

viewpoint

Finding space to manoeuvre: local and national CSOs in complex and politically charged contexts



Consultation meeting at community level, Burundi.

© APHD Burundi

A view from INTRAC's Central Asia Programme

A time of extended or severe political tension - such as the transition period from 1990 in the former Soviet Union - causes many problems for civil society organisations (CSOs). Whether through links with local communities or national elites, CSO leaders are almost inevitably caught up in conflict or social turmoil, supporting or opposing the current powers that be.

In ONTRAC 59¹, we studied the role of international NGOs (INGOs) in complex and politically charged contexts. The articles provided examples of how INGOs attempt to understand what is going on in these environments, be sensitive to conflict and potential conflict, help the victims of violence, support human rights defenders and so on.

In this issue we are looking at the views of local and national CSOs who are usually closer to events and can rarely take a break by going back to headquarters in some far-off country. We asked authors in four very different settings to reflect on the following questions:

- How are local civil society groups operating in politically charged contexts? How are they finding spaces to manoeuvre and how are they seeking to overcome the context-specific challenges they face?
- Under what circumstances are external support and alliances with donors and INGOs helpful? When are they not? What works well for local civil society groups and what does not?

The authors offer perspectives from countries, or parts of countries, which are resource poor, affected by violent conflict or sustained low intensity violence, with limited or constrained space for civil society. They each bring their individual views, but there are a number of common themes across the articles that resonate with my own regional experience.

In Central Asia, we often consider the period after the five ex-soviet socialist republics got independence in 1991 as building the base for civil society. However, in times of political conflict - such as the civil war in Tajikistan in the

Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| A view from INTRAC's Central Asia Programme..... | 1 |
| Local NGOs in Yemen: growing in strength... | 3 |
| APDH in Burundi: staying relevant in a difficult context..... | 4 |
| Baladna: working with Palestinian youth living in Israel..... | 6 |
| Local agency and linkage: why they matter... | 7 |

In this issue:

This issue of ONTRAC convenes views from four local/national civil society organisations on how they operate in complex and politically charged contexts, and how they would want external actors to support them.

After an overview and reflections from Charles Buxton, INTRAC's Central Asia Regional Representative, Khlood Alhaj from the Social Fund for Development looks in detail at the prospects and challenges for local NGOs in Yemen in a context of conflict.

Jean Marie Habwintahe and Rene-Claude Niyonkuru, from the Association for Peace and Human Rights in Burundi, reflect on the significance of locally-based initiatives, networking and collaboration to overcome a disruptive political context.

Ameer Zreik from Baladna - the Palestinian Association for Arab Youth - outlines the importance of critical discussion of history and culture to promote identity and peace, as well as some of the challenges in securing funding in a complex context.

Andries Odendaal, Senior Associate at the Centre for Mediation in Africa, emphasises how good analysis of local dynamics and effective and sustainable linkages between civil society and external actors are key elements when developing and implementing a successful strategy or initiative.

mid-late 1990s or Kyrgyzstan's double "coloured revolution"² in 2005 and 2010 – we see how the civil sector splits into different political camps (pro-democracy, conservative, nationalistic, secular, religious).

Indeed, some civil groups may hardly be affected by political tension (for example small clubs and hobby groups, traditional credit associations or residents committees); and others may take a direct part in political life – in political parties, media organisations, various lobby groups, social movements, neighbourhood self-defence groups, and so on. Many of these do not get foreign funding or belong to the international development community. In this issue of ONTRAC we focus on local and national organisations with international ties, funding or partners.

Increasing politicisation

First, we can say that in times of political crisis, the local or national agenda tends to take precedence. Adopting the right stance may even be a question of survival for local CSOs. This comes across strongly in the articles in this edition and can be seen today in Ukraine. Often ethnic or clan identity becomes important (see the article on Yemen).

Second, violence (political, ethnic, or gender based) by whatever means (terrorism, aerial bombardment, liberation warfare, civil war) inevitably changes the rules of the game for CSOs and communities. Either they are forced to take sides, entering a new form of struggle for their objectives (or new objectives), or they adopt a neutral, likely non-violent stance. The agenda may be humanitarian, providing services and socio-psychological support for those suffering from political and military actions, or it may be around rights – advocating for minorities, displaced people, children, disabled or old people side-lined by the conflict.

This happened after the civil conflicts in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. It took a long time for CSOs involved in humanitarian and peace-building programmes to switch back to their original objectives.

History and leadership

In politically complex situations, historical issues and disputes often become super important for CSOs. We see this in the article about Baladna. Zreik asks the international community not to forget the origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. His association actively promotes critical discussion of the history and culture of Palestinians in Israel, the Occupied Territories and the Diaspora, trying all the while to build alliances with other national and religious minorities. Promoting and showing leadership in a time of crisis is another vital function for local and national organisations.

This kind of broad perspective has been achieved by local CSOs with deep experience in conflict resolution and defence of human rights. Often local CSOs have gained these skills from INGOs. But the articles in this edition of ONTRAC show the strains that sometimes occur in these relationships – for example, when local organisations feel that INGOs are dominating humanitarian programmes or are back-tracking on questions of principle.

After the 2005 revolution in Kyrgyzstan, it was notable that some donors began to opt for stability over democracy (indeed, many elements in the national elite did too!)

Tense moments at election time

In Burundi – a country suffering long-term political divisions and violence – the authors note a twofold challenge. On the one hand, as tension rises before the elections planned for late 2015, government restrictions on CSOs are increasing; on the other hand, beneficiary and supporter groups are crying out for action to reduce their sufferings. The article shows an important strategy used by local CSOs – networking widely within civil society and with government and international agencies.



An elderly Russian lady shields herself from the hot sun as she waits at a bus stop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

© Sara Lafleur-Vetter. CC BY 2.0

The importance of local analysis is stressed by Odendaal in his article on the work of conflict mediators in South Africa. Conflict prevention or mitigation mechanisms proposed by foreign donors may need to be adapted and not everything works as expected - for example, mediators may be ignored by key government figures. He notes another problem that we have seen in the former Soviet Union region: armed conflict or major political change brings many civil society leaders and activists into government and national leadership roles. But trying to defend the new regime they are part of, they may not support civil society efforts that rock the boat (often a very precarious boat) they are sitting in.

Working together

All in all, the experiences of authors in this edition show the need for national and international civil actors to collaborate closely with each other. The analysis of the local context by organisations embedded in the country's culture and political life is vital for any strategy of international support. The words partnership and understanding come up often in the four articles. Indeed, respect for the difficult role of local and national CSOs must be the basis for an effective and sustainable strategy.

Charles Buxton
Regional Representative
INTRAC Central Asia

charlesb@intrac.kg

¹ INTRAC, 2015. "ONTRAC 59 The role of INGOs in complex and politically charged contexts." Oxford, INTRAC. <http://www.intrac.org/resources.php?resource&id=832>

² "Coloured revolution" is a term used to refer to the political upheavals in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in the 2000s.

Local NGOs in Yemen: growing in strength

By June 2015 the conflict within Yemen¹ had reached 20 out of the country's 22 governorates, aggravating the humanitarian situation in which around 81% of the population are in need of assistance. While there are many examples that show an effective response by local NGOs (LNGOs) to the situation, many of them are questioning whether what they are doing is good enough, what role they should be playing, what could be done to reinforce what has already been achieved, and what help they need to counter challenges.

The role of LNGOs in a context of conflict

Yemen, which unified in 1990, is one of the poorest countries in the Arab region, suffering armed conflicts since the 1994 civil war. Despite the increasing number of LNGOs, Yemeni civil society was not active in responding to conflict-related needs. This was partly due to the lack of experience of LNGOs in participating in development in general, and in functioning in such a difficult political environment. There is a contrast between rules and norms in Yemen's tribe culture and some of the aims LNGOs are working to achieve, such as human rights.

NGOs focused mainly on the provision of welfare and social support, implementing pre-designed projects for donors, and some limited reporting on violations to international human rights agencies. Although this was not necessarily the role that they wanted to play, especially those seeking to promote equal citizenship and rights, it gave them space to sustain and the chance to develop gradually at the same time.

When Yemen joined the Arab Spring in 2011, it was expected it would translate into real change and stability. The number of NGOs increased, reaching 12,500 by 2014. They became more active in conflict resolution and LNGOs participated in

¹The internal conflict escalated in 2014, when a political transition agreement reached a deadlock. This resulted in an open armed conflict among different groups, including the military and led to the intervention of Saudi Arabia and other allied countries in March 2015. In September 2015, a group called 'Houthis' led what they call a revolution.

establishing a new constitution for Yemen that would guarantee them more freedom. However, a political transition agreement was not reached and in 2014 the country descended into another armed conflict.

LNGOs were already constrained by a lack of adequate financial and human resources, as well as unpredictable changes in the political and social context. With the outbreak of wide-scale conflict, they had to find ways to operate in the chaos.

LNGOs as a key player now and into the future

Despite a context of political instability, many Yemeni LNGOs are finding their own ways to manoeuvre and are demonstrating their ability to provide an effective response to the dire situation. Examples of these organisations include:

Omam Coalition for Yemen was established after the foreign intervention in March 2015, and is the largest national voluntary initiative. It involves 65 LNGOs, academics, human rights activists and journalists from different governorates and currently works on humanitarian and relief activities. Each member NGO contributes, pooling resources and knowledge, to achieve their planned activities. Taking a coalition approach enables members to respond to the needs of communities by themselves, and then seek donor funding as appropriate.

Mowatanah Organisation for Human Rights is an independent organisation that has worked from 2013 until 2015. It issued a series of reports documenting human rights violations by internal and external parties involved in the conflict with a high level of neutrality. This put them in a strong position not to be controlled by any party, and was necessary in order to gain the trust of other stakeholders, including the local community and INGOs.

Most LNGOs attribute their ability to continue working during the conflict to different and overlapping factors including partnerships and networking with different stakeholders. These have helped LNGOs to respond to the needs of communities, and raise their voice as an active player. Leadership and strong capacity have also played a critical role in implementing

initiatives and overcoming challenges. Finally, independence has made stakeholders, including the conflict parties, take LNGOs seriously.

However, not all LNGOs have the ability to overcome challenges and continue working. As a result of the conflict, many have been forced to shut down.

Partnerships and relations with INGOs

When the 2015 conflict escalated, there was a shift in the international NGO sector operating in Yemen. Many suspended their projects and focused on humanitarian relief.

Local NGOs were passive recipients of this shift. They were not involved in the process, other than when international partners informed them that they needed to implement some activities related to humanitarian relief.

Most LNGOs believe that their fundamental relations with INGOs are the same as before the war, with a lack of real partnerships and INGOs acting as donors within an 'inner-circle'. There is a need for these relationships to be strengthened and for transparent dialogues between the two. There is also a need for LNGOs to be supported to assess the needs of communities without being tied to donors' agendas.

Conclusion

In my experience, LNGOs are the hope for Yemen. Since 1990, they have adjusted their strategies from avoiding work in the politically charged context, to operating amidst the chaos.

However, a new approach and healthy dialogues with INGOs and donors are essential in order to help reinforce what has already been achieved, and respond adequately to current and future challenges. LNGOs need support to face the unpredictable situation, as although it could change, the conflict and its aftermath will remain for a long time.

Khlood Alhaj
Research Assistant
Center for Global Development and
Sustainability, Brandeis University

khahaj@sfd-yemen.org

APDH in Burundi: staying relevant in a difficult context

After two decades of being in a relatively good position to advance local and national issues, Burundian civil society seems to be in the middle of a puzzling crossroads. The current disruptive political context, characterised by an ongoing fight for the control of power between the ruling party and the opposition, not only threatens peace and stability of the whole country, but also puts the work of CSOs at risk.¹ Their efficiency and future are now progressively undermined by increasing repression and restrictions from the government; and their own failure to design and implement genuine interventions that are in line with beneficiaries' aspirations.

There is now an urgent need for CSOs to reassess their missions, actions, strategies, values, and so on, to make sure that they do not fall amidst the competing political interests prior to, during and after the 2015 general, yet tense, elections.

This article explores how the Association for Peace and Human Rights (APDH) manages to keep its interventions relevant and on the move in such a difficult context as Burundi.

Issues affecting civil society in Burundi

There are a number of issues facing civil society in Burundi. These include increasing mistrust and lack of cooperation between the government and CSOs. Harassment and restrictions against civil society from different government structures are also increasingly being reported. Recently, the government has accused CSOs of being political acquaintances with the opposition, especially when they all denounce abuses and demonstrate a lack of capacity or political will to adequately push forward issues in the general interest. This generates more mistrust and confrontation.

In addition, CSOs have insufficient financial and human resources, and many are totally



Youth project building a school.

©APDH Burundi.

dependent on external funding. A significant number are unable to mobilise their own resources and instead work with large international NGOs and/or United Nations agencies to access funding.

The efficiency and visibility of CSOs on the ground, especially in rural areas, is also overshadowed by projects carried out by the many humanitarian and development international NGOs working countrywide.

These constraints, along with the lack of management capacity amongst those with resources, have undermined the possibility for most local CSOs in Burundi to fulfill their potential to bring about change by:

1. Understanding the context and meeting people's needs
2. Designing specific and realistic interventions that are closer to the people and time-bound
3. Stimulating ownership and collaboration at all levels

How APDH is acting within this environment

APDH started as a human rights school club. It was initiated in 1996, with the main goal of creating a space for discussion between students from different ethnic groups and communities deeply affected by the large-scale violence that has occurred in the country since the 1993 military coup.

It was approved as a national not-for-profit organisation in 1998, with the clearly defined aim of promoting human rights and peace in Burundi. The scope of its

interventions has evolved to include a wide range of themes around peace and human rights, with a focus on women's empowerment, local governance, land conflict and management, and human rights education.

The organisation works with and for communities, and collaborates with government agencies and other national and international NGOs to advance human rights and peace locally and at large.

It works around the challenges in Burundi by:

1. Meeting people's needs at the local level

APDH operates through direct interventions on the ground and undertakes wide consultation of people and communities. Through participatory research and community dialogue sessions, we do as much as we can to understand specific contexts and needs in the way they are seen by local populations and stakeholders.

Keeping in touch with those in need creates trust, encourages genuine participation, and helps us to make sure that our activities are relevant and in accordance with real needs. We also build on local expertise to design and implement projects.

Taking a human rights-based approach is a fundamental pillar of our action. We recognise and reaffirm that people at all levels are rights-bearers and not 'objects' of charity. We encourage genuine communication at all levels of society, so

¹ Popplewell, R. 2015. [Burundi unrest - Can civil society challenge the abuse of power while remaining above the fight?](#) Oxford, INTRAC.

that people are able to make choices that reflect their values and lead to positive behaviour.

Real social change cannot be imposed, it comes from, and must be owned by, people themselves. For this purpose, we identify local models and successes and use them as a reference for future interventions.

2. Assessing the relevance and added-value of our activities

Community needs in the fields of peace, human rights, governance, and so on are indefinite compared to the available resources (technical, human, and financial) of APDH and other CSOs. Many tend to embrace all areas and identified needs at the same time, covering large thematic and geographic areas. They also work in competition instead of building strong alliances. This is likely to dilute the quality of interventions and erode the potential for significant and long-term impact.

APDH mitigates that risk through specific interventions within its areas of expertise (capacity building, research and advocacy),

and works in partnership with other strategic and technical partners to provide a wide range of services.

Furthermore, APDH has always opted to concentrate its activities within a reasonable geographic zone, and connects local realities to national and global agendas for a large scale and long-lasting impact.

3. Mending confrontation and competition, nurturing collaboration at all levels

APDH's work evolves in a difficult environment that is not conducive to large-scale, rapid change. However, over the last 10 years we have learnt to adopt strategies for evidence-based and solution-oriented advocacy. We work collectively through networking at local, national and international levels. This is both a measure of security and a guarantee of success for our action. Hence, by joining forces with others, we become strong and achieve more. We bring evidence on what works and what doesn't and create a space for interaction where all stakeholders, including government, can explore possibilities together.

Why INGOs and donors should value the local

While we recognise and highly value the contribution of INGOs to the advancement of peace and human rights in Burundi, years of experience lead us to advocate for the stronger role of local civil society actors, such as APDH. They are better placed to understand the context, and design interventions that are well-adjusted to local realities and fit into the web of social and political power relations. They can also mobilise other local actors for sustainable change. However, local civil society actors first have to commit themselves to "be the change they want to see" though building their capacities and nurturing a sense of the common good in the interests of the long-term stability of Burundi.

Jean Marie Habwintahe
Executive Director, APDH

jmhabwintahe@yahoo.fr

Rene-Claude Niyonkuru
Researcher, APDH

rcniyo@yahoo.com

New Research Project: The Listening Zones of NGOs

INTRAC and the Universities of Reading and Portsmouth are launching a joint three-year collaborative research project (2015 - 2018) titled The Listening Zones of NGOs. With funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), we will be exploring the role that languages and cultural knowledge play in the policies and practices of development NGOs.

About The Listening Zones of NGOs

Last year representatives from a range of NGOs came together at a workshop to explore the challenges faced by the sector in using foreign languages in its work.

The workshop revealed that languages issues do not tend to have a high profile within organisations, formal language policies are often not in place, and translation and interpretation needs are often under-funded.

The research project will explore some of the key issues highlighted at the workshop, including:

- Languages and power relations in the development process
- Organisational awareness of languages and language policies
- Language provision, including working with translators and interpreters
- Communicating with key audiences and partners

It aims to raise the profile and importance of foreign languages and cultural knowledge in development, and produce practical outputs which are of use to the sector. Research findings will be disseminated at a series of workshops for NGO practitioners.

For more information visit <http://intrac.org/pages/en/research-on-languages-in-the-development-process.html> or email slewis@intrac.org.



in partnership with:



The Listening Zones of NGOs is funded by:



Baladna: working with Palestinian youth living in Israel

The Oslo Agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and Israel in 1993 addressed the boundaries of a proposed Palestinian state. It did not take into account the Palestinians who remained within the 1948 borders of Israel and became citizens of the Israeli State. There is still a battle of identity and consciousness going on between Palestinians and Israelis. In order to overcome fragmentation and maintain their identity, Palestinians living within the 1948 borders of Israel have therefore sought to strengthen themselves by creating solid leaders and a strong local civil society.

One decade after the Oslo Agreement, many associations and frameworks have been established. One of these is Baladna - the Association for Arab Youth - which was set up in 2000.

Baladna strives to provide youth with the training, resources and practical tools necessary to confront discrimination and marginalisation of the Palestinian community within Israel. This discrimination is enhanced by an education system which does not promote Palestinian identity, and by sectarian policies which deal with Palestinians not as one integral people but as separate Muslim, Christian and Druze groups. We aim to strengthen understanding and application of the principles of democracy, gender equality, human rights, pluralism and tolerance. We also promote critical discussion of the history and culture of Palestinians in Israel, the Occupied Territories, and the Diaspora.

So far, tens of thousands of youth have participated in leadership training, cultural education, and media programmes. These have directly influenced them, helping to shape their personalities and build a Palestinian identity that they are proud of.

However, the organisation has to operate around a number of challenges. For example, political and financial sanctions have been applied to our programmes by the Israeli authorities, and youth have

been threatened with security measures for participating in these activities.

On the financial side, while a small part of our income comes from private donations and membership fees from local supporters, the main source of funding is through external grants. Most of these are from European donors; often charities or foundations linked to institutions such as churches or governmental departments for international development, as well as the regional funding arm of the EU. Certain American Church groups also make an important contribution, as do various international and regional organisations including human rights groups and bodies of the United Nations.

“We aim to strengthen (...) the principles of democracy, gender equality, human rights, pluralism and tolerance”

Baladna, however, has been facing many funding issues recently. We believe this is because of three main reasons:

Firstly, the European debt crisis and other financial crises in countries where funders were based have led to a reduction of aid.

Secondly, conflicts and armed uprisings in neighbouring countries have resulted in available funds being diverted at the expense of Baladna and many other associations inside the state of Israel.

The third reason for the shrinking of European funding is, in our opinion, the pressure put on donors by the Israeli authorities to stop supporting organisations such as Baladna.

It appears that they perceive the issues of the Palestinians in Israel to be an internal matter that should be dealt with by Israel alone, without any foreign intervention. In July 2015 the Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel, Tzipi Hotovely, warned European diplomats in a series of meetings against allowing funding to reach NGOs critical of Israeli policy, and threatened to bring in legislation to enforce this¹.

The Palestinian NGOs inside Israel are not afraid to identify themselves as Palestinian

organisations and see themselves as part of the Palestinian society that faces much pressure. However, they are often required to move away from important political issues affecting the Palestinian minority living inside Israel. We are aware that our partners and supporters are told rumours in order to halt their support for Baladna.

These factors suggest that Israel does not want associations like Baladna to promote and strengthen itself among the Arab Palestinian communities in Israel, and that there is a fear that policies of discrimination and marginalisation will be exposed to the international community.

However, these challenges have failed to hinder Baladna from achieving its goals, and making a real difference on the ground. The number of participants is increasing every year and the level of awareness on topics such as identity and belonging is rising within the youth. This demonstrates that Baladna is determined enough to achieve its goals in spite of all the obstacles.

For Baladna, faith is the most important factor needed to overcome adversity and not give up. The faith of our friends, partners and supporters in our goals is great to have by our side. When a funder believes in Baladna's goals, it becomes more than just a funder, but a partner that can support us, show solidarity, and put the organisation as one of its top priorities. This helps us to continue. It gives us the feeling that we are strong and can have an effect.

We appreciate all of our supporters and ask them to keep supporting us; and investigate everything they hear about Baladna before making any decisions.

Finally, we believe that our mission will not be accomplished without the support of the international community, not only financially but also socially. International relations with foreign youth may help Israeli Palestinian youth to think outside of the box and build new relationships with people that will help them to achieve the peace and justice that we all aim for.

Ameer Zreik
Baladna Board Member

ameer.zr@gmail.com

¹ <https://euobserver.com/foreign/129734>

Local agency and linkage: why they matter

What is the significance of local level civil society initiatives in countries that have become dysfunctional because of state-failure or violent conflict? Are they a waste of time and energy – like trying to save a drowning ship by scooping out water with a teacup? Or are they actually indispensable – the many small streams that blend into a raging river? What chance do small scale initiatives have, for example, to make an impact on the war in Syria when all the major powers of the world are stuck in a dead-end street? How can civil society lift the Ukraine from its nightmare as long as it is a football in the game of powerful nations?

The discussions around this topic typically fluctuate between two polarised positions. On the one hand some argue that the course of events is solely determined by the realpolitik of national and international actors, implying that local efforts by civil society are by and large meaningless – a source of many romanticised anecdotes, but irrelevant. On the other hand are those who are passionate about a bottom-up approach, arguing that real transformation, in order to be meaningful and sustainable, has to be grounded in and driven by grassroots communities.

There is, however, a more complex position that calls for a better understanding of the interdependence of different layers and sectors of society. In civil wars, for example, the patterns of violence are not only determined by international and national dynamics, but also by the local (i.e. sub-national). Local actors are not mere pawns at the mercy of national actors. They have agency and will act to pursue their own interests. In conditions of severe destruction or dysfunctionality, they often form alliances with either the government or rebel leaders as their own security and survival needs determine.

This does not mean that their interests are identical. Local leaders and communities, rather, plug into the programmes and discourses of national actors because they perceive it as the best available option to achieve their own objectives.

Local agency is therefore important. It does not mean that local actors wield as much influence and power as national actors, or have, on their own, the clout to determine the course of events. It rather means that local agency is a factor in the equation that determines the outcome of national processes.

Implications for local civil society and recommendations for external actors

What are the implications for civil society initiatives, particularly those supported by external actors or funders, and what can be done to improve them? From my experience there are two interconnected factors: understanding local context, and practicing effective linkages.¹

1. Understanding the local context

When planning local initiatives, local civil society actors and the donors who support them have to develop a better understanding of the relationship between local and national dynamics, and then determine strategies accordingly.

In other words, when analysing the context to determine whether a specific initiative is appropriate, it is important to ask in what ways it has relevance for the larger context. How will change at the local level have an impact on the deeper structural issues?

Some of the best lessons come from failures. After the transition to a new political order in South Africa, I participated in a project to train insider mediators in selected rural towns. The assumption was that they would then contribute to addressing racial tensions in the new dispensation. However, we over-estimated the willingness of the new local governments to work with civil society-based mediators. Their focus was on taking charge and governing. As a result, we resolved a few rather insignificant conflicts, but had little impact on the larger political scene. Wrong analysis led to a wrong strategy.

Furthermore, the assumption that the local context is the same as the national context is wrong. The local is seldom an exact replica of the national. Local dynamics are determined by local actors with their own histories, interests, conflicts and needs. Proper analysis is therefore essential.

2. Practicing effective linkages

Effective and sustainable linkage between the different civil society initiatives is also important. John Paul Lederach² has called for long-term commitment to establishing an infrastructure across the different levels of society that would empower the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximise the contribution from outside. He did not have in mind externally designed and imported “infrastructures for peace”, but rather the task of creating functional and sustainable linkages between the various resources and initiatives within a society and externally.

For example, the effectiveness of local peace committees during South Africa’s difficult transition days relied on the links that existed between the local, provincial and national levels. As a coordinator of local peace committees in a sub-region I could, at any time, call on provincial and even national leaders at political, bureaucratic or security level to assist in resolving a local conflict. This linkage was mandated by the National Peace Accord and was a critical factor in the success achieved by the local peace committees.

An article of this length invariably commits some awful generalisations. However, these two simple recommendations, namely that we have to understand the interaction between local and national dynamics better and consciously seek productive linkage between the various initiatives of civil society and other constructive forces, will go some way towards adding value to the efforts of civil society.

Andries Odendaal
Senior Associate, Centre for Mediation in
Africa, University of Pretoria

andries.odendaal@imagnet.co.za

¹ I have in my book, *A Crucial Link* (Washington DC: USIP, 2013), provided some substantiation for these arguments with reference to practical experiences in a number of contexts.

² John Paul Lederach, 1997. *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington DC: USIP, p. xvi.

INTRAC training

For more information on these courses, to apply online, and to read details of all our training courses, visit: www.intrac.org/pages/en/training.html

INTRAC has been running global training courses for over twenty years. As part of our strategy we are committed to providing high quality capacity development programmes to civil society. Our approach is practical, based on understanding what works in different contexts and working closely with people to develop training programmes that respond to their needs.

It could be anything from a basic online, webinar-based or Face to face Monitoring and Evaluating training course to developing bespoke courses for large INGOs and their partners globally on other themes: partnerships, strategic change, use of evidence. We will be guided by your aims, objectives and the needs of your participants to ensure sustainability and long-term impact.

Over the past six months we have run the following courses:

- Advocacy and Policy Influencing online training using webinar technology in Arabic for the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation in Sudan, following three years of similar support in English to other country offices.
- Five Face to face trainings in Oxford on Foundation Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME), Organisational Development and Influencing and Supporting Change in Complex Contexts (ISCCC).
- Online training on Monitoring and Evaluation for the Humanitarian Sector, for local partners of the Danish Refugee Council in the Middle East and North Africa Region.
- Face to face training for DanChurchAid on Results-based Monitoring and Reporting in the Occupied Palestinian territories.
- Online coaching and Face to face training on Greenpeace International's Performance, Accountability and Learning Framework in the Netherlands.
- Face to face training on Theory of Change for Danida, Denmark.

Contact us to find out more: training@intrac.org.



INTRAC training calendar

Face to face training:

Theory of Change for Planning and Impact Assessment

5 - 9 October, Oxford, UK.

Advocacy and Policy Influencing

19 - 23 October, Oxford, UK.

Online training:

Advocacy and Policy Influencing

12 - 15 October (part one); week of 9 November (part two); and 1 December 2015 (part three).

Advanced Partner Capacity Building

9 - 13 November, Oxford, UK.

Advanced Monitoring and Evaluation

23 - 27 November, Oxford, UK.

Monitoring and Evaluation

25 - 28 January (part one); week of 22 February (part two); and 14 March 2015 (part three).

ONTRAC is the newsletter of INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre). It is published three times a year.

INTRAC wishes to thank the NGO Research Programme members for funding ONTRAC: Broederlijk Delen, CBM, Cordaid, DanChurchAid, ICCO (Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation), Norwegian Church Aid, and Save the Children International.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Electronic copies of ONTRAC can be downloaded for free in English at www.intrac.org/pages/en/ontrac.html.

Previous issues, including translated versions in a number of languages, are also available through the same page. To subscribe to ONTRAC via email, go to www.intrac.org and click 'Sign up for our e-news'.



Oxbridge Court, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES
T: +44 (0)1865 201851 F: +44 (0)1865 201852
info@intrac.org • www.intrac.org