

**LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES: SOME
REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS
LEARNED**

LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES: SOME REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED, written by Andries Odendaal and Retief Olivier with contributions from Bishnu Sapkota, Dinesh Prasain, and Philip Visser. Report funded by USAID for the Nepal Transition to Peace (NTTP) Initiative, implemented by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) Kathmandu, Nepal, 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local Peace Committee (LPC) is a generic name for 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. LPCs are either implemented as part of a national peace process, or by civil society organizations in contexts of debilitating conflict.

The study report was aimed at filling a void regarding comparative research in this field and has the objective to identify key lessons learned and areas for further investigation. It has been stimulated by AED's efforts to support the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction in Nepal in conceptualizing and implementing LPCs in that country. Thirteen widely divergent contexts where LPCs were implemented have been considered in compiling this report (see Appendix 1).

The rationale for implementing LPCs was obviously context specific. In general, though, LPCs have been implemented to secure peace at local level as part of a national peace process; or because specific conditions at local level made a local peace process necessary. Using the case of Nepal as a specific example, the rationale for implementing LPCs was that insufficient attention to the need to secure peace at local level would be a threat to the sustainability of the national peace process. The deep-rooted nature of conflict at local level, the psychological effects of violence and neglect on local communities where protagonists had to continue co-existing, the prospect of intense political competition in the context of a fragile peace, and the dynamics and inherent instability of transition periods provided sufficient reasons for considering the implementation of LPCs.

Seven broad themes regarding the establishment and implementation of LPCs have been considered for the purpose of this report. These were:

1. LPCs are transitional mechanisms, aimed at filling a void or weakness in local governance. LPCs are most effective during transitional periods. Transitional periods are characterized by the weakness of governance in terms of legitimacy and capacity - at national and particularly at local level. 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 where relevant matters are discussed in inclusive and participatory manners with the objective to build peace and to arrive at consensus.
2. The nature of the mandate given to LPCs has an important impact on their operation. LPCs are certainly not dependent on a national mandate. They have been effective without it. But a national mandate, either through a nationally negotiated peace agreement or through a joint decision by all relevant stakeholders at national level, has important benefits. It gives more clout to LPCs, guarantees greater access to

national and other resources and establishes a critical link between local and national peacebuilding. On the negative side a national mandate limits local ownership by being imposed on local communities and often politicizes the LPCs. The ideal situation is for the national mandate to be formulated in such a way as to establish a legitimate and credible framework, but to leave sufficient space for local communities to assert their own ownership of LPCs. In practice it is a very difficult balance to achieve.

3. The composition of LPCs is often prescribed by national mandates. The ideal situation is to secure the participation of the main protagonists, but also to include sufficient “insider-partials”. By the latter is meant 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. Insider-partials are not neutral or impartial in terms of the conflict; they may be identified with one of the sides. But by virtue of their integrity and rooted-ness in their community, they have the capacity to provide critical leadership and stability to the LPC. A LPC that is composed solely of protagonists has an almost impossible task; whereas a LPC that is composed solely of ‘doves’ may have very little impact. Finding the right balance between ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’ is important.
4. LPCs have, whether explicitly or implicitly, pursued the following objectives:
 - *Violence prevention or reduction:* LPCs have a demonstrated capacity to reduce levels of violence. They are effective when there is sufficient early warning, allowing them to meet timeously and take collective preventative steps. However, LPCs cannot enforce peace and are powerless against spoiler forces that are intent on committing violence. On the whole, therefore, LPCs reduce levels of violence but cannot prevent it altogether.
 - *Dialogue:* Because the main methodology employed by LPCs is that of facilitating negotiations and building consensus, dialogue is an intrinsic part of their strategy. LPCs, therefore, are successful in promoting dialogue and thus deepening mutual understanding, but they do so almost as a by-product of their more pressing tasks. Some LPCs have pursued dialogue as an objective in itself, but there is room for strengthening this aspect of their mandate.
 - *Problem-solving and community-building:* In a context where coercive decision-making is counterproductive, the ability of a LPC to facilitate processes of joint problem-solving is certainly one of its greatest strengths. This ability has been demonstrated sufficiently. LPCs have been able to restore a sense of community under the most difficult circumstances. They have thus contributed to peacebuilding because each dispute or problem that has been resolved contributes to building mutual trust and confidence in their joint ability to manage their own lives.
 - *Reconciliation:* This is often one of the stated goals of LPCs, but very difficult to assess. LPCs’ overall contribution to reconciliation lies in their general capacity to reduce violence and contribute to joint problem-solving. There are no examples of LPCs acting as local counterparts of National Truth

and Reconciliation Commission processes. In East Timor, however, the National Commission for Reception Truth and Reconciliation successfully facilitated local reconciliation exercises. Its success means that LPCs could in future be seen as credible partners in national reconciliation processes.

5. A key question regards the nature of authority that LPCs should wield. Should they have powers of arbitration? How should such powers be reconciled with the justice system? The hypothesis of this report is that LPCs should wield no other power than a moral one – the ‘power of consensus’. The fact that LPCs mostly operated in a context of high distrust and weak governance made the imposition of authority highly problematic and counterproductive. Where LPCs had success it was because of their ability to facilitate consensus and not because of their powers of arbitration.
6. LPCs depend on support from outside. The quality of such a support system is a key ingredient of the success of LPCs. The support needed was not in the first place financial or in terms of a physical infrastructure – though in places that might have been helpful. The main areas of support needed were (i) access to facilitation support. Local actors, while highly knowledgeable about their conflict and their needs, often lacked the emotional distance and knowledge of the broader context to mediate their own conflicts. At times it was necessary to receive support from facilitators who came from outside and who could work with the LPC to facilitate or mediate problem-solving processes; (ii) a basic orientation of the LPC regarding the role they should play. Such ‘training’ was necessary because the LPC role was a completely new phenomenon that operated on principles that represented, for most members, a paradigm shift from their more accustomed authoritative styles of decision-making; (iii) access to national peacebuilding resources. The ability to request assistance from national actors or other resources to assist with complex local processes added a lot of value. It also meant that the national process was more informed of needs that existed at the local level.
7. It is lastly necessary to note what cannot be expected of LPCs. LPCs cannot coerce compliance. They have – and should have - no ‘teeth’. They are only successful in so far as the softer approaches to peacebuilding are appropriate. Secondly, LPCs will not be successful when there is a lack of political will towards peace at national level. Thirdly, it cannot be expected of LPCs to address the root causes of conflict, namely the larger political, social or economic systems. At most, LPCs enable local communities to minimize damage to their communities and maximize cooperation in matters over which they have control. Lastly, LPCs are no substitute for local government bodies or the justice system. They may facilitate consensus on decisions to be made, but they cannot and should not make or enforce those decisions. The moment LPCs are invested with power, they will become an arena for contesting power and thereby lose the critical element of their success – being a non-threatening space where communities search for inclusive, mutually beneficial options to their problems.

In conclusion, LPCs are by no way perfect institutions guaranteed of success. They are mechanisms to build peace at local level under very trying circumstances. But they have sufficiently demonstrated their usefulness. More research, however, is needed, specifically regarding in-depth assessment of specific projects within selected contexts and looking more deeply at factors that determine success or otherwise.

INTRODUCTION:

This research report has been commissioned by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) in Nepal through the NTTP Initiative. The objective was to survey the use of Local Peace Committees across the world and identify best practices. AED, through NTTP, has supported the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction in Nepal with the conceptualization and implementation of Local Peace Committees (hereafter: LPCs) in Nepal during the period 2006 – 2008. During this process it became clear that very little comparative or other research has been done on LPCs - with the exception of South Africa's experiment that has received some attention. It was a surprising discovery, given the increase world-wide of the use of LPCs and their obvious value as local peacebuilding mechanisms. The report is an attempt to begin filling the vacuum.

The case for LPCs in Nepal is briefly discussed below as an example of a contextualized rationale for LPCs. It is followed by a working definition and typology of LPCs, and a discussion of seven main themes regarding the establishment and functioning of LPCs. These are (i) LPCs as transitional mechanisms; (ii) the importance of mandate; (iii) composition; (iv) main objectives; (v) what authority LPCs should have; (vi) capacity needs; and (vii) limitations to what LPCs could do. The final section contains a number of conclusions and recommendations for further research.

The report is work in progress, based on a survey of literature and reports that were available. Thirteen different contexts where LPCs have been deployed were considered (see Addendum 1). There are certainly more places that have deployed LPCs, but difficulty with access to information have prevented their inclusion into this assessment. The study will therefore have to be widened, but also deepened through field visits and /or in-depth case-studies.

THE CASE OF NEPAL

The rationale for LPCs in Nepal is presented below as an example. Contexts differ and this rationale is clearly not applicable to all situations, but it presents a fairly coherent logic for implementing LPCs that may have wider application.

The decision to implement LPCs in Nepal has been stimulated by an innovative structure called the Nepal Transition to Peace (NTTP) Initiative. NTTP consisted of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, senior level representatives of the main political parties in Nepal, including the rebel movement (CPN-Maoist), civil society representatives and the UN Mission in Nepal. NTTP was not a decision-making body, but rather a clearinghouse of ideas and policies. It met regularly to seek ways to promote and support the peace process. Its formation has been facilitated by the Academy for Educational Development (AED), which has continued to serve it logistically and technically.

NTTP was convinced that LPCs were necessary for Nepal. The following were some of the most compelling arguments (see Odendaal 2006):

- The conflict fault-lines in Nepalese society ran from top to grassroots. The various root causes of the conflict that were being mentioned – such as feudalism, exclusion, weak governance – all had local manifestations and configurations. It meant that in almost every district and village in Nepal serious tensions existed on issues relating to the so-called feudal system, exclusion of minorities, ideology and government neglect. Also, in every district the configuration was somewhat different, depending on history and demography. The implication was that peacebuilding could not be seen as a process that was confined to a political agreement between national leaders only. There was need for multiple peacebuilding processes at local level.
- A characteristic of the situation where protagonists co-existed at local level was the contradictory need for co-operation on the one hand and distrust, anger and fear on the other hand. This was particularly true of communities at subsistence level. Cooperation and mutual support was a necessity of life in such communities, not a luxury or a matter of good-heartedness. Yet, the emotional and physical damage done by violent conflict was most acutely felt at local level. Rural people had borne the brunt of violence, discrimination and neglect. The very people who had been most affected by the conflict had the most urgent need for trust-building, the mending of relationships and peace. The question was whether local social, cultural and spiritual resources were sufficient to deal with the dilemma, and whether the establishment of peacebuilding processes and institutions was necessary to provide support on the difficult but necessary path of reconciliation.
- The conflict in Nepal had rural roots. It was not the political elites in Kathmandu who had a fall-out. It was a rural revolt against perceived discrimination and neglect. The centre-periphery divide, that was the divide between Kathmandu-based elites and the rural districts, was serious and a significant part of the cause of violence. Important as it was to reach a national peace agreement, the process of building peace could not ignore rural dynamics. Coupled with this necessity was the assumption that real empowerment took place when local communities took control of their own destiny. Locally negotiated peace agreements on local manifestations of conflict were a very important form of empowerment and, at the same time, an important way to secure the national peace process.
- Periods of fairly dramatic social or political change were often characterized by acts of self-assertion by various social groups. It took the form of strikes, boycotts, traffic disruptions or other ways of causing inconvenience to the public, all to draw attention to whatever the cause may be. The high frequency of such events during transition times was explained by the fact that past restrictions on such activities might have lapsed, that transitional governments often lacked the capacity or will to regulate such behaviour, and that the bottled-up need for self-assertion had found an opportunity for expression. In a country like Nepal, where the conflict had strong local roots, local authorities in the districts had to deal with

such group-behaviour on an almost daily basis. The management of 'social restiveness' was time-consuming and, in the absence of policy guidelines and without the legitimacy or national will to resolve difficult issues, quite difficult. It was a situation that would benefit from locally negotiated 'codes of conduct' and locally driven mediation efforts. Furthermore, it called for engagement with the police, involving them in local negotiations, restoring their tattered public profile and providing them with a mandate on how to behave in such situations.

The conclusion drawn from the above was that insufficient attention to the need to secure peace at local level was a threat to the sustainability of the peace process. The deep-rooted nature of conflict at local level, the psychological effects of violence and neglect, the prospect of intense political competition in the context of a fragile peace, the dynamics of transition periods - all contributed to a situation that called for careful and special attention.

The process of implementing LPCs in Nepal was not a smooth one. Already in 2005 Cabinet took a decision to implement LPCs, but it was a one-sided decision as the rebel movement, the CPN (Maoist) was not part of it. In 2007 the Cabinet, this time inclusive of the CPN (Maoist), approved a Terms of Reference for LPCs. Implementation, however, was further hampered by subsequent political developments. A major obstacle was the close link with, and logistical and administrative reliance on, the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, which was viewed as a Congress Party ministry because of the profile of the incumbent Minister. Other political parties questioned the independence of the LPC's under such arrangements. A multi-party Peace and Conflict Management Committee (PCMC) was established in March 2008 with the mandate to intervene and seek to resolve all crises and potentially violent disputes as the peace processes unfolded. LPC's would report to this Committee, with the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction providing logistical and administrative support – thus resolving the political deadlock. At the time of writing (April 2008) the impact of this arrangement was not yet clear. As long as the struggle for a proper mandate at national level continued, however, very little could be done in terms of the actual implementation of LPCs.

WHAT IS A LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEE?

Definition

“Local Peace Committee” or LPC will be used as a generic name in this study. In practice a variety of names are used such as District Peace Advisory Councils; District Multi-Party Liaison Committees; Village Peace and Development Committees, Committees for Inter-Ethnic Relations, etc.

A working definition of a LPC is that it is a committee that is formed at the level of a district, municipality, town or village with the aim to encourage and facilitate joint, inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding processes. A LPC is by its nature *inclusive* of the different sections of the community that are in conflict and has the task to promote peace *within its own context*. A LPC's strategy is characterized by its emphasis on

dialogue, promotion of mutual understanding, trust-building, constructive and inclusive solutions to conflict and joint action that is inclusive of all sides of the conflict and that is aimed at reconciliation.

In what follows below the various aspects of the definition will be substantiated. Two preliminary comments are in place here. Firstly, by *peacemaking* is meant the negotiation of a ceasefire or an accord that brings hostilities to an end (Galtung 1975; Boutros-Ghali 1992). By including *peacemaking* in a definition of LPCs the need to negotiate peace at local level is recognized and emphasized. Local level peacemaking obviously has to operate within the framework provided by national peacemaking, but it is to the advantage of a local community to negotiate their own peace, affirming national developments and dealing with the particular configurations, experiences and histories of the conflict at local level. *Peacebuilding* refers to two main tasks: preventing a relapse into war or violence; and creating a self-sustaining peace (Miall, Ramsbotham et al. 1999:188-194; Bush 2004:25). It therefore refers to matters such as the prevention of further violence; the management of social restiveness; the defusing of disputes that have the potential to break the peace; and the complex and often tortuous process of managing political, social and economic transformation that would ensure peaceful co-existence. Peacebuilding policy will be determined at national level, but it is at the local level that much of the hard work has to take place – often with minimum capacity and resources.

The second comment on the definition is that *committee* should not be understood in the sense of a formal decision-making structure, but rather in the sense of a ‘working group’. As will be seen below, LPCs function best when they steer away from a formal decision-making focus and rather function as a non-threatening social space where dialogue, consensus-building and problem-solving can take place.

Typology

Two main categories of LPCs can be distinguished. The first category is LPCs that receive their mandate from a national structure or process. This may include a national peace accord (such as in South Africa, Macedonia or Northern Ireland) or a mandate from a national statutory body (such as the Malawi Electoral Committee or the Sierra Leone Political Parties Registration Commission). It may also be mandated by a decision of Government (as in Ghana and Nepal). Nationally mandated LPCs are characterized by their ability to leverage collaboration by the local representatives of those parties and bodies that have endorsed the decision. They benefit from having a formal mandate and from being part of a recognized national process. Their mandate may differ from context to context and may be fairly general (“to prevent violence” or “promote reconciliation” as was the case in South Africa) or specific, such as the focus on policing in Northern Ireland (Neyroud and Beckley 2001) or prevention of violence during elections as in Sierra Leone and Malawi. The composition of LPCs in this category normally includes political parties, relevant government bodies, security forces and civil society.

The second category is LPCs that have been formed by civil society initiatives. Such LPCs, because of the lack of a formal national mandate, are often the products of locally

facilitated processes; and therefore more illustrative of the so-called “bottom-up” approach. In their composition they normally reflect a stronger civil society presence. The participation of political parties, government and the security services depend on the LPC’s ability to attract and interest individual representatives at local level. These LPCs are, to a greater extent than is the case with nationally mandated LPCs, composed of individuals who have a personal passion and capacity for peacebuilding, rather than formally mandated representatives. Civil society LPCs may focus on the more general objective of preventing violence and promoting peace (as in Burundi, Sri Lanka and Liberia), but they may also be established to focus on a particular issue (such as cattle rustling in Kenya). Civil society LPCs are invariably dependent on NGOs that provide the initial facilitation and ongoing logistical and financial support. In Sri Lanka, for example, LPCs were supported by no less than four implementing partners.

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED:

The following seven topics have the greatest relevance for the successful functioning of LPCs:

1. LPCs are transitional mechanisms, aimed at filling a void or weakness in governance.

Transitional periods, particularly those following the declaration of a ceasefire, the signing of a peace accord and an agreement on negotiating a new political dispensation, are inherently disorderly, confusing and often violent. Typically the security services are demoralized or discredited, whereas the executive suffer political credibility or legitimacy. It is a time of social restiveness, as mentioned above regarding Nepal, where various social and political groups, for legitimate or opportunistic reasons, exploit the available space to mobilize and agitate.

In South Africa the apartheid government was still in power during the period 1992-1994 when LPCs were deployed, but it had very little political will left to impose on society. With its credibility and legitimacy at very low levels, its resources stretched and its mind focused on the ongoing negotiations, little energy was left to manage and control the multiple expressions of citizens’ anger and frustration. Yet, the new constitution has not been formulated and the new government not elected. Nathan (1993) referred to this situation as a “fundamental structural problem” because of the absence of legitimate forums and procedures for contesting power. The LPCs were an “imperfect bridge” to help facilitate the transition at local level. Soon after the election of 1994 that established a new legitimate government, the LPCs were disbanded – in spite of concerted efforts by some actors who felt that LPCs still had a role to play. With the establishment of legitimate order, the time of LPCs was past. To stay with the image of an “imperfect bridge”: with the river in flood and all normal bridges destroyed, imperfect bridges were necessary. These imperfect bridges could be discarded, however, as soon as ordinary bridges (i.e. legitimate local government) were re-established.

LPCs in Kenya demonstrated another dynamic. According to Adan and Pkalya (2006: 3) Kenyan LPCs had their roots in the failure of the state to provide security and justice. "The realization that community members themselves are better placed to manage their own conflicts was anchored on the inaccessibility of the formal judicial system and lack of trust in government led conflict prevention interventions ...". Though legal governance was in place, LPCs were necessary because the state was incapable to deal with some of the challenges that communities have faced. They were established primarily to deal with the high incidence of cattle rustling and inter-ethnic conflict in the Rift Valley. The LPCs have built their legitimacy on the traditional institution of elders, yet adapted it somewhat towards a more modern context.

Governance weakness was also a determining factor in Sierra Leone (Nyathi 2008) and Liberia. In fact, Shepler, Odineyi *et al* (2006) concluded that amongst the LPCs that they have observed in Liberia those that have operated in a local leadership vacuum performed better than those where strong local leadership existed. The latter was often partisan, which made conflict resolution more difficult.

A preliminary conclusion, therefore, is that LPCs are appropriate in conditions where national and local governance is weak or absent. An important exception, however, is provided by Ghana (Ojielo 2008; Interior Ministry *no date*).

Ghana has had a stable and democratic government since 1992, but with a troubled past of military *coups* and dictatorial rule. Their decision to implement District Peace Advisory Councils (as they named their LPCs) was taken not because of a crisis of governance, especially not at national level, but because of their experience with a number of intractable community-based and inter-ethnic conflicts. The most important of these was the so-called Dagbon crisis - a conflict concerning succession to the chieftain's throne (or "skin") that had the potential to destabilize the northern part of the country and become excessively politicized, thus posing a threat to peaceful national elections in 2004. The conflict was dealt with through a process of community dialogue and mediation. The appropriateness of this methodology for such types of conflict was recognized by Government and led them to institutionalize District Peace Advisory Councils - as an alternative conflict resolution mechanism. The experiment is still in its infancy, but it is clearly an important initiative and one worth monitoring.

2. A national mandate vs. local initiative and ownership.

The question regarding the nature of the mandate that LPCs operate on is a very important one. A national mandate is certainly not a precondition for effective LPCs. In all the countries that have been surveyed civil society based LPCs can legitimately claim some success. In fact, some LPCs have achieved quite spectacular results, such as the LPC in Kibimba, Burundi (Ningabria *no date* (2)). They have effectively restored the minimum fabric of society after an atrocious attack during the civil war - an incident that had completely polarized and paralyzed the community. The LPC

facilitated the re-opening of both the primary and secondary schools and the hospital. They have gradually re-built trust, also with the military, which led to greater security for all. They have been active for 7 years without external funding, the only external inputs being that of training. This example is in no way an exception, but fairly typical of the ability that a LPC has to make and build peace.

The strength of civil society based LPCs is *local initiative* and *local ownership*. These are priceless ingredients of any peacebuilding process. Bush (2004: 25) has stated: "Peacebuilding is not about the imposition of 'solutions', it is about the creation of opportunities. The challenge is to identify and nurture the political, economic, and social space, within which *indigenous* actors can identify, develop, and employ the resources necessary to build a peaceful, prosperous, and just society." Local peacebuilding initiatives that rely on the initiative and commitment of local actors are clearly closer to this ideal than processes that have been designed at national level.

However, very few civil society based LPCs have been established solely by the efforts of a local community. There are exceptions, such as the community of Mpumalanga in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, who negotiated their own peace accord during the late 1980s while the rest of the region was caught up in a vicious cycle of violence. On the whole, however, the establishment of LPCs was facilitated by NGOs or religious bodies. Peacebuilding at grassroots level, in fact, faces a dilemma. Local communities have an immediate understanding of and experience in conflict. They live in and with the destruction caused by violence. This closeness to or intimacy with violent conflict, however, means that people are often too close to and emotionally involved in the conflict to manage an intervention (Project Saamsan 1998; Lederach 2001). They lack the 'emotional distance' to manage a peacemaking intervention. They often also lack the capacity, resources and a broader perspective on the conflict. They therefore rely on 'outsiders' to support them, such as NGOs or religious leadership. 'Outsiders' here refer to people who are not part of the grassroots community, even though they may share the same nationality or identity. The result is that at least part of the mandate to establish LPCs, as well as the commitment to their sustainability, is located outside the local community. In reality it often translates into a dependence on donors – through NGOs – which has an impact on the sustainability and stability of LPCs (because of shifts in donors' focus); and ultimately on their accountability to the community (Adan and Pkalya 2006).

Furthermore, NGOs have different philosophies and methodologies which could become a problem when they operate in the same area - as happened in Kenya where various organizations have established LPCs in the same districts. As a result a National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management became necessary to provide some coordination (Adan and Pkalya 2006). It is also significant that the lack of a legal framework and national policy was identified as a problem of Kenyan LPCs (Gunja and Korir 2005; Adan and Pkalya 2006). Since LPCs in Kenya dealt with cattle-rustling and traditional approaches to justice were not recognized by law, it created tensions with the formal legal system.

A further problem with civil society based LPCs that is fairly general is that such LPCs find it difficult or are unable to feed into and influence the national peace process or national policy because of the lack of formal communication and accountability channels between national and local levels. Its ability to address the centre-periphery divide is therefore limited.

Nationally mandated LPCs have the advantage that they operate in a coordinated manner; that they could rely on national resources and support; that they have greater clout because of their mandate and could therefore engage all local actors with greater credibility; and that there are well established lines of communication and accountability between the local and national levels. Nyathi (2008) observed that the District Code of Conduct Monitoring Committees in Sierra Leone had a more substantive impact than civil society bodies because of their formal mandate.

The danger here is of course that the national mandate may be imposed in a top-down manner that denies local dynamics and peculiarities. The South African process has drawn some criticism in this respect (International Alert 1993; Gastrow 1995; Ball 1998). It was seen as an elitist process, designed in secret and implemented in manners that did not always incorporate all excluded groups (eg. women and the youth). Another danger is the ease with which national oversight can be politicized – as the experience in Nepal has demonstrated.

The ideal situation is a nationally negotiated agreement to implement LPCs with minimum guidelines, but with sufficient allocation of resources and support (see MoPR 2007). The mandate should create sufficient space for local leaders to establish structures and processes that suit their situation best and that will enhance their sense of local ownership and achievement. But it should also establish lines of communication that flow from the local to the national level and back; and enable local communities to call on political and infrastructural resources at national level.

3. The composition of a LPC: ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’.

Linked to the issue of a mandate is the composition of LPCs. Any LPC has to be inclusive of individuals that come from different sides of the conflict. A LPC that is composed of a homogeneous group is indeed a contradiction. LPCs may, however, be composed of volunteers, albeit from different sides of the conflict. Such a LPC is therefore composed of ‘doves’ – people who regard the achievement of peace as more important than pursuing sectarian interests. This is often the situation in civil society based LPCs. They have the advantage that their members share a high level of passion and commitment to the ideal of peace and reconciliation. Such LPCs are normally quite active, with ambitious objectives. However, they do not always succeed in engaging all the different players and sometimes have difficulty in getting the ‘hawks’ on board. The ‘hawks’ are those distrustful of peace because they see their interests threatened by the necessary compromises of peace. With the ‘hawks’ absent, LPCs may lack credibility and local leverage.

On the other end of the spectrum are LPCs that are, by virtue of their mandate, composed of representatives of the different parties in conflict. They often struggle to operate effectively because of high levels of tension in the LPC. More important, during a transition period political parties are in the ambivalent situation of having formally committed themselves to peace - whilst the political struggle still continues. In practice LPC members have often been accused (correctly or opportunistically) of participating in or instigating activities that are potentially violent (see Odendaal and Spies 1996). The presumed 'peacemakers' are at the same time 'troublemakers'. A LPC that has protagonists as its members is bound to experience such tensions.

The ideal is to have a good mix of hawks and doves on the LPC. It is important that local leaders participate in the LPC even though they sometimes adopt hard-line positions and embark on disruptive actions. It is not possible to build sustainable peace without engaging them in the peace process. It is at the same time necessary to have people on the LPC who are committed to peace and who may establish a middle-ground.

However, what should be prevented at all cost is to allow one party to capture the leadership position of a LPC and dominate from there. This can be prevented either by frequently rotating the leadership positions or, more ideally, to appoint persons in those position on the basis of consensus. In such a case it can be expected that persons that enjoy trust in the community across the spectrum will be chosen. It can also be expected that such individuals will have the aptitude to mediate, facilitate dialogue, bring perspective to discussions or establish some middle-ground. These people often come from civil society and should be seen as 'insider-partials'. Wehr and Lederach (1991) have coined this term to describe persons who mediate from a position of connectedness and belonging to the community and not from a position of impartiality. They are persons who are trusted in such a role not because of their impartiality (i.e. on the basis of who they are not), but because of the trust that they enjoy in society (i.e. who they are). "The trust comes partly from the fact that the mediators do not leave the post-negotiation situation. They are part of it and must live with the consequences of their work. They must continue to relate to conflictants who have trusted their commitment to a just and durable settlement" (Wehr and Lederach 1991: 87). People who fit this description would be ideal leaders of a LPC.

In South Africa LPC chairpersons were elected on the basis of consensus. They were often from the religious or business sector. When LPCs failed to find a chairperson acceptable to all sides, two co-chairpersons were elected – a Black and White person. They were therefore 'insider partials', but together they represented the commitment to peace. What is more, they proved to be very effective. Of all actors at the local level, the LPC chairpersons have made the most substantial contribution to local peacebuilding (Odendaal and Spies 1996; 1997).

The composition of LPCs is therefore a matter that deserves serious attention. The LPC should in its composition and functioning reflect the ideal it is striving for. In

some cases an extraordinary effort was made to regularize procedures for composition, such as in Northern Ireland (see Eve, Keanie et al. 2003). In other cases their composition may lay at the heart of the LPCs' struggles to function. If the conflict was caused by some form of exclusion or discrimination, it is important that the voices of those excluded communities are not only represented, but also effectively listened to. This may indeed call for some particular facilitation skill, but mere representation as a form of window-dressing will not contribute to peace.

4. LPC objectives and strategies.

The main objectives and strategies that LPCs have pursued in practice were the following:

Violence reduction.

LPCs have a proven capacity to reduce levels of violence and create safer communities (see for example Northern Ireland Policing Board 2007). Possibly the most dramatic example in this respect was the role that LPCs played in South Africa following the assassination in April 1993 of Chris Hani, one of the liberation movement's most charismatic and popular leaders. The country was at a knife edge because of this incident. It would have taken very little to plunge it into a vortex of violence. The LPCs have been widely acknowledged for the contribution that they have made across the country to prevent that scenario. They have done so by facilitating joint planning sessions at local level to forge local agreements on how the various protest actions and memorial services that were planned, should be conducted. It often included an affirmation of the Code of Conduct of the National Peace Accord. It also entailed practical agreements regarding monitoring. The fact that these arrangements were made *jointly*, i.e. with the collaboration of the liberation movement's structures, local government and the local police, ensured that they were effective to a large extent. The funeral of Hani and the various protest events across the country were not completely violence free, but in relative terms they were peaceful.

However, in South Africa political violence had actually increased after the signing of the National Peace Accord (in terms of which LPCs were established) (Gastrow 1995; Ball 1998; Collin Marks 2000). In the period September 1990 to August 1991 2 649 persons had died. It increased to 3 404 during the year following the signing of the Peace Accord (in September 1991) and 3 567 the next year. *The Star*, a Johannesburg daily, had initially been skeptical of the Peace Accord and its peace committees. On 15 September 1992, however, it editorialized: "Without an accord it would be easy for South Africa to be sucked up into a vortex of violence." (in Gastrow 1995: 79). Gastrow (1995: 83) concluded that LPCs have definitely prevented violence by solving many burning issues, promoting dialogue and monitoring protest events. "It has been instrumental in containing violence to levels that would otherwise have reached even more alarming levels."

This conclusion is in line with what has been observed elsewhere. LPCs are by their nature far too fragile to stop violence altogether. A process that is built on the ‘soft power’ of dialogue and mutual problem-solving cannot stop spoilers that are determined to use violence. They were most successful when dealing with a situation of *anticipated violence* where it was possible to bring parties together in time and negotiate proper preventative arrangements. They were also effective in managing rumours. Rumours, in a context of high polarization and tension, are particularly dangerous. By being a platform where reliable communication could take place, rumours had been dealt with effectively. LPCs, however, have no mechanisms or power to prevent sporadic acts of violence or intentional violence. This fact should not detract from the immense value of containing or reducing violence. In Kenya, for example, it meant that children from warring communities could go to school again and that internally displaced persons could return (Gunja and Korir 2005). Apart from such results and the fact that lives and property have been saved, the empowerment and hope that came from joint local initiatives to prevent violence should not be underestimated.

It was the intention that the Nepal LPC’s would act as mechanisms to combat violence in the election process in April 2008, but as very few were in fact functioning during the time of the election, this did not happen, except for instances where individuals who were involved with the LPCs acted as mediators and facilitators (NTTP 2008). The PCMC called on some of these individuals during the election process to intervene, with some success. During the PCMC’s interventions in particular crisis areas, the need for such local mechanisms as the LPCs to assist with combating violence during the election process was very apparent.

Dialogue.

The importance of dialogue as “a central mechanism within the social integration - process” (UNDESA 2007: xv) is increasingly recognized and implemented. *Dialogue* must be distinguished from other conflict transformation processes such as mediation or problem-solving and has value in its own right. Its purpose is to uncover shared meaning and promote better mutual accommodation and understanding (UNDESA 2007: 3). Structured national dialogue processes were implemented in, for example, Guatemala and Nepal (International IDEA 2007). For our current purpose the question is whether LPCs have value as facilitators or sites of local dialogue.

Dialogue is the assumption on which most if not all the work of LPCs relies. Yet it is also an explicit objective in itself. One of the objectives in Northern Ireland with the District Policing Partnerships was to enable local people and their political representatives to articulate their views and concerns about policing – an issue that symbolized so much of the polarization in that country (Northern Ireland Policing Board 2007). In Sri Lanka the People’s Forums had quarterly discussions on common community concerns (AED 2006; AED 2007; Anti-War Front, Foundation for Co-existence et al. 2007). (Interestingly these LPCs sprang into action after the

tsunami and were instrumental in facilitating a number of impressive reconstruction projects.) Regarding LPCs in South Africa Ball (1998: 26, 30) mentioned that LPCs “helped engender dialog where none had existed or seemed possible before.” LPCs became a place “where people felt safe to raise difficult and contentious issues”. In the DRC and Liberia LPCs enabled people from deeply divided and traumatized communities to talk to each other.

In reality most of the dialogue that LPCs facilitated took place during processes to solve specific problems. The enhanced mutual understanding was almost a bonus – such as the “cordiality” and enhanced trust between political parties that Patel (2006) reported regarding the local level Multi-party Liaison Committees of Malawi (see also Gloppen, Kanyangolo et al. 2006). From Guyana, however, comes the example of an initiative with the sole and explicit purpose to facilitate “conversations to explore” at community level. They have avoided the word “dialogue” because of negative experiences with it in the past. The conversations took place under auspices of the Guyana Ethnic Relations Commission and with UN support. With a history of election-related violence in the country, the objective was to promote ‘talking’ as a first response to problems and to open more constructive channels of communication between identity groups. During a period of 4 months 153 neighbourhood and regional “Multi-stakeholder Forums” were conducted where community members talked to each other about their concerns, fears and hopes. These meetings then fed into a two-day ‘National Conversation’. Lund and Myers (2007: 48) concluded: “In fact, it did create a safe space for Guyanese to agree on strategies for overcoming ethnic and other differences, and articulate their own role in the development of their community and country. In the post-elections period Guyanese were able to sit and talk with each other at the National Conversation in a respectful and highly interactive manner about national challenges in ways not done before.”

These conversations were not facilitated by LPCs. However, it is the type of process LPCs could well facilitate, with the added advantage that LPCs could provide follow-up and continuity – something the once-off nature of the Guyana exercise had precluded.

Problem-solving and community-building

Some of the most inspiring reports regarding the impact of LPCs came from communities that have been shattered by violence. The example of Kibimba in Burundi has been mentioned above. The critical question that had rallied LPC members there was: “How can we live together again?” (Ningbabria *no date* (2)). In the South Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo an LPC has organized a football match between ex-militia of the so-called Mai-Mai and community youth (Butt 2004). It presented a powerful image of the restoration of ‘the ordinary’ in the midst of mind-boggling chaos; of making community life possible again (see also Network 2004; Ningbabira *no date* (1)). From the North Eastern part of Kenya came the story of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee. It was established by a group of women who were deeply concerned and

affected by the ongoing negative effect of inter-clan strife by pastoralist peoples who faced desperate competition for water in a drought-stricken region. It achieved remarkable results and soon inspired the spread of similar LPCs across the region. It is an outstanding example of the empowerment, in this case of women, that joint conflict transformation activity provides (Ibrahim and Jenner 1998). A LPC of Liberia reported dealing successfully with 39 cases over a 2 year period, mostly regarding land ownership issues of returned displaced persons (Shepler, Onideyi et al. 2006). In Macedonia a local Committee on Inter-Ethnic Relations was credited with the fact that name changes to streets and public buildings – a highly emotive issue in a multi-ethnic context – were implemented with complete consensus by all stakeholders (Aziri 2008; see also Koceski 2008).

LPCs, therefore, have the ability to facilitate or mediate solutions to disputes that threaten the fragile peace in communities. They are capable of restoring some semblance of community life in the midst of the devastation of violence. Reports on the work of LPCs confirm this fact without exception. Ball (1998: 35) stated it thus: "...even in the most violence-ridden areas peace committee staff were able to mediate conflict and create a safe space within which problems could be discussed." LPCs have the ability to succeed where other attempts have failed possibly because of the different approach to conflict resolution that they employ (see below).

What is not clear, however, is the rate of success for LPCs in this regard. The fact that disputes have been solved is certainly very positive, but LPCs have also failed in some instances (see Odendaal and Spies 1996). An IRIN report of 17 December 2007 (IRIN 2007) - on post-election violence in Kenya – was titled "Inefficient peace committees frustrate reconciliation in clash areas." It referred to the Mount Elgon area in Kenya where fighting between two clans had erupted. Community, civic, religious and local authority leaders have questioned, according to the report, the make-up of peace committees and whether or not they were operational before the conflict. Incidentally they did not call for disbanding the LPCs, rather for reviving and restructuring them because they believed they "could play a pivotal role in pacifying the warring groups."

Successful joint problem-solving at local level has indisputable peacebuilding value. Moreover, its positive impact on the general political culture should also be considered. In South Africa, for example, LPCs introduced mediation and joint problem-solving processes to rural areas. It implied a significant paradigm shift away from authoritarian styles of decision-making (Odendaal and Spies 1996; Ball 1998). Mediation or other forms of joint problem-solving have an inherent democratization effect because they establish some 'level playing-field' where parties engage with each other on (more or less) equal terms and work together to solve a problem. It is the anti-thesis of authoritarian rule. The success in dealing with conflict in new manners, therefore, contributes to the democratization process in a country.

Reconciliation

Many LPCs have reconciliation as a main objective. Reconciliation, though, is a very complex matter. As Lederach (2005: 160) has pointed out, reconciliation is “dealing with the worst of the human condition, the effort to repair the brokenness of relationships and life itself.” It involves a process where the often contrasting demands of peace, justice, truth and mercy (amnesty) have to be integrated and balanced (Lederach 1997).

LPCs contribute to reconciliation in many indirect ways. When communication is facilitated, violence is prevented, relationships are strengthened and specific disputes resolved, the goal of ultimate reconciliation is served. In a Liberian community a LPC facilitated talks that led to the cleansing and reopening of a mosque that was used as a carpentry shop during the war. The contribution of such an act to local reconciliation between two ethnic groups, one being Muslim and the other Christian, has to be substantial (Shepler, Onideyi et al. 2006).

There are not really examples, though, of LPCs participating formally in national Truth and Reconciliation processes. National reconciliation commissions, under whatever name, normally focus on events and actors that have national significance. Local communities, however, have their own urgent need for reconciliation. The experiment in East Timor is therefore very important. The National Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation of East Timor established community-level reconciliation procedures (CPRs) for perpetrators of lesser crimes. These were mediation procedures between victims and perpetrators at local level, based on traditional practices. Over 90% of the cases submitted were satisfactorily dealt with by CPRs, approximately 40 000 community members participated in these procedures; while an interim review revealed that 90% of those interviewed expressed satisfaction with the process (CAVR 2006).

In conclusion, therefore, reconciliation is a national project, ultimately dependent on national policies that would transform the conflict. At local level there is a definite need for facilitated reconciliation processes as demonstrated in East Timor. There is not much evidence that LPCs have been involved in reconciliation in a structured and planned way, but by their composition and nature they would be ideally placed to house such processes.

5. Do LPCs need “teeth”? The importance of approaches to conflict.

A key question to ask regarding LPCs is how much formal power they should have. What “teeth” should they have to regulate the behaviour of spoilers and opportunists? How should they bind parties into compliance with agreements that were forged?

There is more than one answer to this question. On the one end of the spectrum are the *gacaca* courts of Rwanda. Though they were not LPCs in the stricter sense of the word, they were mentioned here because one of the stated objectives with these courts was to promote reconciliation and healing at community level. They were established because the international and national justice systems were unable to cope with the

workload of awaiting-trial prisoners following the genocide of 1994. *Gacaca* courts therefore located the dispensing of justice in local communities; empowering them with a process and structure to deal with a specific category of offenders *within* and *by* the community where they have committed their offences during the genocide of 1994. Part of the process was to encourage perpetrators to confess to their crimes. Such confessions, though, had substantial benefits because it could dramatically diminish sentences that were imposed. The point is, however, that *gacaca* courts dispensed retributive justice. They had the authority, though restricted, to mete out punishment. Whereas the jury is still out on the success of this innovative experiment, it has been controversial. Some of the more general concerns were the potential violation of principles of ‘due process’; potential witness intimidation in a context where the perpetrators belonged to the majority identity group; and the competence and impartiality of the community judges (Zorbas 2004: 8). The key question for our purposes would be whether community reconciliation had indeed been promoted through an approach that had considerable ‘teeth’.

In South Africa the National Peace Accord sought to provide LPCs with some ‘teeth’. It made provision for “Justices of the Peace”. These were individuals *with legal authority* to be appointed to support LPCs. They would, *i.a.*, investigate complaints regarding public violence or intimidation; apply the ‘rules of natural justice’ when issuing an order; refer facts constituting an offence to the Attorney General, and pronounce as a judgment the terms of a settlement reached by LPCs. In reality no such person was ever appointed because it was deemed too dangerous and – in practice – ineffective (Gastrow 1995; Odendaal and Spies 1997). The contribution of LPCs to violence reduction and problem-solving was done without any reliance on formal authority or power.

In Kenya an interesting dilemma existed in this regard. LPCs, as mentioned above, came into being in Kenya largely because of the inability of the state and its justice system to safeguard local communities against the effects of cattle-rustling and ethnic conflict. In the largely pastoralist areas of northern Kenya, access to water seemed to be a major catalyst of violence. The LPCs relied heavily on the traditional ‘council of elders’ and traditional customs, but diluted the traditional approach somewhat with the inclusion of women, youth and civil society. The dominant conflict management mechanism of the ‘council of elders’, though, was that of arbitration. They fined wrong-doers or – in extreme cases - formally cursed them (Adan and Pkalya 2006). This approach, even as adopted by LPCs, was effective as long as wrongdoers recognized such traditional authority. However, it was not recognized by Kenya’s formal legal system and was therefore ultimately not enforceable. LPCs were therefore seeking formal recognition from the government that would include the establishment of a legal and policy framework for LPCs. Adan and Pkalya (2006) mentioned that while LPCs seemed relatively successful in filling the vacuum between the traditional and modern legal systems, they at the same time suffered under the image that they were too modern for traditionalists and too traditional for modernists. Staying with the metaphor of ‘having teeth’, they seemed to have some

teeth to pull of a credibly threatening showing of teeth, but when it came to real biting there were not enough.

From Sierra Leone came a different perspective regarding the functioning of the District Code of Conduct Monitoring Committees (DCMCs) (Nyathi 2007; 2008). They had no power of arbitration and no legal standing. Their authority was a moral one, vested in the Code of Conduct – an accord regarding the conduct of peaceful elections that was negotiated between all political parties. If there was a problem, the DCMC would meet to find a solution, which they managed in the majority of cases. Not everyone necessarily stuck to the agreement all the time, but on the whole the ‘authority of community consensus’ carried the day. This approach was deliberate and considered. It followed intense discussions within the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), the statutory body that implemented DCMCs. The initial instinct of the chair of the PPRC, a senior judge, was to go the legal route in dealing with inter- and intra-political party disputes, but the reality on the ground convinced them that it was not feasible. Reporting after their successful deployment during the elections of 2007, Nyathi, who was a United Nations Technical Adviser seconded to the Political Parties Registration Commission at the time, was insistent that the legal approach, in a context where the legal system was not yet fully functional after years of brutal civil war, would not have had the same positive results. Being toothless proved to be an asset.

The varying approaches clearly raised serious questions regarding the underlying theory that LPCs based their methodology on. A guiding hypothesis for this study was that LPCs should not have teeth. They were effective local peacebuilding mechanisms precisely because they did not wield power and therefore did not impose decisions. Ury, Brett and Goldberg (1988) have made the now familiar distinction between power based, rights based and interest based approaches to conflict. It concerned the methodology used to manage conflict: power based approaches referred to coercive practices; the rights based approach referred the conflict for adjudication or arbitration; while the interest based approach sought to solve the underlying problem in a manner that would satisfy the interests of all parties to the greatest possible extent. The latter approach (i.e. the interest-based approach) depended on a style of negotiation that in itself did not rely on hard bargaining and the exertion of pressure, but rather on a genuine search for mutually satisfactory solutions.

The essence of periods of transition is that authority is disputed and lacks legitimacy for at least an important segment of the community. Attempts to deal with conflict in such a context through using force, either in brute form or through the force of law, have not only failed, but actually fuelled the flames of violence. Conversely, by following an approach that was built on mutual recognition and a search for sustainable solutions, the underlying dilemma of the legitimacy of power was being dealt with by sharing decision-making power; by seeking consensus and using consensus as the guiding authority in implementing decisions. It was also an approach that recognized and dealt with the ‘psycho-political dynamics’ of conflict

much better than power or rights based approaches. By psycho-political dynamics were meant the subjective, emotional and visceral resistance people had against peace that derived from their objective political and social reality (Nathan 1999). It referred to the reality of the psychological content (such as deep distrust, enmity, fear) of political and peace processes. An approach that emphasized respect, inclusion and consensus had a much better chance of sustainable success than one that used coercion in such a context.

LPC are obviously only a temporary mechanism for facilitating local governance, but in the absence of legitimate and effective governance, it is the only workable alternative.

By giving LPCs formal power the danger exists of undermining the very strength of LPCs – its non-threatening, consensus building capacity. The example from Ghana may provide the best way to deal with the ‘problem of the teeth’. The Ghana proposal sees the work of the District Peace Advisory Councils as a first response to community conflict that will employ the methodology of an interest-based approach. These bodies have no power of arbitration. At most they may make recommendations to government, but their primary functions are to build consensus and seek mutually satisfying solutions. When they fail, formal legal processes may kick in. It correlates with Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) systems employed in civil justice systems across the world where efforts at conciliation are seen as a first step, followed only by a legal process when that fails. The work of LPCs may therefore be reconciled with a country’s legal system if it is seen as an informal process to reach mutually satisfying solutions and not as an alternative body with the power of arbitration.

6. Capacity building.

All the LPCs studied during this survey have enjoyed capacity building and financial support of some sort. There are no examples of LPCs that functioned in any sustained way without some outside support.

The support came from a variety of resources. LPCs with a national mandate had government support that included financing and infrastructure (full-time staff, offices, office equipment, transport, etc.). Where governments had insufficient resources donor agencies played a role. In two cases (Ghana and Sierra Leone) the UN formed partnerships with government. In the case of LPCs with civil society support, various NGOs and INGOs played a role. In Kenya the National Council of Churches of Kenya was also very instrumental.

It is still an open question how important physical infrastructure is for the functioning of LPCs. In South Africa it was necessary for LPCs to appoint their own support staff and establish their own offices, despite being financed by government. The liberation movements refused to have meetings in government offices or to deal with government employees because of deep levels of suspicion. Therefore the

establishment of a separate infrastructure that was accountable to an inclusive multi-party body, the Peace Secretariat, was necessary.

LPCs, however, seem to need very little in terms of infrastructural support in order to function. They should ideally be able to make use of existing resources in a community (like a venue for meeting and communication resources). In Nepal it has been calculated that the key requirement would be support for the LPC facilitators to enable them to support the LPCs. This would require payment of fees and travel costs. The Chief District Officer would provide the venue for meetings and office space. Training and orientation of the LPC members would also be a key requirement.

It is in fact important not to 'throw money at' LPCs. The habit of some NGOs to pay 'sitting fees' had, according to reports, a negative impact on the 'moral fabric' of LPCs in at least two cases (Kenya and Liberia) (Adan and Pkalya 2006: 19; Shepler, Onideyi et al. 2006). It destroyed the spirit of volunteerism, thus diluting willingness for community service. As such it ran against the grain of what LPCs strove to achieve – the restoration of functioning communities.

A much more important form of support than physical infrastructure is the establishment of sufficient facilitation capacity. As mentioned above (see par. 2), local leadership have an intimate understanding and experience of the conflict. Yet, this very immediacy of the conflict experience makes it difficult for local leaders to achieve sufficient distance to manage an intervention. They need support in at least three critical areas.

Firstly, LPCs need access to a fairly professional level of facilitation that is located outside the local community. For example, it is in most cases necessary that someone should come from outside to broker an agreement on the decision to form such a LPC, especially where polarization at local level is so extreme that normal communication between different sections of the community is not possible. Furthermore, during the life of a LPC it may also encounter specific situations that are too complex to deal with, either because of the depth of animosity and distrust experienced at local level or because the nature of the problem is such that intervention from outside is necessary. Under such circumstances LPCs benefit from having access to facilitators that are located at provincial or national level. Especially in situations where LPCs are established as part of a national strategy the existence of such facilitation capacity at a fairly professional level is necessary. In South Africa this function was fulfilled by full-time staff appointed by the Peace Secretariat. In the case of Ghana and Sierra Leone the expertise resided at the UN Country Office and with individual nationals that have received training from them. In the case of civil society LPCs, this expertise was provided by the supporting NGOs. Skilled facilitation capacity is therefore necessary for the successful functioning of LPCs.

Secondly, LPCs themselves need, as a minimum, sufficient orientation regarding the roles expected of them. But they also need training in basic peacebuilding concepts and skills. By training LPCs is not meant giving prescriptive knowledge on what they

should and should not do. In the peacebuilding field much progress has been made on conducting training in ways that are experiential in format, building on local experiences and knowledge. Training a LPC means to guide them on a collective journey of reflecting on their own experiences of conflict and exploring some constructive ways to transform the conflict. Training, therefore, is in itself a peacebuilding exercise where mutual understanding is deepened, relationships strengthened and a mutual vision for the future developed. It has also been found that attention to personal emotional growth and self-awareness is necessary, given the depth of trauma that local people have experienced and the importance of the person of the peace-builder in peacebuilding (Odendaal and Spies 1998: 132; Project Saamspan 1998; Dressel and Neumann 2001).

Thirdly, LPCs ideally need a support structure that connects them to the national level. They should be able to feed information to the national level, request information from the national level and seek support where necessary from higher profile actors. LPCs cannot by themselves create such a support structure. It has to be established as part of the national peace infrastructure or has to be facilitated by the NGOs that have set up the LPCs.

7. What LPCs cannot do.

There are specific limitations to what LPCs can do. LPCs have been criticized for failing to achieve outcomes that were never in their power to achieve. LPCs have, as it is, a very difficult task and they are not helped by overburdening them with naïve expectations.

Firstly, as discussed above, LPCs do not and should not have ‘teeth’. LPCs cannot enforce peace. They cannot forcibly prevent violence. They are only successful in so far as the ‘soft approaches’ to peacemaking are effective.

Secondly, LPCs would find it difficult to implement peace agreements if, at national level, there is a lack of political will to do so. If either key political players or security/rebel forces lack commitment to a national peace agreement, it cannot be expected of LPCs to be successful (Ball 1998).

Thirdly, LPCs cannot address the root causes of a conflict if those causes are located in the national constitution, laws and policies. LPCs have been accused that they facilitate ‘negative peace’; that they address symptoms and not causes (International Alert 1993; Adan and Pkalya 2006). Part of the dilemma is that in a situation of deep polarization the concept ‘peace’ is contested. Peace for some would mean maintenance of the *status quo* minus violence. For others peace means the establishment of a radically new order, even through the use of violence (Odendaal and Spies 1997). LPCs, at most, allow local leaders to negotiate measures that would minimize damage to their community and maximize collaboration in dealing with their specific challenges. LPCs, however, cannot determine the national debate on the nature of peace and what policies need to be implemented to achieve that.

Fourthly, LPCs cannot substitute for local government or local policing. LPCs could facilitate more effective local governance by mediating disputes and building consensus, but they cannot assume political and financial responsibilities for which they have no mandate. They can facilitate better community-police relationships, but they cannot and may not form an alternative command centre for the police. In Nepal this was a particular problem as there were no local government bodies other than the Chief District Officer and Village Development Committee officers in the districts. Some role players resisted the implementation of LPCs precisely because they feared that LPCs would play this role. That would create political problems as the LPCs would become arenas of conflict themselves. It is important that LPCs acknowledge their limitations and focus on their facilitation role in this regard.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Seen from a distance LPCs are indeed “imperfect bridges”. Ball’s summary (1998: 35) regarding LPCs in South Africa have wider application: "Viewed as a whole, the peace committees had a mixed record, and a definite assessment of their 'success' or 'failure' is impossible. Peace committees were unable to stop violence completely but often limited its occurrence. They were unable to end impunity on the part of the security forces, but they were able to help equalizing the balance of power between those in power and ordinary citizens and to strengthen accountability. Their ability to address the underlying causes of conflict was circumscribed, but even in the most violence-ridden areas peace committee staff were able to mediate conflict and create a safe space within which problems could be discussed. And though unable to transform the 'struggle mentality', they were able to help South Africans take their first steps toward understanding the value of negotiations and how to engage in them constructively." In addition it also has to be said that different LPCs, even in the same context, performed differently. LPCs were ultimately only as effective as the commitment and leadership qualities of its members, which of course varied from place to place.
2. Yet, though imperfect, LPCs have amazing peacebuilding potential. Being imperfect is not the same as being useless. 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 peace-builders; 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.
3. The research on LPC must be broadened and deepened. On the one hand the net should be cast wider. There is evidence of the existence of LPCs in countries not

included in this study (e.g. Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Serbia, Indonesia, Nicaragua) that should be followed up. But on the other hand, and perhaps more urgent, in-depth case studies should be compiled of LPC that operate in the following contexts: (i) in conditions of state collapse like in the eastern DRC; (ii) in conditions of relative state weakness such as in the pastoralist areas of Kenya; (iii) in countries in transition from one constitutional dispensation to another, like in Nepal; (iv) in countries where a specific challenge like a general election threatens a relative fragile peace, as happened in Sierra Leone; and (v) in contexts where LPCs are mandated to act as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, like in Ghana.

4. There are some processes that have to be monitored over a period of time. Examples are the institutionalization of District Peace Advisory Councils in Ghana; the process in Kenya to seek formalization; and LPCs as facilitators of dialogue and reconciliation in Nepal.
5. There are specific questions that have to be considered in more depth:
 - (i) How to deal with the dilemma posed by Kenyan LPCs, namely how to fill the gap between traditional and formal justice systems; how to utilize credible traditional conflict resolution processes, but in a manner that will do justice to the demands of inclusion and full participation?
 - (ii) The question regarding a LPC's 'teeth': How valid is the assumption proposed in this document that LPCs should not have teeth? How successful were the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda or the LPCs in Kenya that had powers of adjudication and arbitration?
 - (iii) What are the dynamics that make a LPC work? Is it its mandate; the right composition; the personality and commitment of individuals; or the quality of external support and facilitation?
 - (iv) What should donors know in order 'to do no harm'?
6. Ultimately there is need for a more robust discussion of the theory and methodology of LPCs. For this reason academic publication and discussion is necessary; as well the creation of forums for an informed discussion of findings.

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