AN ARCHITECTURE FOR BUILDING PEACE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES

A SUMMARY FOR PRACTITIONERS

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This publication is a short summary of the complete version of "An architecture for building peace at local level: A comparative study of local peace committees" (LPCs); an analytical study by Andries Odendaal available through the UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery. The summary specifically adds practical dimensions and recommendations for UN/UNDP conflict prevention and peacebuilding practitioners. However, the issues covered in the summary cannot be fully understood without the full version of the document. This summary has been produced by the UNDP and not by the study's author.

Both the full study and this summary can be downloaded from the UNDP's website: **http://www.undp.org/cpr/whats_new/_publications.shtml**.

I.   INTRODUCTION

In the past 20 years, local peace committees have emerged as effective instruments for local peacebuilding in conflict-affected situations. LPCs have been established in different countries (many with support from the UNDP) and many anecdotes testify to their effectiveness. But there is little systematized and practical knowledge about LPC successes and failures or how they were created, or the history of government and international development efforts to support or create them.

To fill this gap, the UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery commissioned a study – "An architecture for building peace at local level: A comparative study of local peace committees" – of the effectiveness, composition and history of LPCs. The study focuses on these committees as part of a formally recognized national peace architecture, and examines LPC operations in 12 different contexts by reviewing existing literature and practical experiences. It also includes eight full case studies: FYR Macedonia, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone and South Africa. To our knowledge, this is the first systematic compilation of practical lessons learned from existing local peace mechanisms. The study outlines what LPCs can and cannot do and how successful LPCs are strengthened.

> In Kenya, a community-based local peace committee was so successful in containing inter-tribal violence that the programme was copied and given official Government status. The expanded Kenyan local peace committee programme has led to formal negotiated peace agreements and declarations between pastoral tribes. The LPCs have successfully applied features of the local traditional justice system to cases of inter-ethnic conflict, and have facilitated engagement between the Kenyan Government and marginalized communities.

Local level peace mechanisms have different names in various countries; in some they are indeed called local peace committees, in others they are called local peace mechanisms, local peace commissions or councils, peace zones, etc. They are not all the same, but contain similar elements and approaches. This summary will use the term 'local peace committees'.

II.   WHAT IS A LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEE?

A local peace committee is a forum that includes different sections of the community (local government and political representatives, civil society, business and religious leaders and representatives of traditional groups, etc.). The committee meets regularly to discuss emerging conflicts or tensions affecting a district, municipality, town or village. LPCs have been established in contexts of open violent conflict, and also in situations of socio-political fragility and/or complex political transition processes.

LPCs help the parties involved to negotiate a mutually satisfactory peace arrangement. Their activities provide a culturally relevant and appropriate opportunity for representatives of locally-divided communities to meet and discuss the conflict. Detailed practices differ, but all LPCs use dialogue to promote mutual understanding and trust-building, inclusive and constructive problem solving and joint action to prevent violence. An LPC does not use coercion or hard bargaining; its authority rests on the strength of the consensus it achieves.

Typically, LPCs are established where there is debilitating polarization within local communities and the threat of violence. At the same time, there is usually evidence of emerging national and local political will to prevent conflict and make/sustain peace. Often, these conditions arise in contexts of state illegitimacy or lack of capacity that hamper the effectiveness of state institutions as arbitrators. LPCs are particularly useful in conditions where coercive methods will be counterproductive; and where the justice system in particular is weak or lacks credibility. LPCs rely on 'soft' approaches such as encouraging dialogue, facilitation, mediation and negotiation.

III. WHAT CAN LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES DO?

Local Peace Committees can:

- **enable communication** between former protagonists, thereby dealing with potentially destructive rumours, fear and mistrust;

- **prevent or contain violence** through a strategy of joint planning for and monitoring of potentially violent events;

- **play a facilitation or mediation role in local peacemaking processes** that leads to local peace agreements and reconciliation;

- **facilitate dialogue** between various sections of the community and strengthen social cohesion and participatory governance approaches;

- **convey information between local and national levels** so that local peacebuilding opportunities and challenges can receive appropriate national attention.

It is also important to note what LPCs cannot do. LPCs cannot enforce peace, especially with spoiler groups bent on using violence. LPCs cannot deal with the structural causes of conflict, particularly if the conflict is driven by national political, economic or cultural interests. Obviously, LPCs also cannot openly override national political imperatives.

Finally, LPCs should not assume functions of local governments; they are forums for promoting dialogue and reconciliation. The relationship of LPCs with local governments differs from context to context. In some cases, LPCs have facilitated 'mini social compacts' and enabled participatory governance processes; in others they have been subordinate to local councils.

IV. THE DESIGN OF A SUCCESFUL LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEE

1. Successful local peace committees depend on local political will and buy-in from the wider community

National participants do not take part in LPC processes; local participants do. Establishing an LPC should not be imposed on local stakeholders – ideally, creating and deciding membership of an LPC should ultimately be a local decision. In fact, the process of engaging with local stakeholders to reach this decision is a critical aspect of success. Therefore, if LPCs receive legitimacy and recognition through a formal national mandate, it should be set out in a way that respects the need for local ownership of the LPC process. On the other hand, LPCs have effectively been established by the state in several countries following a negotiated settlement of a conflict. In FYR Macedonia, the commissions for inter-community relations provides one example of this approach.

> In Nicaragua, local peace commissions mediated several local agreements. They were particularly successful in engaging contra guerillas who had re-armed after a nationwide ceasefire agreement. The commissions also helped to successfully reintegrate the contras back into society at a time when all other attempts to deal with them had failed.

The importance of local leadership can be seen by comparing LPC experiences in South Africa and Nepal. South Africa's National Peace Accord sought to deal with the problem of excessive nationwide violence during the transition period from apartheid to democracy. The Accord was an elite pact negotiated behind closed doors and then announced to the public. At the grassroots level, there were pockets of strong resistance.

However, national participants understood the need for carefully-facilitated processes to secure local buy-in. Establishing LPCs needed to be rooted in the conscious decision of local stakeholders to engage with the peace process. This focus on local decision-making created the risk that local participants could block formation of an LPC – as indeed happened in a number of instances. It became clear it was critically important to work patiently and deal effectively with local resistance to and concerns about the peace process. The staff handling implementation of South Africa's national peace architecture spent much time and effort working with communities to encourage and support LPCs. The committees ultimately made an important contribution to building a peaceful political order.

In Nepal, the national Government essentially ordered local peace committees to be created and appointed their members with no local consultation. It provided some administrative support, but little technical assistance or explanation of the committees' planned role. The Nepalese experiment only succeeded in districts where local stakeholders realized an LPC could be useful and chose to commit to the process separately from national support.

Therefore, the process followed in forming an LPC is very important and requires careful facilitation and enabling activities. The facilitator should:

- share information with all relevant local parties and organizations, and provide adequate opportunities for local stakeholders to discuss the matter, express their concerns and ask questions;

- orient the parties to concepts relevant to LPC creation and inclusive dialogue-based problem solving. Orientation is particularly important in post-conflict societies because people are often emerging from authoritarian political cultures and/or are being asked to pursue an entirely different form of decision-making. Role clarification is also important: LPC members and the wider community should understand a committee's functions and limits;

- request that potential participants discuss the matter with their members or supporters and return to a follow-up meeting with a mandate.

An LPC should be set up only once mandates have been received from all relevant organizations.

2. Local peace committees should include parties to the conflict, but be led by 'insider-partials'

The way LPC members are chosen is crucial in determining their effectiveness and impact. An LPC should include local organizations or movements relevant to the local peace process in order to make the course of action sustainable. In many cases, the dynamics of local conflicts are related to those at national level, meaning that the LPC becomes a forum where local representatives of national protagonists meet. Nonetheless, an LPC's composition should be determined at local, not national level.

Including parties to the conflict is vital, but an LPC works best when some of its members can occupy the middle ground, acting as peacemakers, conciliators or mediators. It is important that an LPC be led by these 'insider-partials' – people who are taken seriously, respected, trusted, and have the personal integrity to lead the peace process. They are not impartial mediators. They are local people who mediate or provide leadership from a position of connectedness and belonging to the community, and must live with the consequences of their work. Insider partials are usually drawn from religious, business or other civil society organizations.

> In South Africa, local peace committees could not completely stop the political violence that followed the end of apartheid. However, many LPCs prevented potentially violent events and made local dialogue and problem-solving processes possible.

An LPC should have an inclusive membership, but local traditions do not necessarily respect some values that are assumed at an international level – such as including women. This is a difficult dilemma. As far as possible, an LPC should determine its own composition; prescriptive formulas should not be imposed. Making its own decisions on this matter gives an LPC local legitimacy and strengthens its efficiency.

V. A NATIONAL PEACE ARCHITECTURE TO SUPPORT PEACE AT ALL LEVELS

Ideally, an established national peace architecture should assist LPCs by providing **political, technical, and administrative support**. These three aspects are interconnected, and failure in any one respect has a negative impact on the entire process. The national architecture should include the following aspects;

A national multi-stakeholder forum can possibly coordinate LPC activities, provide guidance based on a national political consensus and facilitate local and national communication. A national multi-party body can also advise LPCs and facilitate access to national resources. A good example is Sierra Leone's National Code of Conduct Monitoring Committee – a multi-party body with the same composition as local bodies.

> In Sierra Leone, the national 'peace architecture' underpins all LPC activities, and has provided the basis for the committees to play an important role in mediating conflict prior to and during national elections. The committees also successfully promoted reconciliation among political parties after clashes between their supporters in several areas.

A technical facility can provide skilled facilitation, mediation or other peacebuilding services to LPCs. Establishing or supporting LPCs requires in-depth understanding of the demands and dynamics of peace processes and skill in managing them. LPCs should have access to professional, skilled conflict-transformation practitioners trained and equipped locally to fulfil this role. This training should be a continuous process of action and facilitated reflection, rather than a one-off event, and is one of the most worthy areas for external support. The objective should be to develop a body of knowledge and skills that is culturally and contextually relevant. If possible, full-time appointments should be made at a ratio of one professional facilitator for every three to five LPCs (which was roughly the situation in South Africa).

Administrative support can offer administrative and financial assistance to LPCs at relatively low cost due to local buy-in. In principle, LPC members should offer to serve on a voluntary basis because they are working for their own peace. Payment for services is not advisable and can be counterproductive. However, financing is necessary to support members' transport and accommodation costs, and for expenditures incurred in the process of making peace (venue rental costs, public address systems, bus hire, etc.). The largest budget items are for providing technical support and orienting and training LPC members. These activities also require a certain amount of logistical support.

VI. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

The eventual goal of a process to create LPCs is to locate all support structures within the national peace architecture. However, almost all successful national LPC programmes have required external support at some point. Over the years, the UNDP has played an important role in supporting LPCs in Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone and other countries.

To ensure that national peace architectures and LPCs become self-sustaining, external support should be aimed specifically at building capacity and strengthening local and national ownership. However, there is an inherent dilemma in this respect: local ownership is a precondition for LPCs to succeed, and relying on external support may weaken this ownership. Therefore, it is crucial that external agencies be extremely careful about the ways they provide external support, and they need to pay attention to matters of ownership and sustainability.

> Local peace committees have helped prevent election-related violence in Malawi, Sierra Leone and South Africa.

It is also critical to sustain external support and to carefully determine the length of time it will be necessary. This support should be specifically aimed at building capacity of local institutions with managerial responsibilities.

VII. HOW CAN the UNDP HELP?

One of the UNDP's particular strengths is its continued presence in a country. Other agencies come and go in response to immediate crisis management, but the UNDP sustains its presence and establishes and maintains long-lasting relationships with national and local partners. The UNDP is therefore well-placed to focus its attention on building and sustaining national peace architectures and LPC capacity. Key recommendations to UNDP Country Offices include:

Equip staff with substantive expertise in peacebuilding: Experience shows that successful UN-system support to LPCs hinges on using qualified staff with technical expertise in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Highly skilled and experienced UNDP staff played critical roles in most countries that succeeded with their LPC process.

Invest in LPCs only when the conditions seem right: Begin with a thorough analysis to determine whether suitable conditions exist to establish LPCs in a sustainable manner. Country Offices should consider supporting LPCs and a national peace architecture only if:

- local communities demonstrate a high level of polarization, have a history of violence, or there are strong indicators of potential violence (in other words, if there is a clear need and demand for local peacebuilding);

- local governance systems cannot fulfil their normal conflict resolution function or require a specific mechanism to promote social cohesion and constructive conflict resolution that would not be provided otherwise;

- sufficient local and national political opportunities exist to implement local peacebuilding processes. This includes ensuring that local peacebuilding will not be excessively politicized, and that there is enough national and local buy-in to the concept. LPCs necessarily operate in high-risk areas characterized by political instability and deep distrust. Therefore, the question is not whether ideal conditions exist to implement them, but if there are opportunities to move forward despite the risks;

- the UN system enjoys credibility in the context as an impartial and reliable facilitator and supporter;

- the UN system has a longer-term commitment to local governance and decentralization support, and understands the need to link and align LPCs to this longer-term commitment;

- the UN system has sufficient internal dedicated capacity (a peace and development advisor or other conflict prevention/peacebuilding expert) to provide quality substantive advice for LPC implementation.

If several of the suggested engagement criteria have been met, UNDP Country Offices could fulfil any of the following roles to support a peace architecture that includes LPCs:

- Make available competent UNDP staff with a thorough understanding of conflict transformation/peacebuilding and appropriate skills to support and facilitate LPC work.

- Work with existing LPCs to strengthen their role in monitoring and preventing violence, especially in particular political situations such as before and during election processes.

- Provide financing as a bridging measure so that a peace architecture can be established.

- Provide institutional support to national institutions that have the task of supporting LPCs. For example, the UNDP has enhanced management and administrative systems for the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction in Nepal and the National Steering Commission in Kenya.

- Provide technical support to national partners that sustain LPCs through in-service training or other forms of skills training.

- Spread the word about LPC usefulness to relevant national audiences through conferences, seminars and consult

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