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Strengthening Local Peacebuilding
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Local Peacebuilding needs our support!

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Local Peacebuilders often UNNOTICED

I like to start my introduction of this *background note* on Local Peace Committees by highlighting the third sentence in the **Background note** of the Conference: *Existing or nascent grassroots structures and initiatives which aim to support peacebuilding from within society* **OFTEN GO UNNOTICED.**

This is a very true and an important fact that needs elaboration.

Local Peace Committees (LPCs) have a key role to play, but are hardly *described, analysed, recognised and supported.*

I have written several articles about LPCs and discovered that in a dozen African countries LPCs do very valuable work or have done so. But their work is very **unknown** and stays under the radar screen.

National Peace Infrastructures

Andries Odendaal is a keynote speaker this morning. From 1991-1995, he was a Regional Coordinator of one of the Regional Peace Committees in South Africa. The National Peace Infrastructure of South Africa contributed substantively to relatively peaceful elections in South Africa in 1994.

At this moment, **national** peace structures, with a mandate from the national government, exist in Africa in among others **Ghana**, Kenya and Malawi.

In Kenya alone, more than 300 Local Peace Committees worked under the umbrella of a national peace structure.

Ghana is the best example of a national peace structure, with a successful track record. The Chairman of the National Peace Council of Ghana, prof. Emmanuel Asante, is a Panellist in the last Panel of the day.

Local Peace Committees

This morning, Dieudonne Kibinakanwa from MIPAREC in Burundi, gave a lecture as well. It is great that MIPAREC established some 500 LPCs in Burundi.

In many countries, **informal** peace committees exist, having no national mandate:

- **solving community conflicts**
- **protecting the community against violence**

LPCs derive their legitimacy from the fact that it were local communities that created them in response to (the threat of) increased violence and continuing injustice.

'A Local Peace Committee (LPC) is an inclusive forum operating at the subnational level (district, municipality, town or village) that provides a platform for the collective local leadership to accept joint responsibility for building peace in that community', (Odendaal, Crucial Link, p.6)

In fragile states, people often have very little means to influence power structures that impact their existence. Often, there is also no justice for them: courts are in towns, are expensive and

bureaucratic; thus most conflicts are not solved. The more dysfunctional or weak the states are, the less power people have.

Peacebuilding via LPCs has the potential to empower people.

We notice a development, especially in African countries, that the number of weak and fragile countries increases.1) Weak state authority is an important element in the fomenting of conflicts, especially in marginalised communities.

With such developments, it is of great importance that people organise themselves.

Elections may give fertile ground for violence. 'Elections are a major catalyst for democratic change, but have an intrinsically conflictual nature. Elections make deeply rooted social conflicts more visible and thus have great potential for triggering violence', as an IDEA report from 2010 states.

Role of the government

At the national level, the role of the government is essential in providing a Peace Infrastructure with a **mandate**. Government support may give it legal status, weight and resources, provided the government is respected and has legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. If the government wants to steer the process of the Peace Infrastructure - for instance through political appointments - or appears unwilling to consult civil society actors, the Peace Infrastructure may lose legitimacy. For LPCs it may even be counter-productive to be linked to the government.

It is a challenge to find the right balance between complete independence on the one hand and being government-steered on the other.

A *semi-independent* peace infrastructure is recommended, as Ghana did establish.

Kenya is an interesting example of what can happen.

Already in 2001, Kenya started establishing a Peace Infrastructure. Some 300 LPCs were established around 2010.

Insiders say the original model worked well: they were community-based, composed of trusted LPC members with strong skills in reconciliation and as a result they solved many conflicts. But since 2008, a process of formalization, institutionalization and politicization took place, combined with the impact of the devolution. The influence of government or political parties increased, some even say they **captured** the peace infrastructure.

It is my conviction, that a **national peace infrastructure**, as Ghana established, is really great and a great **achievement**. And it would be wonderful if more governments would establish a similar peace structure.

The reality is however that many governments are not open for this idea and want to 'control' power. Or they are corrupt or dysfunctional and a peace infrastructure should even not be linked to them, because it would **delegitimize** the peace structure.

As I discovered, in a dozen of African countries **informal Local Peace Committees** exist, doing great work: Burundi, DRC, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, CAR, Liberia, Sierra Leon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissao, among others. And there will be LPCs in many more (African) countries.

Some examples:

-MIPAREC, Burundi

The Ministry for Peace and Reconciliation Under the Cross (MIPAREC) was established in 1996. Its mission is to promote community development and social cohesion through reconciliation, training and other peacebuilding-related activities. An estimated 500 LPCs are

now established, usually existing of about ten people. LPCs have successfully managed conflicts and rebuilt social cohesion at community level.

- **The Centre Resolution Conflicts (CRC) in North Kivu, DRC**

CRC is known for its successful community-led disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration work. It has persuaded ex-combatants to leave the bush and persuaded communities to accept them back. CRC has helped 25.000 IDPs to return home and rescued 780 child soldiers. It has set up dozens of LPCs. In 2017, their number was around 220.

- **District Platforms for Dialogue, Mano River region** (Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea)

In many parts of Africa, borders are porous. And sometimes this is where rebels hide, as for example in the Mano River region.

Together with Conciliation Resources (UK), four national NGOs in the four countries have established and empowered a network of locally owned peacebuilding structures called **District Platforms for Dialogue (DPDs)**. The DPD network aims to mitigate local conflicts by

- identifying emerging conflicts
- building awareness with regards to conflict issues
- facilitating dialogue to prevent the escalation of violence.

There are some 18 DPDs, but using a focal point system they are linked to some 170 remote communities.

- **Community Cohesion Committees in Ethiopia**

Gambella Regional State is in south-western Ethiopia and borders South-Sudan's Jonglei State. The region has 13 districts.

Gambella's Bureau of Justice - a government department - is tasked with promoting community cohesion and justice. ZOA, a Dutch NGO, has supported the regional Bureau of Justice in this community cohesion intervention.

The Bureau supports the establishment of so-called **Community Cohesion Leadership Committees (CCLCs)** There are about 40 CCLCs at the moment and they have solved many conflicts over land use, fishing rights and cattle raiding.

- **Regional Spaces for Dialogue (RSDs) to Peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau**

In 2007 Interpeace (an INGO based in Switzerland) and its Guinean partner **Voice of Peace** established 10 permanent dialogue groups all over the country. Since 2011, these RSDs solved on average some 100 conflicts a year.

The Business Plan For Peace

September 2017, Dr. Scilla Elworthy 2) published '**The Business Plan for Peace**'. This Plan demonstrated how 25 tried and tested strategies for preventing war could be scaled up and extended over 10 years.

Individuals and companies have come forward offering skills, assistance and partnership, with particular reference to 10 of the 25 strategies.

Strategy 2

*Activate the **Social Architecture for Peace** in areas at risk of armed violence; create systems that effectively prevent conflict and build safety at national, regional and local levels.*

Strategy 5

Fund **1500 Locally Led Peace Building Initiatives**, working through credible, established organisations such as Peace Direct, Conciliation Resources and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies.

Need for increased support for LPCs

It is **urgent** and of **great importance** that the international peacebuilding community strengthens and enhances its support for **local peacebuilding**. Too long this approach got **UNNOTICED**.

Well functioning LPCs solve conflicts before they escalate and become bigger conflicts. LPCs are relatively cheap, because it is based on committed, trusted and capable local volunteers. Resources are needed especially for training, meetings and transport cost of early response teams.

If this bottom-up approach would be strengthened in many countries, it would influence higher levels of government.

International actors have an important task to support locally owned and driven initiatives. Especially in Africa, with an increase in **fragile countries**, a **joint effort** of national NGOs, INGOs, governments and UN agencies is **urgent**.

It could be an informal **Platform** for consultation and advice, involving national NGOs, INGOs, government and UN representatives. If people see the need for it, there will be many ways to organise such a platform, or Advisory Group.

Possible issues may be:

- measuring the results, the impact of LPCs
- how cost-effective is this approach
- research where LPCs exist
- what are shortcomings of this approach and what can we do in this respect
- analysing risk factors, including 'political capture'
- what are key programme activities which are most effective, as giving training or give some support for transport/food for *Barza* meetings, etc
- which governments/UN agencies/foundations/INGOs are most open to give support and partner with such an initiative ?

There are some governments as Germany, Switzerland, UK and the Netherlands that support peace structures, but also UN agencies as UNDP and the Department of Political Affairs. In addition, there are INGOs as Conciliation Resources, Welthungerhilfe, Interpeace, PAX, Peace Direct, ZOA-international, CRS, World Vision, Concordis and southern partners as MIPAREC (Burundi), Action for Conflict Transformation (SA) and many more, including local partners of the listed INGOs.

Such a Platform or Advisory Group may link to the initiative of Dr. Scilla Elworthy with 'The Business Plan for Peace'.

For a peace structure to work, **inclusion, participation and collaboration** are essential points of departure.

In a global context of more increasingly fragile states, the urgency of investing in peace structures, especially given their relative success and high cost-effectiveness, is self evident.

A sustainable peace infrastructure is the result of commitment on the ground - which is a given - and long-term funding - which must be acquired.

Timelines should be at least ten years. The visible gains are an increased number of stable countries and regions, with significant reduced risks of falling back in conflicts.

1) Between 2007 and 2016, 29 countries experienced a critical -or significant- worsening of their situation, becoming more fragile. 20 of the 29 countries are from Africa, according to the Fragile States Index 2016, Decade Trends 2007-2016, p. 8-11. And this is about a relative

worsening in 10 years: DRC and Somalia - as examples - were even not included in this list of 20 countries. www.fundforpeace.org/fsi

2) Dr. Scilla Elworthy has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times for her work; she founded Peace Direct in 2002.

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several of the above listed references can be found on this website.

BIO

Paul van Tongeren LL.M established the European Centre for Conflict Prevention, publishing the People Building Peace – and the Searching for Peace volumes. He was the convenor 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. Since then, Paul has focussed his attention on enhancing Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) and has written many articles about I4P and Local Peace Committees. paulvtongeren@gmail.com