or village with the aim to encourage and facilitate joint, inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding processes within its own context'.[2]

LPCs often fulfil a useful function in opening a dialogue in a divided community, solving conflicts and protecting their communities from violence. LPCs can fill a void or compensate weaknesses in local governance and justice:

> The absence or weakness of legitimate local government structures, coupled with the need to forge consensus between former protagonists and other stakeholders on urgent matters of co-existence at local level, calls for a mechanism to facilitate consensus. LPCs provide such a space.[3]

There is great diversity in LPCs. They often have hybrid structures and may be inspired by traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and modern formal dispute resolution processes at the same time.

When LPCs have a national mandate, they have more clout and have more access to national and other resources. They can also establish a critical link between local and national peacebuilding. But quite a lot of countries have weak, fragile or collapsing governments. They may also be ruled by authoritarian regimes, which are not interested in such peace structures. What can people do when their national government will not support them in their pursuit of peacebuilding? What can people do at the local level when conflict and violence are escalating in their neighbourhood and the government is failing to give protection? The answer, in many countries, has been to create informal local peace committees.

Looking at LPCs from different countries some observations can be made:

- Diversity of types: there are formal LPCs vs informal LPCs, local grown LPCs vs LPCs established by (I)NGOs.
- Tasks and mandate: tasks are mainly related to goals, such as opening a dialogue in a divided community; solving community conflicts; or protecting communities from violence.

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[2]Andries Odendaal and Retief Olivier, *Local Peace Committees: Some Reflections and Lessons Learned* (Nepal: Academy for Educational development, 2008), 3. Available at www.infrastructuresforpeaceinternational.org (medio February 2013).
[3]Ibid.

- Link with local government: most LPCs tend to involve representatives from local government.
- Funding: many LPCs function without external support.
- Impact: the (temporary) impact of LPCs is mostly related to solved community problems, increased security in the community and/or the empowerment of their members.
- Biggest challenge: LPCs can hardly influence the national political context; changes in the national political situation however have a great impact on them, leading to many of them being dissolved.

This article describes 10 LPCs in an equal number of settings; many others could have been mentioned too. Inspiring examples not mentioned in this article include the local peace zones in El Salvador,[4] peace zones in the Philippines[5] and LPCs in Sierra Leone.[6] We will begin, however, with an exceptional and inspiring case, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee in Kenya. This example makes clear how successful and inspiring LPCs can be, and even contribute to a national policy and peace infrastructure.

Ten examples

Kenya: The Wajir Peace and Development Committee

During the early 1990s a highly destructive cycle of violent conflict raged in the district of Wajir in the North-East region between different clans of Kenyan Somalis, leading to more than 1200 deaths over a period of four years. The violent conflict had its roots in the centuries' old custom of livestock raiding by pastoralist groups. The situation became more violent because of an influx of refugees from neighbouring Somalia and Ethiopia, increasing aridity, the ready availability of small arms and the very weak presence of government in the district, resulting in the failure of state institutions to regulate conflict and provide security.[7]

In 1993 a group of women met at the market place and started a discussion on ways to stop the violence. One of the women was Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, later to be honoured as Kenyan Peacebuilder of the Year (2005). The discussions at the market place resulted in a process of peacemaking that is impressive by all accounts. The process entailed the formation of a group of civil society actors working together to sensitise the population to the need for peace. They engaged the elders of the different clans and set up a mediation process. After several meetings, the elders agreed to sign a code of conduct, which

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[4]Landon E. Hancock, 'El Salvador's Post-Conflict Peace Zone', in *Zones of Peace*, ed. Landon E. Hancock and Christopher Mitchell (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian, 2007), 105–23, 39, 47.
[5]Kevin Avruch and Roberto S. Jose, 'Peace Zones in the Philippines', in Hancock and Mitchell, *Zones of Peace*, 51–70.
[6]Andries Odendaal, *Architecture for Building Peace at the Local Level: A Comparative Study of Local Peace Committees* (New York: UNDP, 2011), 63–8.
[7]Janice Jenner and Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, *Voices of Local Peace Initiatives: Kenya Peace and Development Network, Wajir Peace and Development Committee*, *National Council of Churches of Kenya, and Amani People's Theatre* (Cambridge, MA: Collaborative for Development Action, 2000); 'Women Take the Peace Lead in Pastoral Kenya: Back to the Future', in *People Building Peace – 35 Inspiring Stories from Around the World*, ed. Paul van Tongeren (Netherlands: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 1999). Also based on information from Andries Odendaal.

effectively stopped the violence. In this process civil society actors worked with representatives of formal authority, particularly the District Commissioner and member of parliament, but on a voluntary basis.

The initiative was homegrown and locally owned. It was soon realised, however, that the LPC would need some form of formalisation to provide co-ordination to all peacebuilding activities. It was decided to integrate the peace initiatives into one structure that would bring government, NGOs and citizen groups together. This was done in May 1995, when the Wajir Peace and Development Committee was formed, with the District Commissioner as chairperson. Members included the heads of all government departments, representatives of the various peace groups, religious leaders, NGO representatives, traditional chiefs and security officers.

The success of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee in bringing peace to the district soon led to the spread of the model to other districts. International donors, NGOs and the National Council of Churches became involved in facilitating and supporting the establishment of local peace committees. In 2001 the government established the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management with the objective to formulate a national policy on conflict management and to provide co-ordination to various peacebuilding initiatives, including the local peace committees. Much of the success of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee was due to its ability to engage both traditional leadership and government and to facilitate greater government responsiveness to the needs of the population.

During the post-election violence that wracked Kenya in late 2007/early 2008, the North-Eastern region was quiet and stable. In the aftermath of the violence, the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008 recommended the establishment of district peace committees everywhere. The infrastructure for peace that had been formalised by the National Accord and Reconciliation Act therefore acknowledged the impact of local peacebuilding and sought to build on it. Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, one of the driving forces behind the peace initiative in Wajir, became Chair of Concerned Citizens for Peace (established after the Post-Election Violence of 2007–2008). She died tragically in a car accident, in 2011.[8]

Sudan: the Collaborative in South Kordofan

Sudan has been in civil war since 1955, with the exception of the period between 1972 and 1983. In 2005, a fragile Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed. In July 2011, Sudan split and the Republic of South Sudan became independent. Some two million people were killed during the civil wars; four million people fled the violence.

The Collaborative is a network of local peace activists from Sudan and South Sudan, which has continued to co-ordinate efforts across the new border. Formed in 2006, as a result of a meeting facilitated by Peace Direct and PACT, the Collaborative has built up 12 peace committees in South Kordofan (Sudan) and Unity State (South Sudan). The peace committees are trained to analyse conflict and find local solutions, supported by a rapid response fund (RRF) controlled by the Collaborative where necessary. In most cases the RRF is not needed and costs are covered by community contributions. The Collaborative is a partner of the UK-based NGO Peace Direct.

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[8]George Wachira with Thomas Arendshorst and Simon Charles, *Citizens in Action: Making Peace in the Post-Election Crisis in Kenya – 2008* (Nairobi: NPI-Africa and GPPAC, January 2010).

For three years, the Collaborative has been working with communities to identify and train local peace activities and co-ordinate them into a more effective network. As the peace committees are entirely voluntary, there is a self-selection process that identifies those people most committed to peacebuilding. The combination of traditional administration members and the young educated generation has made some peace committees highly successful. Most peace committees are inclusive and are keen to have each tribe or ethnic group represented, providing a collective and balanced decision-making process.

The peace committees aim to respond quickly to conflicts, prevent smaller conflicts from escalating and to help communities resist any pressure to become involved in a conflict. In most cases the peace committees – with over 70 members – have been supported by the local administration, traditional leaders and even the security forces. According to a recent evaluation:[9]

- in 57% of peace committee interventions, communities that previously fought alongside one of the parties, now have chosen not to;
- in 80% of interventions where violence had occurred, no repeated violence has been reported;
- in 94% of interventions, the conflict appears to have been resolved or partially resolved; in 6% of cases the interventions appear to have failed.

One example: the evaluator cites a case where the stabbing of an Arab man by a Nuba man could have led to inter-tribal conflict. However, the community contacted the peace committees, monetary compensation was agreed, mediation between both parties ensued and the problem was settled.

Each of the peace committees cost US$5000 to create and US$1500 per year to maintain. In more than 50% of cases, the peace committees have intervened in conflicts without any outside funding. The peace committees have intervened in over 65 conflicts in three years. The annual cost of running the project is US$170,000. Clearly, the benefits outweigh the costs.

Colombia: local peace communities

Colombia has a history of nearly five decades of internal armed conflict between the Colombian government and various guerrilla groups such as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army). Historically, the conflict is rooted in what is known as *La Violencia*, which was triggered by the 1948 assassination of the populist politician Gaitan. There have been at least 250,000 casualties and millions of displaced people.[10]

Local peace communities, peace committees, peace laboratories and zones of peace have been flourishing in some of the most vulnerable conflict zones. Objectives were to get

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[9]Peace Direct, *Conflict Prevention in South Kordofan: An Impact Assessment of the Collaborative's Model* (2012); *Integrity, Final Report: Evaluation of the CFPS Rapid Response Fund and Peace Committee Model in Sudan* (2012).

[10]Virginia M. Bouvier, *Colombia: Building Peace in a Time of War* (Washington DC: USIP, 2009); Catalina Rojas, 'Islands in the Stream: A Comparative Analysis of Zones of Peace within Colombia's Civil War', in Hancock and Mitchell, *Zones of Peace*, pp.71–90; Christopher R. Mitchell and Landon E. Hancock, eds., *Local Peacebuilding and National Peace: Interaction between Grassroots and Elite Processes* (London: Continuum, 2012).

protection from the surrounding violence, but also to establish participatory democracy and encourage local development. Often community leaders started such a process, but mayors or local administration also took the initiative. Many organised themselves into associations of peace communities to obtain more bargaining power with the armed actors.

There have been hundreds of LPCs with most of them being active between 1998 and 2002. In 1998 Andrés Pastrana Arango was elected President. He had promised to negotiate peace with the guerrilla groups. That year, Bogota-based peace organisation REDEPAZ – a network of mostly local and regional peace initiatives – began a project to help establish and support new and existing local peace communities, calling it One Hundred Municipalities for Peace. Four years later the project came to an end and was replaced by one that sought to develop local democracy. Under Pastrana's successor, President Alvaro Uribe, government policy changed, aiming for a military solution and peace communities became targets for the security forces.

Most LPCs established institutions to ensure maximum participation in decision making. They had a Constituent Assembly, open General Assemblies or Municipal Forums for all members of the community. Working committees met every month, on specific issues, with representatives of unions, the church, youth & women organisations and so on. Such forums started to identify the causes of violence and poverty in each community and to draw up a development and peace plan for the community.

The success of LPCs – albeit limited – has been largely connected to the degree of involvement by all the community's various groups and sectors. Also contributing to their success has been the relationship between LPCs and existing local power and governance structures (without becoming too dependent). Many LPCs managed to establish (temporarily) increased security. They empowered their members and local civil society. In the absence of strong leadership for peace at the national level, local and regional initiatives were temporarily filling a gap.

The DRC: Centre Resolution Conflicts in North Kivu

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is sometimes known as Africa's first world war; the fighting involved seven other countries at one time or another and it has proved to be the planet's deadliest conflict since World War II, with more than 5.4 million casualties since 1994.

Centre Resolution Conflicts (CRC) is a Congolese NGO, working in the Eastern province of North Kivu. It was founded in 1993. CRC has developed from an organisation focused on training displaced people to coexist peacefully with members of other tribes into an organisation whose mediation skills are called upon by local communities, international NGOs, multilaterals and local government officials right across North Kivu. CRC is now a member of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) protection cluster in the region. The UK NGO Peace Direct started a relationship with CRC in 2004.

CRC is known for its successful community-led disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration work in the DRC. It has persuaded ex-combatants to leave the bush and persuaded communities to accept them back. In addition, CRC has educated and assisted 20,000 people across two provinces, by helping 14,400 displaced persons to return safely home, rescuing 650 child soldiers and mobilising former enemies to resolve conflicts via mediation and negotiation. Much of CRC's success is based on its ability to engage with armed actors (including rebel groups) and to negotiate the protection of their communities from violence. CRC's work with armed groups and ex-combatants has played a key role in

reducing the number of armed groups active in North Kivu from nine to four, and negotiations are held to get more groups out of the bush.

CRC has become a key link between communities, local government authorities in Eastern DRC and the armed groups in the bush. CRC has a strong focus on working with youth. Local committees for peace created by CRC are non-partisan frameworks for consultation and analysis, reflection and action of grassroots communities around issues of reconciliation, security and participation in the management of public affairs. Since its inception CRC has set up dozens of local peace committees.

LPCs organise hearings, dispel rumours, mount a rapid collective response to incipient violent conflict, continue to support the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and ex-combatants to their home communities, encourage communities to initiate peace themselves, provide training and create a permanent link between communities, armed groups and the national army.

Some 20 peace committees have evolved into very active task forces. Task forces bring together key community leaders who have been involved in addressing conflict locally and represent all sectors of the community: media; culture and arts; education; churches; human rights organisations; and so on. A key criterion for membership is being a community leader with a recognised following. They have become an authoritative source of accurate information and have earned the trust of the communities in which they work. By bringing together civil society groups, task forces have created a counter-balance to governmental authority within the community and become a focal point for local officials.[11]

The DRC: Barza Inter-Communautaire in North Kivu

The Barza assembles leaders from North Kivu's nine major ethnic groups to discuss issues central to community life and to help resolve low-level conflicts before they escalate to violence. The word 'Barza' derives from the Swahili word *baraza*, meaning 'verandah' or a meeting place, usually outside a hut in the centre of a village or under a large tree, for local elders to assemble and discuss problems in the community, providing a framework for giving directions as to the way of life inside and around the villages. The *baraza* is traditionally where local inhabitants bring their disputes for their elders' resolution.

Between 1998 and early 2004, a period of major instability and armed conflict in many parts of Eastern DRC, the Barza generally succeeded in resolving ethnic disputes in North Kivu, particularly those over land ownership, before they escalated to mass violence. However, by the end of 2004 the Barza's ability to mitigate ethnic tensions had weakened considerably and by the end of 2005 the Barza had collapsed altogether.

The pre-cursor to the Barza was the *Commission de Pacification et de Concorde* (CPC), established by Laurent Désiré Kabila's government in 1997, initially as a national body with provincial branches. The CPC established 'peace cells' in each region, comprising local eminent persons who worked at the grassroots level, organising meetings between leaders of antagonistic ethnic groups and convincing small numbers of combatants to lay down their arms and reintegrate into the community. Several observer organisations reported that the CPC was instrumental in generating inter-communal discussions. The CPC created the Barza, to consolidate the CPC in North Kivu.

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[11]Rosemary Cairns, *External Evaluation of Peace Direct and Centre resolution Conflicts Project* (London: Baring Foundation, 2011).

It is difficult to distinguish the work of the Barza from that of the CPC. The key difference appears to be that the CPC is officially a government-run institution, while the Barza considers itself independent and non-partisan and has been increasingly at pains to distance itself from the CPC and potential links with Kinshasa.

The primary purpose of the Barza is to 'prevent, resolve and heal wounds after conflict'. Issues that have commonly been addressed by the Barza include conflicts over land and property, the distribution of ethnically discriminatory literature, cases of hate speech, social disturbance resulting from the influx of foreign refugees into North Kivu and the regular nocturnal arrests, kidnap and illegal detention of civilians by the state or rebel groups.

Evaluating the overall contribution of the Barza, a European mission to the DRC in 2001 reported:

> Together with other complementary initiatives in North Kivu, the Barza [has] been able to find peaceful and sustainable solutions to some conflicts and to promote peaceful coexistence. There has been no 'ethnic' violence in the Barza sphere of influence since 1997, despite regular attempts by one or another authority or armed group to spark new clashes. Moreover, partly as a result of the Barza's work, there is now a trend among the displaced people to settle in multi-ethnic rather than mono-ethnic villages in North Kivu. Despite repeated requests to donors, the Barza has not received any financial support.[12]

While the Barza successfully facilitated an inter-ethnic dialogue in North Kivu between 1998 and early 2004, it increasingly faced two main problems that led to its eventual breakdown in 2005. The first was its own fraught connections to local political leaders; the second was its inability genuinely to resolve disputes among Barza representatives' communities and within the Barza leadership itself.

The problems of intimate links between the Barza and the political leadership were exemplified by two failed attempts to establish a *Barza Inter-Communautaire* in South Kivu. In 1999, civil society and the general population in South Kivu protested against the introduction of the Barza by the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie (RCD) provincial governor, claiming that it constituted a further extension of RCD rule in the province. Another attempt some years later, resulted in large demonstrations, waving placards bearing messages such as 'Barza = Conflict'. Opponents of the Barza claimed that it was simply another form of political imposition from Kinshasa.

One of the conclusions of Phil Clark, the author of an article about *Barza Intercommunautaire*, is that:

> to continue as a viable, effective tool of conflict mediation in North Kivu, the Barza must maintain independence, and must be perceived in the community as independent, from national and provincial political elites and must confront directly all attempts by these leaders to manipulate ethnicity for political gain.[13]

Clark argues that community-level mechanisms like Barza are crucial modes of conflict resolution, primarily because of their ability to foster face-to-face engagement between leaders of groups in conflict and their proximity to affected populations.

Observations from the EU, the United Nations Mission to Congo UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUC) and others indicate the Barza has shown in the past that it

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[12]André Bourque and Peter Sampson, *The European Union's Political and Development Response to the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Maastricht: ECDPM, 2001).
[13]Phil Clark, 'Ethnicity, Leadership and Conflict Mediation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: The Case of the Barza Inter-Communautaire', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2, no. 1 (2008): 1–17 p. 14.

can help resolve low-level disputes, which in North Kivu have often fuelled major conflict. The combination of the Barza's proximity to the population and its function as one of the few forums in which leaders of different ethnic groups can meet to resolve their mutual problems enabled it to fulfil a vital mediation role in North Kivu.[14]

The DRC: The Haki na Amani network and local peace initiatives in Ituri

Ituri is one of the districts in North-East DRC and is divided into five territories. In all those territories, LPCs have been established. In February 2003, a conference on the proliferation and illegal trafficking of small arms/light weapons in the border region between DRC, Uganda and Sudan was held in Uganda. All three countries sent delegations, including representatives from respective governments, armies, police forces, armed groups, churches, Muslims, human rights groups and social movements. At the time of the conference, Ituri had been plunged into open warfare and a great number of militias operated there. The situation of public order, human rights and internal security was catastrophic. Inter-community relations had been severely damaged by the war and there was deep mistrust.

Several organisations asked for a programme for inter-community reconciliation. A study was performed to assess the situation in local communities. A key proposal was to organise community *barazas*. A network, later named Haki na Amani (RHA), began its first activities in 2004 and was composed of among others Episcopal Justice and Peace Commissions, human rights groups and a women's network.

The goals of RHA are the promotion of peace, the protection of human rights, the encouragement of citizen participation in order to create a society governed by law and order, the opposition of identity violence and the positive transformation of conflicts through the expansion of its members' intervention capacities. International partners and funders are among others IKV Pax Christi, Cordaid and Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) (all three based in the Netherlands), Trocaire and Pax Christi International Alert.

Its main activities were mobilisation sessions to transform positively the conflict. These sessions brought together around 100 persons from antagonistic communities, initially intended for all the leaders and notables of the involved communities, but also local militia leaders. Later on, local administrative authorities and other civil society groups were invited as well. At the end of the mobilisation session, the participating communities were invited to elect the members of a local peace initiative (ILP). The ILPs were comprised of a committee of around 12 persons who engaged in mediation and conflict resolution in the community. Some 500 ILPs were established.

In the beginning, the ILPs sought to mediate in all sorts of problems by community gatherings, but later, they organised football matches between two communities, reopened schools and markets, helped with the return of displaced persons and so on. All ILPs and local initiatives for community security (ILSCs) were trained as well in constitutional topics, elections and responsible citizenship before the 2007 elections. The inclusiveness of the ILPs helped to lessen tensions between the communities. During the period immediately following the conflict, they were very useful in a situation in which the slightest dispute could ignite a new war. RHA has strengthened the capacities of the ILP leaders in mediation and solving conflicts.

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[14]Clark, 'Ethnicity, Leadership and Conflict Mediation', 1–17.

Later, another vast network for peace was added. Known as *nyumba kumi*, this is a rapid alert system operating at the local level. They are part of the Episcopal Justice and Peace Commission. In total, there were around 800 *nyumba kumi*. Their existence led to the creation of 57 ILSCs. All moderators of ILSCs received training, followed by community *barazas*, aiming for a participatory exchange of local concerns. The process of bringing together the ILSCs and the state services responsible for securing persons and their property (police and local authorities) in local committees for community security was strongly supported. Material support – bicycles – has been provided to the most active ILSCs. These ILSCs are highly regarded by the population and all state actors, which gives its actions a seal of social legitimacy. The alert system traditionally used by ILSCs involves shouting, banging on cans or saucepans and whistling. All members of ILP committees and ILSCs participate as volunteers without payment in kind or cash. Payment may lead to intra-group competition.

The creation of RHA and the Ituri programme constituted the first action towards enhancing community security in the region. Another step was a 2006 conference on community security and small arms. The main approach was organising community *barazas*, gatherings of around 400 people, and a free forum, designed to perform a true assessment of the problems faced by the population. At the end of the meeting, a list of problems was drawn up and accepted by the participants. Key was creating an interface between the different population groups as well as between the state services and the population. At the end of the *baraza* on community security, representatives were elected to participate in local meetings on the topic of security. After several *barazas* at community level, a meeting on community security would then be organised at the territorial level.

As well as delivering criminals to the competent authorities, ILP and ILSCs have also enhanced the capacity to stand up against state-level abuse and corruption. They have been described positively because of their bottom–up, local, open and inclusive nature, the fact that there are women members and that there has been intensive training and capacity building. Around half of the established ILPs continue to be active, some 300 at present.[15]

The DRC: village peace committees in North Kivu

The NGO World Relief Congo is establishing village peace committees (VPCs) in North Kivu. At first, an assessment is conducted in order to get more specific information on the amount of ethnic groups, Barza leaders, traditional leaders, church leaders and others living in a village that might play an active role in a VPC. Afterwards a conflict transformation workshop is organised, and elections for a VPC are prepared. A VPC is composed of 10 members, including a Barza member, youth leader, woman leader, local authority representative, church leader, school leader and member of civil society. They meet every week. Political authorities invited World Relief Congo to expand the programme of establishing these committees to other territories and provinces.[16]

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[15]Georg Frerks and Pyt Douma, *Local Peace Initiatives in Ituri, DRC 2003–2007*, Pax Christi Best Practice Study no.3 (Utrecht: IKV Pax Christi, 2007); Eric Mongo and Joost van Puijenbroek, *IKV Pax Christi, the Haki na Amani Network and the Dynamics of the Peace Process in Ituri: Accomplishments, Challenges and Lessons Learned 2004–2008* (Utrecht: IKV Pax Christi, 2009).
[16]Information from Jean-Pierre Mfuni Mwanza, founder and executive director of Central Africa Conflict Prevention Association (CACOPA).

Burundi: the Kibimba Peace Committee

Some 300,000 people have died as a result of violence since Burundi's independence in 1962. But there are examples of local peace committees that have managed to achieve some form of stability and conflict resolution even in the midst of civil war and near state collapse. As an example, we present the case of the village of Kibimba, at the height of the civil war. A local peace committee operated for more than seven years without external funding. The peace committee was formed after a particularly vicious attack by rebels in 1993 that included the burning alive of 70 secondary school children. Subsequently the community divided along ethnic lines into deeply polarised camps.

The peace committee was formed in 1994 following some initial training by the central Mennonite committee. The LPC started a process of facilitating communication between different groups and succeeded, eventually, to return some degree of normalcy to the heavily traumatised community. The re-opening of the school and hospital and the fact that both communities were using these facilities again, was an important indicator of success.[17]

Uganda: peace committees in the Karamoja region

Since 1986, government forces and fighters of the insurgent Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have been fighting in Uganda and in neighbouring countries. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, possibly as many as 500,000 and 1.4 million of people have been uprooted. After a ceasefire and peace agreements, the Juba peace process failed in 2008.

In Uganda, district peace committees (DPCs) exist in the Karamoja and Acholi regions in the North. Their role is to prevent and resolve conflicts, assess the situation in the field and report or respond to an impending outbreak of violent conflict. They also follow up and recover stolen/raided livestock. The chairperson is the resident district commissioner; the co-chair is the chairperson of the local council. Members are representatives from among others police, security forces, religious communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), women and youth.

In Karamoja, there are additional village peace committees (VPCs). Their main role is to confine the youth within the villages through warning, caution and curses in order to scare them away from cattle raiding activities. Traditionally, elders have a duty to counsel and admonish the youth.

VPCs will also promote peace within their villages, for example by preaching about peace during village meetings. They also act as an early warning system to report an impending raid.

Being selected as a member of a VPC depends on several qualities: being a respectable person (respected by both adults and youth); a wise, visionary and focused elder; a person who commands the attention of other villagers; a frank, effective and fearless person. Challenges for DPCs and VPCs are inadequate capacity to handle conflict and security matters of the members and the lack of funding for these activities. Funding is meant to facilitate movement either by bicycle or cars and to provide food, tobacco and local brew for elders during VPC meetings, in addition to passing on messages about impending raids or attacks.

One insider reports from interviews with the police and community members that cattle raids have reduced, although cattle theft still occurs. However, road ambushes have ceased and a level of peace is returning to Karamoja.[18]

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[17]Information on Kibimba Peace Committee from email communication with Andries Odendaal.
[18]Information from John Fisher Tumwesigye, Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), Uganda.

On the national level, an interesting development is taking place. The National Governing Council of the African Peer Review Mechanism Process of Uganda convened a high-level consultation in July 2010 on the need to establish appropriate institutional mechanisms for ensuring long lasting peace and stability in the country, to address the country's burgeoning conflicts over land, natural resources and traditional authority. The establishment of a viable conflict management system is a work in progress.[19]

Peace Shuras in Afghanistan

The different wars in Afghanistan since 1978 have resulted in some three million people being killed. However, compared to other countries of similar size and political and economic instability, Afghanistan's peace structure is surprisingly strong. Harnessing a long tradition of tribal mechanisms for dispute resolution involving councils of the traditional elders of the villages, *Jirgas* or *Shuras* are now important mechanisms for peacebuilding in Afghanistan. *Jirgas* are usually a temporary or ad-hoc group of respected elders that convenes when necessary to resolve disputes. A *Shura* is a group of local elders or recognised leaders who convene regularly to make decisions on behalf of their community.

Afghanistan's formal justice system has traditionally been very weak and has limited presence outside of the major urban areas. These formal institutions, including police and court systems, suffer from limited capacity and widespread perceptions of corruption and inefficiency. As a result, it is estimated that 80 to 90% of Afghans, particularly those living in rural areas, continue to look to informal, non-state institutions to provide justice. These institutions or peace *Shuras* are often preferred to the formal court system because they are generally led by respected elders who have earned a reputation for fairness, who understand the local community, reach decisions on locally accepted values and norms, and focus less on punishment and more on maintaining community relations. They practise 'restorative justice'.

Two important NGOs aiming for community peacebuilding, among others by establishing peace *Shuras*, are Co-operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) and Sanayee Development Organisation (SDO). They have established several hundreds of peace *Shuras* in Afghanistan. CPAU mentions having established some 500 peace *Shuras* in their reports. CPAU was established in 1996 and works for the promotion of knowledge and awareness of peace, social justice and human rights as the foundation upon which the nation-building efforts in Afghanistan should be based. Through its ongoing training and coaching programmes, CPAU works at district and local level to build up the skills and capacities of local community leaders and representatives from diverse ethnic backgrounds, strengthening the role of community institutions.

SDO was established in 1990. The community-based peacebuilding programmes of SDO aim to strengthen the social structures that can enable the constructive transformation of conflicts. By addressing the root causes of conflict, they promote stability, justice, goodwill and co-operation among members of the community. Members of peace *Shuras* are community elders/leaders, school teachers, community youth, local businessmen and village Mullahs (religious scholars). At the district level peace *Shuras*, members of district government are included as well. SDO has established some 530 LPCs within 13 provinces.

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[19]Chetan Kumar, 'Building National Infrastructures for Peace: UN Assistance for Internally Negotiated Solutions to Violent Conflict', in *Peacemaking: From Practice to Theory*, ed. Susan Allen Nan, Zacharia Cherian Mampilly, and Andrea Bartoli (Oxford: Praeger, 2012), 388.

CPAU reaches out in villages to local elders and Community Development Council (CDC) members to begin the process of forming peace *Shuras*. All community members are invited to participate in selecting the members of the new peace *Shuras*. The villagers elect some 25 male elders to join the new peace *Shura*. Membership of the peace *Shura* tends to overlap with that of CDC's, a government-supported *Shura* that makes decisions about local development projects. Continuity and overlap with other existing institutions positively affects the local legitimacy of the peace *Shuras*. Most disputes are over land/property; access to water, inheritance, family, marriage and financial compensation. Where male peace *Shuras* were created by CPAU and SDO, some 25 women were also selected by female community members to participate in a women's peace *Shura*, addressing family disputes especially when they involve female disputants.

Interviewed peace *Shura* members estimated that they resolved 80 to 90% of their cases. Consensus has emerged within the development community that non-state/local justice and security networks are often more accountable, efficient, legitimate and accessible providers of justice than the agencies and institutions of the post-colonial state.

Peace *Shuras* do not solve the overall conflict, but are important in solving many day to day conflicts and stop them from escalating into violence in this volatile country. Peace *Shuras*, well trained in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, seem to be able to reduce the gap between communities and formal governance structures.[20]

A national solidarity programme (NSP), operated out of Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, helps identify, manage and monitor development projects and resources. The NSP provides direct block-grant transfers to democratically elected CDCs at US$200 per family. The CDCs improve local governance, making it more accountable and inclusive; they alleviate poverty and provide jobs. There are some 34,000 CDCs in existence, covering 80 to 90% of rural Afghanistan. Almost all of these CDCs, especially those that are well established, have taken on conflict resolution and peacebuilding tasks. Many observers describe this programme as a success. At the national level, a High Peace Council has been established.

General observations

Looking at LPCs from different countries and at some of the literature on LPCs, some observations can be made:

- Lack of data/reports and evaluations: it is very difficult to collect hard data of LPCs, let alone to get information on their impact. A first priority should be to analyse and document this type of peacebuilding more thoroughly.
- Diversity of types: there are formal LPCs within the context of a national peace infrastructure. There are informal LPCs that nevertheless co-operate closely with local or district authorities. There are LPCs that are locally grown and very independent; there are also LPCs that were established when national NGOs or churches co-operated with INGOs, willing to set up local peacebuilding programmes and structures. A further analysis of these different types, and their strengths and weaknesses, might be useful.

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[20]Seth Peavey, *Opportunities and Challenges for Justice Linkages: Case Studies from Kunduz & Takhar* (Kabul: Co-operation for Peace and Unity, 2012); Bjorn Holmberg and others, *Strategic Conflict Analysis of Afghanistan* (Kabul: Swedepeace and CPAU, 2012).

- National context: national government was in most cases not interested or too weak to deliver peace, security and justice.
- Local origin and ownership: most LPCs were established locally because the local community felt threatened, violence increased, justice and development failed. National government neglected to provide security, justice or development. As a result, people took matters into their own hand. Cases and findings from the literature indicate that these LPCs were highly motivated and were relatively, if temporarily, successful.
- Diverse composition: participation varies. Elders take part, as do respected leaders of local community groups, educated youth and women. They are nearly always very committed and respected within their community. They are also unpaid volunteers. Quite often, representatives from local government are involved as well. Odendaal and Olivier recommend securing the participation of the main protagonists, but also including sufficient 'insider-partials', people who enjoy high levels of trust in the community and who have the capacity to hold the centre in the midst of centrifugal forces.[21]
- Tasks and mandate: the tasks are mainly related to goals, such as opening a dialogue in a divided community; solving community conflicts; protecting their communities from violence; responding rapidly to incipient violent conflict; engaging with armed actors and organising/supporting the return of IDPs to their communities.
- Link with local/regional government: it is interesting to see how most LPCs are established by local communities, but tend to involve representatives of the government, often in an early phase. But caution is needed, if local government wants to steer the process. Some LPCs are also linked with local informal traditional justice systems.
- LPCs and national peace infrastructure: it is interesting to note that in several countries where both LPCs and national peace structures existed, the LPCs functioned better. As an example we can mention South Africa before the 1994 elections, Colombia and Kenya during the post-election violence.
- Increase of LPCs: when it became clear in different countries that LPCs managed to solve local community problems and kept the violence outside the community, the approach was often duplicated in neighbouring districts/regions.
- Substantial number of LPCs in different countries: it is remarkable to see that in countries like the DRC, Colombia and Afghanistan hundreds of LPCs exist.
- Costs: members of LPCs are volunteers and are not paid. When they were paid, competition started, tensions increased as membership of LPCs began to be perceived as a way to get money. Some money is needed for training and capacity building and for the travel cost of interventions. Often LPC members (who travel on motorbikes and push-bikes) paid those cost themselves. LPCs are highly cost-effective. Especially the running costs are minimal. Several cases indicate how quick interventions, often at the cost of far less than US$1000, prevented a conflict from escalating.
- Funding and role of national and international partners: it is remarkable that the need felt locally to counter insecurity or injustice is often so strong, that so many LPCs function without external support. There is need for funding to establish LPCs and strengthen the capacities by training and so on. National NGOs and INGOs can

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[21]Odendaal and Olivier, *Local Peace Committees*, 4.

play an important facilitation role in this respect. Another budget item is the running cost for interventions. Several INGOs contribute to establishment and training of LPCs, such as Peace Direct (UK), IKV Pax Christi (Netherlands), Cordaid & ICCO (Netherlands), Trocaire, OXFAM.

- Sustainability: this is in many cases a problem. There is no political or financial support from national government and limited support from INGOs. LPCs can hardly influence the national political context in their country. Changes in the national political situation (as occurred for instance in the DRC and Colombia in 1997/2001 and 2002 respectively) have a great impact on LPCs, leading to many of them being dissolved.

Some key research questions that should be asked when addressing the matter of LPCs include: under which conditions are LPCs effective? Which types of political/property/communal/ethnic problems can be successfully resolved by them? How important is the support of national NGOs or government? How dependent are they from external funding? How can they best survive if the broader political or conflict environment becomes very polarised or violent?

Challenges

Informal LPCs face many challenges:

- Political environment: LPCs can influence their local situations, often not the broader environment. When the government changed its policy, as it did in Colombia in 2002, the LPCs became targets. When mass violence escalates, as it did for instance in the DRC and Afghanistan, LPCs fail. This is a crucial challenge!
- No teeth to bite: LPCs cannot coerce; they cannot use force when there are security threats. What authority do LPCs need? Odendaal and Olivier recommend that LPCs should wield no other power than a moral one – the 'owner of consensus'.[22]
- Lack of legal and policy framework: if LPCs would be part of a national peace infrastructure, things add up: political and financial support, training and capacity building; information exchange. If there is no legal and policy framework, the work of LPCs cannot be secured and every person can successfully challenge the existence and ruling of LPCs in a court of law. The lack of co-operation from certain government agencies (e.g. the judiciary), is disappointing; this is the case in Afghanistan. But sometimes – as in the case of Wajir – a bottom–up process can contribute to a national infrastructure, when LPCs manage to get local and district government involved.
- Lack of volunteerism: traditional systems of dispute resolution were based on volunteerism. In new LPCs members sometimes ask to be paid and aim for financial gains. When the funding does not materialise, they sometimes withdraw from the LPCs.
- Funding: two types of funding are needed: to establish LPCs, with capacity building and training workshops; and running cost for interventions. Here is an example from Afghanistan: a LPC member complained that they were incurring too many personal costs as a result of their membership of an LPC. Because the LPC did not possess a permanent meeting location, the LPC met in the house of the LPC chief.

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[22]Ibid., 5.

He was expected to provide food and tea to a few dozen guests for the meeting, which would always take several hours. Such cost is more than half of an average policeman's monthly salary.[23] Funding is important, but large budgets may kill programmes as well. Donors can substantively facilitate professionalisation and expansion of LPCs especially by capacity building:[24]

> Yet, though imperfect, LPCs have amazing peacebuilding potential . . . . Their imperfection relates primarily to the fact that they often have to operate in conditions of minimal legitimacy and capacity. Their strengths, though, are the mobilization of local communities to forge their own peace; the empowerment of local actors to take leadership as peacebuilders; the internalization of confidence in a community's own resources to make peace; and the generation of hope and a new vision of possible co-existence. Concretely, LPCs have saved lives, protected property, broken deadlocks, solved problems, and restored ordinary life. They have contributed towards blocking the downward spiral of violence and distrust, and forging a new upward momentum. As fragile as they were, LPCs offered a relatively cost-effective investment in sustainable local peacebuilding.[25]

This conclusion of Odendaal and Olivier was based on their evaluation of LPCs from 13 countries and also based on LPCs with a national mandate. If we look to the 10 cases presented in this article, we can fully support this conclusion. Wajir, Sudan, the three initiatives in DRC, Colombia and Afghanistan all conclude that the LPCs had some (temporary) impact. They solved community problems (up to 80%); increased security in the community; empowered the members; developed some countervailing power to local government or found ways of co-operation.

But the big challenge with informal LPCs is that they are very dependent on the broader, political or conflict environment. If that environment becomes very polarised or violent, they will be gravely affected.

II.   Infrastructures for peace

In its World Development Report 2011[26] the World Bank acknowledged that more than 1.5 billion people are still affected by violent conflict; this affects people in some 90 countries. It repeatedly emphasises the need for 'national efforts to build an institutional infrastructure for conflict prevention'.

Yet most conflict-affected countries still lack the structures, capacities and mechanisms to deal adequately with violence. Just as health provision requires institutional structures to support it, such as university faculties, hospitals, paramedic staff and prevention programmes, so does peace. Establishing a national infrastructure for peace could include: (1) adopting a co-operative, problem-solving approach to conflict, based on dialogue and non-violence, which includes main stakeholders; (2) developing institutional mechanisms, appropriate to each country's culture, which promote and manage this approach at local, district and national levels.

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[23]Peavey, *Opportunities and Challenges*, 36.
[24]See Mohamud Adan and Ruto Pkalya, *The Concept Peace Committee: A Snapshot Analysis of the Concept Peace Committee in Relation to Peacebuilding Initiatives in Kenya* (Nairobi: Practical Action, 2006).
[25]Odendaal and Olivier, *Local Peace Committees*, 26; Odendaal, *Architecture for Building Peace*, 10. Andries Odendaal, *Rebuilding Intra-Community Ruins: A Study of Local Peace Committees* (Washington, DC: USIP, 2013).
[26]World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2012), 188–9 and 271–2.

It is good to point out here that infrastructure for peace (I4P) is not a clear-cut concept. It is rather a vision, an ideal that hopefully will be realised in the years to come. But it is a longstanding process. The people in the countries that are following this path are pioneering. Some of them have a pretty good idea what direction they are heading for, others are just at the start. This means that at this moment we cannot formulate the exact components of such a structure; it is a work in progress.

LPCs can fulfil a valuable role at the level of local communities. A nationally established infrastructure for peace can have more impact, not only at levels above the local communities but also in different departments of government. A national government has more weight to invite other stakeholders in the process and can enforce security. As former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated, 'essentially, the aim should be the creation of a sustainable national infrastructure for peace that allows societies and their governments to resolve conflicts internally and with their own skills, institutions and resources'.[27]

When Nelson Mandela was released in 1990 South Africa was deeply divided, resulting in an escalation of violence. This inspired many South Africans to build a peace structure with national, regional and local peace committees. Observers agree that in the two years prior to the historic 1994 elections, this peace infrastructure contributed substantively to containing the spiral of violence.[28]

There are many countries pioneering with I4P at the moment. They include Ghana and Kenya (see below), Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Uganda, Costa Rica, Peru and many more.[29] Most find different ways to set up such structures.

Key components of peace infrastructures in Ghana and Kenya

Two countries often cited as examples and pioneers in establishing peace infrastructures include Ghana and Kenya. In order to understand better what a Peace Infrastructure may include, it may be helpful to look at the countries' policy documents. Kenya started 20 years ago with this process. After many consultations, the Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management produced a final version of the National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management in December 2011.[30] Ghana institutionalised its peace architecture in the National Peace Council Act in 2011. No other countries can refer to such a long process and to such intense consultation processes at all levels and with all sectors to establish an I4P.

Some of the main components/pillars identified in their strategies include:

- Peace committees at local, district and national levels, with main stakeholders involved, especially key respected civil society leaders.

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[27]United Nations, Progress Report of the UN on the Secretary-General's Report '*Prevention of Armed Conflict*' (New York: United Nations, 2001), 16.

[28]Odendaal, *Architecture*, 34–40; Nicole Ball and Chris Spies, *Managing Conflict: Lessons from the South African Peace Committees* (Arlington, VA: USAID, 1998); Susan Collin Marks, *Watching the Wind: Conflict Resolution during South Africa's Transition to Democracy* (Washington, DC: USIP, 2000).

[29]Paul van Tongeren, *Creating Infrastructures for Peace: Experiences at Three Continents* (Pensamiento Propio); Paul van Tongeren, 'Increasing Interest in Infrastructures for Peace', *Journal of Conflictology* 2, no. 2 (2011): 45–55; Website of the Global Alliance for Ministries and Infrastructures for Peace, a growing international network: www.mfp-dop.org (last accessed 18 January 2013).

[30]*National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (final version)* (Kenya: Office of the President, December, 2011). Available at http://www.nscpeace.go.ke/nsc/index.php/resource-library/downloads/reports/67-peace-policy-dec-2011 (last accessed 18 January 2013).

- A national peacebuilding platform or forum organises consultation and co-ordination.
- A Conflict Analysis and Early Warning & Response System improves identification of conflict drivers and enables timely and appropriate prevention and response.
- A Peacebuilding Support Unit within the government develops the overall government policy on peacebuilding together with the National Peace Council and the platform.
- Building national capacities for peace: increased capacity of peacebuilding institutions of government, peace committees and CSOs.
- Involvement of insider mediators: strengthening the role of insider mediators to overcome suspicion and hostility and enhance the negotiation and mediation skills.
- Traditional perspectives on conflict resolution to draw upon.
- Promotion of shared vision of society and a culture of peace: working to engage the society more broadly and promote messages and values of peace.
- Peace education to ensure all citizens receive basic training and have an understanding and knowledge of peacebuilding.
- Budget to ensure sustainable funding and resources.
- Implementing and monitoring an infrastructure for peace to ensure rigorous evaluation, lessons learned and strengthening peacebuilding capabilities.

Both documents include most of these elements, but there are of course differences. After all, I4P cannot simply be 'copied, cut and pasted' from one country to another. The process of building *legitimacy*, acceptability and capacity takes time. Countries should develop their own processes and mechanisms in close collaboration with key local and national stakeholders, and with support of regional and international stakeholders.[31]

Role of the government

This article focuses on informal LPCs, without a mandate of the national government and on infrastructures for peace in general. In this last aspect, the role of the government is essential. It is also a delicate relationship.

For infrastructures for peace, involvement of main stakeholders at the different levels is very important; this gives an infrastructure clout and legitimacy. However, the risks are twofold. On the one hand, as a simple civil service initiative, an I4P could be stalled. If a government decides to establish such an infrastructure, it may have impact and weight.

On the other hand, governments may want to steer this process, pay little attention to the consultation of other stakeholders. Consequently, I4P may become a top–down process. The government may even be corrupt or otherwise give not much legitimacy to the I4P or a national mandate may even be counter-productive.

If conflicts escalate and situations become polarised, government and political parties may get involved, become partisan or paralysed. In such events, a peace infrastructure cannot bridge the divides and is instead part of the problem.

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[31]On I4P in Ghana, see Emmanuel Bombande, *Ghana: Developing an Institutional Framework for Sustainable Peace: UN, Government and Civil Society Collaboration for Conflict Prevention* (GPPAC Issue Paper on Joint Action for Prevention, 2007), 46–54; Ozonnia Ojielo, *Designing Architecture for Peace: A Framework of Conflict Transformation in Ghana* (Lejia: Legon Centre for International Affairs, 2010); Odendaal, *Architecture*, 55–6; Ministry of Interior, *National Architecture for Peace* (Ghana, 2006); *National Peace Council Act* (Ghana, 2011). On the I4P process in Kenya see van Tongeren, *Creating Infrastructures*; van Tongeren 'Increasing Interest in Infrastructures for Peace'; Odendaal, *Architecture*, 40–3.

A semi-independent peace infrastructure is recommended. These are being established in Ghana and Kenya. The National Peace Council in Ghana is composed of respected civil society leaders, especially from faith-based institutions. This increases their legitimacy.

It would be wise to start a process of establishing an I4P as a multi-stakeholder effort, right from the beginning. The government will of course influence the process, but when other actors (including civil society) are involved as equals, an I4P will have more legitimacy.

As article 30 of the National Peace Council Act of Ghana states, 'Independence of the Council: Except as provided in the Constitution, the Council shall not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority in the performance of its function.' This is a wise formula. And the government will gain as well from such a legitimate structure.

The urgency to establish infrastructures for peace

Most countries lack the capacities and structures to deal adequately with on-going and potential violent conflict. To have such capacities and structures in place, it is urgent to establish I4Ps, because the world is not becoming a safer place. Violent conflict has emerged as a central obstacle to the attainment of equitable and sustainable development. Furthermore, an economic downturn, the financial and the food crisis, add more tensions. Competition for resources, ethnicity and conflicts on land are adding up to the already existing potential for violent conflict in many countries.

Elections are a structured process of competition for control of political power and have an intrinsically conflictual nature. Elections make deeply rooted social conflicts more visible and thus have great potential for triggering violence. Social media may multiply triggering events.

All these elements make it very urgent to analyse what the potential is for violent conflict in a given country, who the drivers are and which capacities, mechanisms and structures are needed to counter the developments and potential conflicts.

Some conclusions and proposals

Increase in violent conflicts

Some 1.5 billion people live in fragile and conflict affected contexts in some 90 countries. A downward trend in the number of violent conflicts came to an end; the number has been increasing again. There are conflicts over land use, national resources, ethnicity and many more causes. Add to this the exclusion of certain groups, the financial, economic and food crisis, governance failure or contested elections – and this is only a partial list. We need a strategy on the national, regional and global level how to deal with these phenomena. Infrastructures for peace and local peace committees can be important pillars to counter these dangerous developments or reduce substantively their impact.

Promising approach

We are in need for a comprehensive, inclusive and long-term approach on peacebuilding. I4P can be a key instrument in this respect. It is a problem-solving approach to conflict, based on dialogue and non-violence, including main stakeholders, at the local, district and national level. It allows societies and their governments to resolve conflicts internally, developing institutional mechanisms, structures and capacities that promote this approach. Evidence has shown it has worked in several cases.

Peaceful elections

Nearly all countries have regular elections for president, parliament and local government. Elections become more contested and violent because underlying grievances are often not addressed. An I4P and/or LPCs substantially increase the chances of peaceful elections by having a structured peace community/network, an early warning and response system, capacities for conflict prevention and mediation, while different levels and sectors/actors are linked. We highlight the issue of elections here, because when there are more causes for conflict and fewer capacities and institutions to cope with those causes, elections tend to become triggers for violence. As elections are planned in advance, we should gradually build the capacities and structures that are needed for peaceful elections.[32]

Semi-independent peace infrastructure

An infrastructure for peace involves the government and other stakeholders at all levels. The involvement of the main stakeholders is crucial. It is therefore important to establish a peace infrastructure with the government as one of the pillars, but not steering the whole process. Too often, government dominates and other stakeholders feel marginalised. In polarised situations, governments may be paralysed, rendering an independent peace structure a more preferable option.

Informal local peace committees

What can people do when their government will not support them politically or financially in their pursuit of peacebuilding? One of the answers may be to create informal local peace committees. Even if they lack a national mandate, their strength is the mobilisation of local communities to forge their own peace; the empowerment of local actors to take leadership as peacebuilders; the building of confidence in a community's own resources to make peace and the generation of hope and a new vision of possible co-existence. In several places and on several occasions, as we have seen, LPCs have saved lives and communities from violence, protected property, broken deadlocks, solved problems and restored ordinary life. They have contributed towards stopping the downward spiral of violence and distrust and have forged a new upward momentum. Informal LPCs need much more political and financial support from national actors and the international community.

Cost and funding

I4P and LPCs are very cost-effective. The costs of conflicts are often hundred times higher. Aiming for sustainable peace needs sustainable and long term funding. Normal patterns of funding for two or three years are not appropriate. Establishing sustainable peace mechanisms, capacities and structures requires an investment of at least 10 years, preferably 20 years. The gains may be visible within decades: an increased number of stable countries and regions, with severely reduced risks of falling back in conflicts.

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[32]Kai Brand-Jacobsen and Paul van Tongeren, 'Infrastructure for Peace: A Way Forward to Peaceful Elections', *New Routes* 17, no. 1 (2012): 18–21; *Preventing Electoral Violence: Operational Guidance Note* (PATRIR & Commonwealth Secretariat, not yet published).

International multi-stakeholder programme

There is a need for a programme or fund for sustainable national infrastructures for peace and LPCs, set up by governments, foundations, the private sector and CSOs/INGOs. In this phase, it may cost perhaps $20–30 million a year; within 10 years the result may be 10–15 countries with a far reduced risk of an escalation of violence, with a solid peace agenda and much better prospects for development. Such a programme or fund should be gradually expanded, to include more countries aiming to establish an I4P.

Research agenda

Infrastructures for peace and local peace committees are relatively new. They are also under-researched. But their approach is promising while the need for preventing violent conflicts is urgent. What is therefore needed is a broad research agenda. Research issues should include mandate and tasks of an National Peace Council (NPC); how a peace infrastructure relates to other state institutions; the composition of peace committees; impact, challenges, lessons and experiences and evaluation of I4P and LPCs and what the conditions are to make I4P and LPCs a success. The key challenges mentioned earlier should be included as well.

International network

With the increasing interest in I4P and the establishment of I4P in more countries, it is evident that we need an international I4P network to exchange experiences between different stakeholders, reach out to a broad community, do advocacy work and facilitate communication and co-operation between the different stakeholders nationally and globally. The main aim of the international network will be to bring about a shift in how we approach conflicts, from war strategies, violence escalation and externally based interventions to effective strategies and measures, capacities and institutions to build sustainable peace.

An International Civil Society Network on Infrastructures for Peace has been established in fall 2012 with some 60 NGOs, LPCs and networks, mainly from Southern countries.[33] The Network's website will be launched in February 2013 (www.infrastructuresforpeaceinternational.org). The new international network will seek to co-operate with governments, UN agencies, academia, practitioners and other stakeholders in a platform on infrastructures for peace, to enhance I4P internationally.

Notes on contributor

Paul van Tongeren LLM established the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, publishing the People Building Peace volumes. He was the convener of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), which organised a conference on the role of civil society in peacebuilding at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in 2005 at the invitation of the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Paul was Secretary-General of GPPAC until 2010. In the past few years, Paul has focused his attention on enhancing infrastructures for peace (I4P) internationally.

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[33]For more information, contact the author of this article, paulvtongeren@gmail.com. Most quoted documents can be found on the new website of the International Civil Society Network on Infrastructures for Peace: www.infrastructuresforpeaceinternational.org.

COMMENTS

Cornerstones or scattered bricks? Comments on Paul van Tongeren's 'Potential cornerstone of infrastructures for peace? How local peace committees can make a difference'

Andries Odendaal

Centre for Mediation in Africa, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Local peace committees (LPCs) can be assessed at two levels. The first is whether LPCs are good for the communities caught in violent conflict; the second whether LPCs contribute to national peace. In this article Paul van Tongeren makes the case for the first, and implies, especially by the name of his article, that the second will follow.

The notion of local grassroots communities taking charge of their own peace in the midst of chaotic violence and destruction is indeed deeply attractive. The news that some of them have success in this regard is therefore satisfying. LPCs deserve support if only for this reason because the approach is based on quality local ownership and self-reliance; and because LPCs mitigate some of the social distress caused by violent conflict.

The question whether LPCs contribute to the national peace is, however, quite complex. Mary Anderson[1] has told us that local efforts do not necessarily add up to peace 'writ large'. For this reason the concept of infrastructures for peace is important, as van Tongeren points out, because an infrastructure implies effective linkage. LPCs linked to each other and to provincial and national structures have, at least in theory, a better chance at influencing national peace than isolated LPCs. Infrastructures for peace imply complementarity in peacebuilding between the local and national levels. But is the ideal of complementarity naïve? Does it work? A recent publication by Chris Mitchell and Landon Hancock[2] has not helped to lift some of the gloom in this regard. They concluded that the complementarity between elites and grassroots in peacebuilding efforts is predominantly one-way (top–down) and not two-way. In fact, the question as to the necessity or desirability for complementary action remains contentious, especially in the view of those in government.[3] In other words, the prospects of local peacebuilding and LPCs having an impact on national peace are not great.

However, two qualifications have to be made. First, from a theoretical perspective the necessity of local peacemaking and peacebuilding for national peace is increasingly

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[1]Mary B. Anderson, 'Experiences with Impact Assessment: Can We know What Good We Do?', in *Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict: The Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation,* ed. Alexander Austin, Martina Fischer, and Norbert Ropers (Berlin: Berghof Research Centre, 2004), 193–206.
[2]Christopher Mitchell and Landon Hancock, *Local Peacebuilding and National Peace: Interaction between Grassroots and Elite Processes* (London: Continuum, 2012).
[3]Ibid., 175.

appreciated. In my own study of LPCs[4] I have followed the cue provided by Stathis Kalyvas[5] that the production of violence in civil war takes place in an alliance between national elites and local actors; that 'the loci of agency spawned by civil war are inherently multiple'.[6] Peacebuilding, in this light, requires the same alliances and depends as much on different loci of agency. Several recent studies[7] have challenged the fixation of the reigning peacebuilding paradigm on state actors and political elites. Autessere has gone so far as to blame the failures of peacebuilding in the DR Congo on the lack of attention to local peacebuilding. In this light LPCs are indeed serious contributors to national peace because they mobilise local participation in the national peacebuilding project. LPCs that form part of a formalised infrastructure for peace that enables interaction and complementarity, and that enjoy sufficient local ownership and autonomy, are particularly useful.[8]

Second, LPCs cannot be viewed uniformly. Hancock and Iyer[9] have developed the distinction between stages in a protracted intra-state conflict in which local peacebuilding initiatives take place. While violent combat continues, local peace-making's contribution is confined to limiting the damage to communities. The examples from Burundi, DR Congo, Colombia and Afghanistan mentioned by van Tongeren confirm this point. The potential impact of LPCs increases while negotiations are taking place or when nationally agreed peace objectives exist (such as in South Africa); and when a long-term peacebuilding strategy is being implemented (such as in Ghana and Kenya).

Informal LPCs, the focus of van Tongeren's attention, are particularly vulnerable to accusations of being irrelevant for the larger picture. The problem is compounded by the often piecemeal implementation of LPCs by (I)NGOs without sufficient strategic linkage to other LPCs and higher levels of authority. However, informal LPCs have demonstrated their potential to make a substantial contribution to national peace. The Wajir LPC is an excellent example in this respect and fortunately not the only one. But failures also abound and perhaps the most important challenge at the moment is to determine what caused some LPCs to have a substantial impact where others have failed.

What is clear is that it is an area in need of further study and experimentation. Van Tongeren's attention to this matter is therefore welcome indeed.

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[4]Andries Odendaal, *Rebuilding Intra-Community Ruins: A Study of Local Peace Committees* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2013).
[5]Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[6]Ibid., 365.
[7]Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (London: Routledge, 2011); Séverine Autessere, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[8]Odendaal, *Rebuilding Intra-Community Ruins*.
[9]Landon Hancock and Pushpa Iyer, 'The Nature, Structure, and Variety of Peace Zones', in *Zones of Peace*, ed. Landon Hancock and Christopher Mitchell (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian, 2007), 29–50.

Comments on Paul van Tongeren's 'Potential cornerstone of infrastructures for peace? How local peace committees can make a difference'

Emma Corneliusson

Project Implementation Department Manager, CPAU, Cooperation for Peace and Unity, Afghanistan

Local peace committees (LPCs) and infrastructures for peace (I4P) are broad concepts and can be applied to various structures, institutions and initiatives across the globe. These structures, institutions and initiatives are hard to compare in a methodological way based on the concepts if one wants to focus on their individual characteristics. Still, this is not enough to dismiss the concepts, but rather an indicator that more work needs to be conducted. Each nation has its own specific context – lessons can be learned and best practices shared among actors with a practical, political, research, military background from across the globe. Networks and open discussions should be encouraged to include the concepts in future peacebuilding. Better linkages are needed between actors working with various LPCs and I4P initiatives both nationally and internationally, and there is a need for a greater mixture of actors involved. Increased instability across the globe demands sustainable peacebuilding; in this, I4P and/or LPCs should be a self-evident component.

Developing set guidelines for what I4P is in a very rigorous form will be a challenge, and might not be entirely beneficial. The degree to which the systems and initiatives are formal or informal, the involvement of various governmental, civil society organisations business and international actors, and the vision driving each, should be context specific. This is not to prevent positive development, and create structures which are ineffective and cause more harm than good. Actors involved and methods in each country need to be carefully selected in order to ensure relevance and sustainability. The creation of structures alone does not ensure they are used as intended, and focus needs to be given so that structures created to bring peace are not captured and abused.

Where government influence is weak and/or illegitimate alternatives are needed. It is also in these situations where the risks for LPCs, but even more so I4P, risk doing more harm than good, and risk being implemented in theory and not in practice. In the case of Afghanistan a nationally accepted I4P structure would be beneficial. There are some attempts of national peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives, but due to political reasons these are often more present and active in Kabul than on the district and village level. Also the abundance of organisations and institutions working with peacebuilding in Afghanistan without a common strategy has created more confusion than sustainable and solid improvement. Frameworks exist in part, but in practice there is still a long way ahead until practice and theory are linked in an effective and positive way. The upcoming presidential election and withdrawal of troops is something which every Afghan is well aware of, and the outcomes worry many. If a broader network of local, provincial and national institutions and actors were to exist and able to collaborate, this could enable civilians to express opinions and priorities, and potentially on their own prevent the reoccurrence of civil war and new outbreaks of mass violence. Now is the time where a

future vision and collective strategy for where Afghanistan should be aiming should be created. The different levels of institutions and actors need to communicate better, co-ordinate and together work for the future. The LPC is a good local and district level alternative, but a broader, and more visionary I4P framework should be developed. This should optimally take place alongside the greater global effort to develop the concepts further. Viewing the concepts from an Afghan context, the historical existence of LPCs lays a framework, but several decades of civil war, upcoming elections and withdrawal of international troops makes local, national and international work related to I4P and LPCs more crucial and urgent than ever.

LPCs can be, depending on how, why and by whom they are created, beneficial at almost any stage of conflict and conflict transformation. When dispute resolution institutions are lacking or captured alternatives will be needed to aid transformation from ongoing conflict to stability. This is regardless of being in a particular village or a nation and/or state as a whole. At the same time, the participants of the LPC risk becoming targets and/or captured by other stakeholders of an ongoing dispute and/or conflict. LPCs are not a solution to continuous and/or high intensity conflicts, in these cases more comprehensive initiatives to reach peace are needed. LPCs usually require a certain level of stability in their surrounding context, so that direct harm does not come to their participants. But this does not mean that stability has to be present on a state and/or national level for LPCs to be started. They can be established within a local context, and add dispute resolution capacity within communities.

As mentioned I4P and LPCs are broad concepts, which can include a wide variety of initiatives, more work, discussions, sharing lessons learned and research are needed. The concepts are not without problems and risks but have potential for extensive positive contributions to peacebuilding and conflict transformation initiatives across the globe.

Comments on Paul van Tongeren's 'Potential cornerstone of infrastructure for peace? How local peace committees can make a difference'

Adane Ghebremeskel[a] and Richard Smith[b]

[a]SADC Council for NGOs, Gaborone, Botswana; [b]ACTION for Conflict Transformation, Johannesburg, South Africa

Introduction

Local initiatives aimed at containing the spread of violence, protecting local communities and preventing the escalation of conflict have been a part of the social landscape probably for as long as there have been local conditions that have required their establishment. While often they remain unnoticed and undervalued the release of Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace in 1992, and the increasing attention paid to 'post-conflict peacebuilding', has included a focus on local peace committees. In his article van Tongeren picks up on this

trend and seeks to draw attention to micro-level forms of organisation that he refers to as local peace committees (LPCs).

There is a growing recognition that externally driven peace processes lack the longer term commitment required to support adequately fragile communities emerging out of crisis. At the same time significant research has been carried out that backs up the lived experiences of peace practitioners and provides compelling evidence of the essential role that local initiatives play in managing and transforming the tensions inherent in communities emerging from periods of intense violence. The work being done by these initiatives to reconcile adversaries and to manage and transform lingering and emerging forms of tension is fast becoming an object of study by several influential scholars. Van Tongeren's contribution in this respect is welcomed.

In many instances the local response to conflict includes the establishment of more structured forms of organisation, including the building of local peace committees. As van Tongeren points out, and through the examples he provides, there is by no means a single formula for the most effective form such local responses take. Indeed it is often on the diversity of their form, developed in response to the diversity of dynamics and conditions that form part of each unique context, that their real strength lies.

On the basis of selected cases from Africa, Colombia and Afghanistan the article under review highlights a number of general observations that signify the diversity of the groups van Tongeren refers to as local peace committees. Differences between initiatives include the quality and quantity of data generated, types of organisational form, operating context, ownership, composition, mandate, the role of funding from international partners and other forms of sustainability. Furthermore, van Tongeren points to a number of challenges that these local initiatives face. Among these challenges are the difficult operating environment, lack of leverage to influence higher level decision making and an inability to manage conflict dynamics that emanate from the tensions between actors and systems operating at higher levels. In addition he cites an absence of a legal and policy framework, weak volunteerism and resource support as additional hurdles that have to be overcome.

Local peace committees, external actors and government

Of particular relevance to a review of van Tongeren's article is the manner in which he draws attention to and unpacks the relationship between local peace initiatives and external actors and the relationship between local and national forms of government and the initiatives established at micro-community level.

Van Tongeren points out how a conflict insensitive approach from external actors can add to the vulnerability of local initiatives. There is an inevitable asymmetrical power relationship that can threaten relatively less powerful local initiatives. This happens in a number of ways, including the potential to undermine the value base that is essential to the ongoing ability of the initiative to act as a moral compass able to mediate conflicts impartially and to maintain the moral high ground from which much of its effectiveness is drawn. Van Tongeren cites examples of how the potentially destructive effect of this power relationship can be exacerbated if resources are introduced into the relationship in a thoughtless manner, or in a way that disrupts the normal functioning of the people involved. A distorted dependence on external resources, and the possibility that local agendas can be diverted or influenced in an effort to ensure ongoing funding support, makes this relationship even more complex.

Van Tongeren's article departs from the premise that peace committees are 'potential cornerstones for a national infrastructure for peace'. In delineating his focus he makes a distinction between formal and informal LPCs. The former refers to those LPCs that are recognised or established by national government, whereas the latter are those that are purely autonomous community-driven initiatives without recognition by the governments. Von Tongeren argues that informal LPCs present a better option in terms of organising because of the relative independence of such initiatives and that because of this they are presumed to be less indebted to political actors associated with government structures, especially during periods when tensions are high as a result of government actions, and thus able to act in a more effective way as 'honest brokers'.

However in the longer term in many contexts it could be argued that it is desireable for local capacities that respond to conflict and violence to become part of the state structures in countries that are rebuilding after times of crisis. Defining the ideal relationship between local structures for peace and government cannot be separated from the longer term vision of society in which the state is able to initiate, maintain and support initiatives aimed at building peace.

Indeed in contexts where the state is seeking to rebuild itself, around for example a newly established constitutional democracy, local peace initiatives may even see the need to assist in restoring confidence in government. Contributing directly to the more effective functioning of government at local level may make strategic sense for local initiatives contributing to a longer term peacebuilding agenda. Maintaining a distance between local peace intiatives, including LPCs, and government, may also reduce their prospects for long term sustainability, and make them more dependent on international external actors. The negative impact of project type peacebuilding may well be counterproductive to the longer term intentions of a local initiative.

Closing gaps and linking levels

The article under review is useful to the extent that it draws attention to and provides evidence in support of the importance of the widespread contribution of local initiatives. The article is also valuable in that it seeks to close the gap between such local responses to conflict and other forms of infrastructure seen as helpful in managing tensions in societies faced with or emerging from times of crisis. This imperative, to connect peacebuilding efforts at different levels, is an approach that has been identified in forums of practitioners, and by some scholars, for several years now. Local peace initiatives need to be understood as one element within the complex transformational response that is required in an engagement with a complex conflict system.

However van Tongeren does not sufficiently point out that community-based peacebuilding, and the effectiveness of local peace initiatives, goes much deeper than simply the establishment of a local committee. The establishment of any form of local organisation needs to be complemented by a range of cumulative activities that are aimed at transforming individual and collective attitudes towards conflict, that enable local actors to identify their challenges, analyse local conditions and to develop strategies and plans that utilise local potentials in their efforts to shape and transform societal relations. Exploring ways of providing support to LPCs without sufficiently acknowledging this need for a more holistic and integrated approach runs the risk of oversimplifying the complexity of the contribution local initiatives have to make.

Furthermore, van Tongeren's article recognises the possibility of LPCs as cornerstones of a national peace architecture but does not pay sufficient attention to how macro-level conflict dynamics, and the manner in which these dynamics affect the dynamics of the local context, in turn impact on the effectiveness of local initiatives. It is in understanding the systemic ways in which these dynamics are interconnected that the full potential of a national infrastructure for peace, founded on local forms of organisation, lies. This could be a useful approach in many contexts but in some contexts such an approach may not be appropriate or helpful in managing local tensions.

Indeed it is in this need to respect the demands of local conditions that some of the proposals contained in the concluding section require closer scrutiny. The delicacy of the relationship between external actors and their impact on local intiative requires an extremely cautious approach. While there is evidence in the article of a sensitivity to this dynamic the overemphasis on an externally driven effort to network and support such initiatives may be cause for concern.

The notion, explored in the article, that local initiatives can be strengthened through training and by ensuring the availability of minimal funding support, still runs the risk of suggesting that such external interventions will be helpful if applied across all contexts. While training and networking may be appropriate in some instances, other forms of learning, including exchange or even learning that arises out of a more self-reflective approach, may be more appropriate in others. Where local peace initiatives become networked as a result of an externally driven agenda, instead of in response to organic needs that emerge over time, as initiatives have need of or are able to respond to the needs of others, there is a danger that their networking detracts from their original purpose.

Conclusion

Van Tongeren's article shows how diverse the LPCs are. Their role and relationship with other social actors, in particular with local authorities, vary from context to context. This is determined by the nature of the conflict that the LPCs are expected to handle.

This may be one of the reasons that make it very difficult to reach any specific preferred direction on the way forward by observing diverse LPCs across the world. There are very few uniform trends and characteristics across all of the diverse forms of initiative in existence. It is important that local initiatives are primarily looked at as local responses to local contexts. The primary aim of such endeavours should be to understand these initiatives, rather than attempt to deduce lessons that can be applied across many contexts. Essentially it may well be that in some instances it is better to leave local intiatives to develop on their own. If the need for a local initiative is powerful enough, then these initiatives will often find ways of sustaining themselves.

If a proposal to seek ways of connecting, linking and networking such initiatives together gains traction, and if there are efforts made to mobilise resources centrally that can be used in their support, a great deal of careful thinking and intensive dialogue will be required. Such a dialogue will need to involve organisations from the global South that are already working closely with LPCs and with LPC veterans directly involved before the proposed initiative will be able to say assuredly that it is doing more good than harm.

Comments on Paul van Tongeren's 'Potential cornerstone of infrastructures for peace? How local peace committees can make a difference'

Ruto Pkalya

National Project Manager, Armed Violence and Small Arms Reduction Project, UNDP, Kenya

Van Tongeren's article has rightly captured the concept of local peace committees (LPCs), a structure that has evolved over the years to become one of the main pillars in conflict management and peacebuilding. The process of its evolution, the different paths it has taken to grow, the success stories, challenges and recommendations made to strengthen LPCs are erudite. In addition, I would like to make the following comments, observations and very few corrections in the article. I hope these observations will greatly contribute to fine tuning the article in readiness for dissemination to a wide range of stakeholders both as learning and an advocacy toll for peacebuilding in the world.

The case of Kenya and the Wajir Peace and Development Committee has been captured very well. In addition, it may help to add or rather clarify that the conflict in Wajir had spilled over to market areas that were dominated by women. Women in the market were fighting along clan lines and this infuriated a group of women civil servants (government officers) from the Wajir community who were working in Wajir leading to their intervention, beginning with the 'women' conflict in the market place. Even before the conflict spilled over to Wajir market, the government, local NGOs and elders (under the umbrella of Al Fatah elders) had failed to prevent or resolve the conflict prompting the local women civil servants, led by the late Ibrahim Dekha to intervene. After successfully mediating the conflict in the market place between the different clans, the women peace makers then enlisted the support of the government, youth, elders, religious leaders (Sheikhs and Imams) and NGOs in peacebuilding efforts leading to the establishment of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee as explained in the article. It is also important to note that one other reason for the agitation for the formation of the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management (NSC) was to institutionalise and legitimate the work of the LPCs including civil society for the then ruling regime in Kenya was fond of classifying peacebuilding as a 'security' affair that should be left to the government and not elders or civil society.

Van Tongeren, however, is not correct when he states that the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008 (NARA) recommended the establishment of district peace committees (DPCs) across the country. Although this may have been implied by the Act as one of the long lasting conflict prevention strategies, it was actually the government, through the Permanent Secretary in charge of Provincial Administration and Internal Security that directed all the district commissioners, through a circular in 2008, to establish DPCs. This directive was deduced from the fact that DPCs may have played a critical role in stabilising the Northern part of the country during the post-election violence (PEV) period of 2007–2008 and so there was a critical need to replicate them all over the country. Although this may be the case, I argued in 2009 in one of the leading dailies in

Kenya (*Daily Nation*) that there were other important reasons that made Northern Kenya peaceful and not just the sole work or presence of DPCs.[1]

To formalise the DPCs including those established as a result of this circular, the government, through the NSC, is pushing for the enactment of a peace policy and necessary legislations to institutionalise it and insulate it from legalistic challenges.

With regards to van Tongeren's 'Lack of data/reports and evaluations' (p. 51), it is also important to note that in some areas, DPCs or LPCs were literally established by the government where the government officials (district commissioners or chiefs) appointed the members of LPCs/DPCs and in some situations, became the chairs of DPCs. In Mandera, Kenya, there was a time the different clans could not trust a member from any of the clans to head the DPC forcing the district commissioner (DC) to chair it since he was by and large perceived as neutral. This situation further eroded the independence and legitimacy of such DPCs.

Insofar as the 'National context' (p. 52) is concerned, in some situations and as alluded to above, the then government defined peace as a security issue that was the preserve of the government and this definition locked or even criminalised participation of civil society and elders (including DPCs) in peacebuilding activities.

Van Tongeren's 'Diverse composition' (p. 52) attracts similar criticisms. It is important to have in mind that initially and traditionally, elders (old men) were the custodians of peace in society. This is why elders dominated the membership of earlier LPCs. However, the spirited effort of civil society led to increased membership and participation of women in LPC activities. In Kenya, it is now a constitutional requirement that no more than two-thirds of members of appointive or elective positions should be of the same gender; including LPCs/DPCs. It may be timely to evaluate and document the impact of this 'forced' engendering of LPCs/DPCs.

Finally, with regards to the 'Link with local/regional government' (p. 52), it must be stressed that said link was not only meant to legitimise the LPCs but was also to give them the much needed 'teeth' especially for enforcing their decisions. On the other hand, the linkage with traditional institutions is geared towards enhancing their legitimacy in the eyes of the communities.

The 'Political environment' (p. 53) to which van Tongeren refers, is also problematic in Kenya. Partly due to the increasing role, visibility and power of DPCs, political leaders have often dipped their fingers into the operation of DPCs. In some cases, they have influenced the membership of DPCs in the process packing these institutions with their supporters much to the chagrin of the peace agenda of the DPCs.

DPCs' weakness, or 'No teeth to bite' (p. 53) as van Tongeren puts it, can also be explained. In most cases, the DPCs depend on the goodwill of the community to enforce their decisions. In rare situations, they rely on the magical power of elders to 'curse' offenders or those who will dare question the decision of the 'elders'. As alluded to above, its linkage with local government gives it the much needed 'teeth'. Finally, in terms of

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[1]The article was published on 13 march 2010 under the title, 'Why northern Kenya remained calm during post-poll violence'. Accessible online at http://www.nation.co.ke/oped/Letters/-/440806/545346/-/id8jgs/-/index.html Standard, another leading dally in Kenya, had published the article earlier under the title 'Why NEP escaped brunt of poll chaos', on *The Standard*, 10 March 2010 issue available online at http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=1144008477&pageNo = 2& story_title =

'Funding' (p. 54), the study of LPCs in Afghanistan is also reflected in many countries where LPCs are part of the peacebuilding architecture.

It may be important to clarify that the final version of the peace policy in Kenya was submitted to cabinet in June 2012 for enactment and legislation. The cabinet subcommittee on security has approved it and the policy is now with the office of the attorney general for further review and recommendation for aspects of the policy that may need to be legislated into law by parliament. The responsible permanent secretary has said on many occasions that stakeholders should continue implementing part of the policy as the final approval/legislative processes are being finalised.

Finally, with regards to 'The peace forums', it is worth remembering that in addition to the national forum, Kenya has gone ahead and established county peace forums as another avenue of devolving and cascading the peace infrastructure to the lower levels.