



indigenous funders promoting the value of local peacebuilding

**WHY A FOUNDATIONS FOR PEACE NETWORK?
REFLECTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

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WHY A FOUNDATIONS FOR PEACE NETWORK?

REFLECTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

**“A global network of independent indigenous funders working to advance equality, diversity and interdependence in areas of entrenched and persistent communal conflict, with a history of, or potential for, violence.”
(Excerpt from the Foundations for Peace Network Strategic Plan, 2005-10)**

One of the three strategic objectives of the Foundations for Peace Network is to draw lessons from the practical work of its members, and to share models of good practice in grant-making that is designed to promote peacebuilding, human rights and equality work. The experience from which these lessons are drawn is varied and reflects the very different conditions and circumstances that the members of the network find themselves addressing on a daily basis. The current membership of the Network includes independent Trusts, Funds and Foundations working in India, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Serbia, Colombia, Northern Ireland, Israel and Bangladesh. The founding members of the Network first came together in early 2004 in Leuven, Belgium following an initial discussion in Belfast, Northern Ireland in late 2003.

WHAT DREW US TOGETHER?

Work in areas of conflict is often lonely and isolating. There is always the need to balance conflicting demands and priorities alongside calculating the risks to be taken. Long-term violent conflict can result in societies becoming self-obsessed and unable to look beyond the daily dramas and calamities. There is often the feeling that nobody can understand our particular situation, and that there has never been a conflict like ours. There can also be a feeling from time to time of absolute helplessness.

What drew us together was:

- The need to exchange the experience of working on a daily basis in a situation of conflict and division both within and between our communities.
- The joy of talking to another independent funder that understands the pressures of dealing with the political, social and economic complexities of conflicts.
- The hope for peer support during periods of particular societal crisis.
- The grasping for new approaches and strategies that others have adopted and that just might make a difference.
- The freshness of a new eye on the old problems and dilemmas that haunt our communities.
- The potential to bring a range of our funded projects together on a thematic basis so that they also might learn from one another.

- A peer exchange between independent funders who have to live with the consequences of the grant-making decisions that they make in situations where staff, Board members and indeed, the people who work in the projects that they fund, may be put at risk.

“We live with the conflict on a day to day basis. We are often drawn from the communities that are engaged in violence. We are shamed by the injustices, inequalities and discrimination that so often lie at the root of conflict. We are hurt by the violence that can so easily spin out of control. And we have to struggle ourselves against being overly aligned. Our societies may be very different, but we share much. . .” Quote from founder member of Foundations for Peace Network.

WHAT IS PEACEBUILDING?

Peacebuilding is not an event, it is a process. Academic and peace activist, John Paul Lederach noted ‘The delight of building peace – “Like fishing, it is the pursuit of what is elusive, but attainable; a perpetual series of occasions for hope”.’ (Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies, 2002).

Peacebuilding can be defined as the opening up of opportunities and spaces which support all members of society to:

- Discuss and address the causes of conflict.
- Contribute to, influence and benefit from social, political, economic and cultural life.
- Develop a sense of self-worth and common belonging based on shared values of justice, equity and interdependence.
- Develop a positive and creative respect for diversity through mutual trust, tolerance and acceptance.

A tall order? Well yes, but peacebuilding is not something that can be left solely to elected politicians, it is our shared responsibility. Politicians have the responsibility to make peace; broader civic society needs to play its part in grounding peace.

In February 2005 the AlvarAlice Foundation held a major conference on Restorative Justice in Cali, Colombia. This brought together a wide range of local groups and politicians with international speakers from South Africa, Northern Ireland, Peru, Philippines and East Timor to share ideas and approaches for conflict transformation.

The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust in Sri Lanka and INCORE at Ulster University in Northern Ireland have established a partnership of learning. Within this partnership two visits to Sri Lanka took place and a return visit to Northern Ireland.

In addition, a video conference was facilitated from Northern Ireland where all the Sri-Lankan business initiatives regarding peace came together for the first time to discuss what could be done jointly.

Since 1997 the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland has benefited from speakers from South Africa; Central America; Israel; Cambodia and the Balkans who shared their experiences of peacebuilding and transitional justice initiatives with community activists working at local level.

International expertise has often been used to open up spaces for dialogue between the various parties to a conflict; it is often easier for the outsider to ask the sensitive question or to draw parallels from their own experience. External speakers can offer safe space for people to hear new ideas. Bringing in international speakers – or bringing delegations of local activists to visit other areas of conflict – also encourages people to realize that their experience of division, or frustrations with difficult peace processes, is not unique.

Peacebuilding also requires that those who were actively involved in the violence and conflict become participants in the process of conflict transformation. This can be uncomfortable for some but inclusion is necessary. Violence always exacerbates marginalisation and alienation and this trend must be reversed. It is always a matter of calculation about the degree of 'sufficient inclusion' – there will invariably be those who will continue to threaten violence. Experience shows that when societies are emerging from conflict, uncertainty can give rise to organisational and intra-community splits, feuds and divisions over the nature of compromise and the allocation of power. Through funding programmes and priorities, indigenous funders can help the process of political and social integration.

The Abraham Fund Initiative was proactively involved in developing a Platform of Action on the theme of Advancing Coexistence and Equality among Jews and Arabs in Israel.

The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust in Sri Lanka supported capacity building initiatives by holding workshops in selected villages with youth organisations on issues of Human Rights, Equality, National Reconciliation and Peace. By focusing on financial support for pro-peace and human rights NGOs, and by helping local community-based organisations (CBOs) become more capable and responsive to their constituencies, the Trust addresses the issues that will lead to participatory democracy.

Reconstruction Women's Fund in Serbia gives fellowships to enable young women to participate in international programs concerning women's studies, peace, democracy and diversity education.

In any peace process there are periods of difficulty – sometimes over many years. Peacebuilding needs patience and a sense of optimism. It is important to encourage civil society initiatives that can help create a supportive climate for change. While it is crucial that the role of elected political representatives is acknowledged and recognized, this does not allow the rest of society to abrogate its responsibility in the challenging task of building peace and achieving conflict transformation. Civil society has an important role, obligation and responsibility to hold governments accountable.

HELPING TO HEAL COMMUNITIES

The wounds left by violent conflict and societal division often continue to ache both through and after a peace process. Addressing these issues is an important aspect of peacebuilding. Work with victims and survivors of a conflict, from all sides, is both sensitive and challenging. All too often – and particularly in the post-conflict stage – victims can be seen as an obstacle to progress by refusing to ‘move on’ when others decide that it is time ‘to draw a line in the sand’. The needs of individual victims are often masked by policy-makers talking in terms of statistics. Initiatives that enable victims of violence to tell their own story are important in order to delve behind and beneath the statistics of violence. Victims are the reality of the consequences of war. They should be protected from use/abuse in the political “market”. Work with victims and survivors of violence should be developed in a manner that is respectful and participatory for the individuals themselves.

Issues relating to truth and justice, no matter how divisive, must also be considered in order to move forward and there is a lot of learning from the international experience that can help to structure and sensitise this work.

The Dalit Foundation in India worked with Amudha from Malliampatti in Tamil Nadu who, when she was 18 years old, was stripped naked, tortured and beaten by upper-caste Gounder men because her community dared to celebrate their deity’s festival without inviting the Gounders. The Foundation worked with a partner organisation, Vizhuthugal, to take legal action against the Gounders and to help Amudha to overcome her trauma. She is now a social activist on Dalit rights.

Themba Lesizwe in South Africa engage in an extensive programme of funding for organisations that support the victims and survivors of violence and trauma.

The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust funded a documentary *Lanka – the other side of war and peace* traversing the last three decades of violence in Sri Lanka juxtaposing the multiple realities of war and peace, which simultaneously exist. It is an act of recalling and remembering the brutal and tragic consequences of the use of violence, and its legitimization for

perpetuation of power: witnessed most poignantly, as those who have suffered through this violence narrate their stories of loss, displacement and survival, giving expression to the larger narrative of war and peace

The need to develop strategies and initiatives that will facilitate the re-integration and re-settlement of ex-combatants and political prisoners is also important in normalising community relationships after violence. Specific programmes will be required to re-integrate children and young people who become combatants. Such re-integration must encompass the social and political aspects as well as the physical and economic.

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland set up a specific programme for the re-integration of politically motivated ex-prisoners. It had its own Grant Advisory Panel which included representatives from all the main paramilitary groups – both Loyalist and Republican. This group continues to meet on a cross-community basis to discuss peacebuilding, re-integration and other policy issues. It also offers an important forum for exchange of views and information.

Reconstruction Women’s Fund in Serbia gives Rapid Response Grants to civic initiatives who react promptly to discriminative, backwards and militant social and political phenomena.

The protection and development of Human Rights is another means of healing divided communities as well as individuals. The drafting of a Bill of Rights, as in South Africa, can offer the potential for an inclusive process that engages communities throughout a divided society. This is a shared venture that can benefit all members of society. Funders can put grant programmes in place to enable disadvantaged groups to have their say in the drafting of a Bill of Rights. The Foundations for Peace Network is committed to the principles set out in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

OFFERING ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE

It is not enough to simply condemn violence, it is also important to identify alternatives to it. Fostering alternatives to violence can happen at different levels and in different ways. Independent funders, working with other civic society organisations, can help to open up space for dialogue and lateral thinking. Sometimes old problems need new questions asked of them.

- It is important to prevent the demonisation of the ‘other side’ – whoever the ‘other side’ might be. Conflict and division fosters simplification. Whenever the ‘other side’ is accused of doing something then rumours magnify the allegation, and people begin to murmur that ‘there’s no smoke without fire’. They expect the worst.

- Work with the media is important in order to try to minimize adversarial portrayal of one community or another. All too often an aligned media sharpens and re-enforces communal or ethnic stereotypes.
- In seeking to identify the grievances of ‘the other’ community it is useful to seek space to enable the protagonists in conflict to state their case. If we do not know why people are in conflict then it is difficult to trace a way out of violence. Civil society organisations are often in the best position to take those initial calculated risks for peace.
- During periods of violence the wider range of voices and opinions within single-identity communities may be increasingly silenced or intimidated to ‘decide what side they are on’. This process of simplification and alignment can exacerbate division and lack of communication. Work to draw out the differences within communities (single identity work) can often be as important as work undertaken to increase and deepen contact between divided communities.

Reconstruction Women’s Fund invited Women in Black Belgrade to be one of it’s founding organizations, to work in synergy for basic principles of solidarity, against militarism and nationalism.

The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust worked to develop radio programmes for children on reconciliation. Since the project was aimed primarily at youth, it took the form of a popular music request show interspersed with messages relating to various aspects of peace; giving information to each side on the other, shattering stereotypes, and discussing common interests in areas like health, culture, and the economy.

Mallepalli Laxmaiah used his fellowship from the Dalit Foundation to create media advocacy networks at the district and the state level with a focus on Dalit rights issues. This has thrown light on the injustices that the Dalit communities face.

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, alongside other independent funders supported the Opsahl Commission in 1992, which prior to the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, encouraged all parties to the conflict to express their views about the future of Northern Ireland. Local poet, Michael Longley, contributed ‘A Blessing’ –

**“Initiative Ninety –
Two (-three, - four, - five. . .)
Offers a space, a clearing
In the jungle for me
And you to stay alive
By sharing thought and word.
Are you within hearing?
Am I being heard?”**

IS THE PROCESS INCLUSIVE?

UNESCO's Culture of Peace Programme notes that the traditional 'feminine' values of tolerance, listening and openness to dialogue should become accepted as values for both men and women. However, as against this the Belgrade Women in Black argued that their opposition to the war was "not a part of our 'natural' role, but as a conscious political choice". (We Are: Belgrade 1994). The reality, nevertheless, is that as a peace process progresses groups such as women, young people, and many more are pushed to the sidelines. Yet, at the height of the conflict, it is often women that have reached out to make contact and maintain communication. In some societies the kinship links of women may enable them to be effective mediators; in other societies women may feel safer in crossing sectarian or political interfaces than men. But this is not always so. The reality remains:

- Women can play an important role in maintaining some lines of communication during periods of violent conflict.
- Where girls and women are the victims of violence through rape, sexual humiliation, etc. special efforts are needed to help them deal with the consequences. Such experiences often go under-reported due to fear of family humiliation and personal shame.
- In periods of transition from violence there can often be increased levels of sexual abuse; domestic violence and suicides amongst young people.
- While women are often left to hold families together during violent conflict, and to pick up the pieces of damaged lives and communities, in the aftermath of violence, they are rarely involved in post conflict decision-making.

If 'the personal is political' then in societies emerging from conflict history is personal and must be addressed on that basis.

A small village called Shamshallapur in Andhra Pradesh, south India comprises of a homogenous dalit community following Buddhism. Nirnaya met their felt need of meeting their survival needs instead of depending on oppressive caste Hindu farmers on whose land they were going as wage labour. Nirnaya extended micro credit and in one year this group of 30 women were able to throw off their veil, hold their heads high and walk in front of the farmer landlords and say whatever you do we will not give up our dignity and self respect.

Pochamma, an illiterate woman was awarded a fellowship by Nirnaya in India. She works in the Medak district to organise village self-help groups and works with women who are differently enabled.

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland supported the Women's Information Day group that brought women from deprived Catholic and Protestant areas together on a monthly basis right through the years of the conflict. They met to talk about issues of health, poverty and education – but they found common fellowship irrespective of their political differences. In this way they humanised the conflict.

Reconstruction Women's Fund supports Roma women activists in Serbia who confront hard deprivation and multiple discrimination of Roma women.

The Abraham Fund has supported more than 2,500 teachers across Israel in receiving co-existence training and curricular materials. Nearly 30,000 children have learned about co-existence through educational programmes and after-school activities.

In the East of Sri Lanka, the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust funded a group the project commenced with basic awareness programmes on the need for all three communities in the areas targeted to live in harmony with each other. It used cricket to bring people, (all three communities) irrespective of their religious and ethnic differences, together. Using sport as a means to break down barriers, Village Peace Committees were established with a view to diffuse village level tensions before they escalated into major issues.

AND THE POWER OF SYMBOLS AND THE WORD.

“The air above Jerusalem is filled with prayers and dreams. Like the air above cities with heavy industry, hard to breathe. . .”
(Yehuda Amichai, ‘Jerusalem Ecology’, 1980)

Symbols, images and vocabulary are incredibly important in societies either immersed in, or emerging from, conflict and division. Very often the contested communities live in two different virtual universes. It is important for indigenous funders to be aware of the potential impact of their words and messages. What we have found suggests:

- It is the very intensity of conflicting dreams and aspirations that makes intra and inter-communal conflict so difficult to resolve. The notion of compromise and tolerance for diversity becomes seen as a form of betrayal.
- The importance of symbols and culture is all too often under-rated. ‘The past’ itself becomes a contested concept and interpretation.
- Vocabulary and semantics are important. A ‘minority’ community in one context can become a ‘majority’ community in another. Very often communities in conflict are actually caught in a ‘double minority’ syndrome (e.g. The Arab population is a minority in Israel, but the Jewish people see

themselves as a minority in the Middle East). Conflict and violence generates feelings of fear and insecurity that can easily be exaggerated and politically exploited.

In India, the Dalit Foundation funded Navachetnato work with Dalits in 33 villages of Kerala, using the medium of folk music and street theatre to communicate with people on social and cultural issues.

The Abraham Fund was supportive of a project that brought 1,000 children, Jewish and Arab, together to sing at the Good Neighbourhoods and Co-existence Project celebrations in Haifa.

The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust in Sri Lanka funded the Road Painting Movement which paints peace murals at sites of war related violence in Colombo to encourage a non-vindictive memory and to transform them into sites of reconciliation.

Nirnaya supports the art work of local children by turning them into greeting cards.

Women in Black Belgrade launched an educational program “Dealing With the Past – A Feminist Approach” around the issue that *‘I am accountable not only for my own acts but for what is being done in my name’*

And then there is the example of South Africa that adopted a new flag and anthem, while seeing sport as a potentially unifying factor where previously it was divisive.

AND WHAT CAN WE DO?

As independent indigenous funders, the members of the Foundations for Peace Network recognize the important role that they can play in promoting social justice and peacebuilding in their own societies. However to achieve this in practice it is important that:

- The Foundations – ourselves - within our own organisations reflect the diversity of our communities in the composition of our Board of Trustees; staff and volunteers, which enables us to work with individuals and groups on all sides of our divided societies.
- Be prepared to support projects that are working to highlight injustice and discrimination, as well as those that are working to support those that have suffered during the conflict.
- Support interventions on behalf of victims of human rights abuses and mainstream human rights approaches and principles into our activities.
- Have local linkages that enable us to listen and hear a wide range of local viewpoints, not simply those that we feel comfortable with.

- Draw on imaginative and effective approaches from other societies emerging from conflict.
- Be there for the long-term – building peace can take as long and as much imagination and resources as it took to wage war.

The members of the Foundations for Peace Network are realistic about what can be achieved in often very difficult and sensitive situations; but equally we are conscious that by learning from one another and being able to draw on the support of one another, we can work more effectively for peace, social justice and mutual interdependence. As independent, indigenous funders, we are uniquely placed to intervene and support local peacebuilding work, to take risks for peace. We need our contribution to be recognised, valued and supported both nationally and internationally.

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Community Foundation for Northern Ireland with inputs and case studies from the member organisations.

It was prepared as a discussion document for the Foundations for Peace Network Conference entitled 'Peacebuilding – the contribution of Indigenous Foundations' to be held on 27th June 2006 in the UN Church Centre, New York.

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