

Translating Networking into Strategic Programming Linkages: Lessons from the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project

Presented by Mary B. Anderson at the FriEnt Strategic Partnership for Peace Workshop, “Opportunities and Limits of Development-GO-NGO Networking as Contribution to Effectiveness” in Bonn, October 23, 2003.

Introduction:

In one of its documents, FriEnt notes that a main motivation for its establishment as a Working Group was that “it was believed that peace processes in developing countries could be reinforced more strategically and systematically by using the member’s comparative advantage and work together.” Through the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, a great deal of evidence has been gathered to support this “belief” and to clarify why and how “working together” can increase strategic effectiveness.

In the paragraphs that follow, we shall first briefly describe the Reflecting on Peace Practice project (Section I) and, then, outline some of the lessons that have been learned through this effort (Section II). In Section III, we shall then look briefly at how these findings are relevant and useful for agencies working toward coordination. In the closing section (Section IV), we shall also discuss what has not yet been learned about coordination in peace practice, and suggest ways to proceed to push the learning further.

Section I: The Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP)

Between 1999 and 2002, over two-hundred peace practice agencies and over one-thousand individual peace practitioners collaborated in a project called the Reflecting on Peace Practice project, to gather, analyze and learn from their vast and varied past experience. These agencies included both international peace NGOs as well as local organizations and groups working for peace in their own countries and regions. They ranged across the globe and involved many different approaches and programmes. Included were programmes that involved training; dialogue; peace education; interpositioning and accompaniment; nonviolent direct action; mediation; conflict resolution; conflict transformation; and many other approaches. Anyone and everyone who wanted to be involved and who, explicitly, worked to end violent conflict and/or to build a just, sustainable peace were welcome.

The approach of RPP was, first, to collect case studies, written as “stories” of what happened as a result of a variety of interventions in twenty-six locations where there was overt, violent conflict or a threat of conflict. Following the collection of these cases (done by many people), consultations of experienced peace practitioners were held in North America and Europe (including people from a wide-range of conflict areas around the world) to read, analyze and identify lessons from these cases.

The cases studies and these consultations did not produce clear lessons! Instead, and perhaps more interestingly, they produced a series of open “issues” that emerged, again and again across contexts, as critical to effective peace practice, but around which there was no apparent agreement. For example, many programmes included some efforts at dialogue between warring/conflicting groups. Many practitioners articulated their strong commitment to dialogue as central to peace-building. “It is always better to talk than not to talk,” was a common theme across societies and conflict types. However, when we looked systematically and comparatively at the ways in which people defined dialogue, the formats for dialogue they used, the approaches to facilitation that were felt to be essential and the range of outcomes, there simply was no agreement. Experiences ranged from successful development of personal friendships to effective translation of a dialogue process into genuine negotiation between warring parties to serious failures where dialogue participants left the sessions more entrenched in their opposing positions and feeling increased animosity toward each other.

Clearly more work had to be done to sort out such variety of experience!

RPP, then, developed workshop materials that outlined the issues identified in the previous project stage and, with these in hand, conducted a over thirty-five “feedback workshops” in many conflict zones, and in some NGO headquarter cities, around the world. The purpose of these sessions was to get many active peace practitioners, in their own settings, to “test” the ideas and confusions put forth in the issues papers and, together, through accumulating and comparing their experiences, to help bring clarity to the issues of effectiveness in peace work.

As the project progressed, the original question which had been framed as an attempt to find out what worked, or did not work, where and why, turned into a more focused and earnest exploration of effectiveness in peace practice. By the time the project completed the feedback workshops, the focus had become: Why is it that so much hard effort carried out by so many intelligent and dedicated people adds up to so little in the areas of peace-making/building?

And, although this question seems harsh, it was welcomed and probed with remarkable honesty and clarity by the many people engaged in the collaborative learning process called RPP.

By the end of the three years (just over one and half of these in case study collection and consultations and the rest in feedback workshops), RPP was able to publish a booklet, entitled Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners (Mary B. Anderson and Lara Olson, authors, with assistance from Kristin Doughty, CDA, Cambridge, MA, USA, 2003.)

Because much remains to be learned (see Section IV of this paper), CDA staff are now working with active peace practitioners in several regions of the world—both local and international—to “try out” the lessons learned in their daily work. These groups are being trained in what has been learned and, together, are using these lessons first to assess their

current programming and, then, to make appropriate adjustments to ensure that they push toward greater strategic effectiveness.

Section II: Critical Findings of RPP That Are Relevant to FriEnt

Finding Number One: Agreement on a Definition of Peace Writ Large Raises a Quandary on How to Assess Effectiveness

Although RPP worked with many, varied peace agencies, it soon became clear that all could agree on the goal which RPP came to call “Peace Writ Large.” (This was intended to convey the BIG goal toward which all projects and programmes are directed – “writ” means, really, “written” as in PEACE written in capital letters to show it is the “big peace.”)

Agencies and individuals work toward Peace Writ Large (PWL) in two basic ways: some focus on ending violent conflict/war; others focus on building a “just, sustainable peace.” (Some people refer to the first group as focusing on “the negative peace” – i.e. the absence of violence only while noting that the second group focuses on “the positive peace” –the achievement of true reconciliation and systems for ensuring sustainable justice.)

Clearly, in terms of assessing progress, all RPP partners agreed that it is much easier to know when the sub-goal of reducing or ending violence is achieved than it is to know when one is making significant progress toward a “just, sustainable peace.” The latter is such an idealized state that, RPP found, any “good” programme can claim to be contributing in some way (often “some small way”) to this grand goal.

The definition of PWL to include the second focus presents peace practitioners with a problem. If the goal is so grand, and progress toward it immeasurable in its multitude of small steps, then anything can qualify as peace practice. Such a broad definition of peace practice serves no good purpose. It dilutes any hard-headedness about the profession of peace practice; it allows dissipation of both energy and resources into multiple small well-intended efforts as if all are equally worthwhile for attention and funding. It leaves the field of peace practice with no agreed standards of effectiveness to which they can, and should, be held accountable.

RPP partners felt reluctant to judge small, good programmes negatively. They also felt continuing frustration that if everything is good, then there is no way to know what is better, or more effective, than anything else.

Finding Number Two: Many Different Types of Peace Practice Do Not Add up to Peace Writ Large

As noted above, RPP included a very broad range of types of peace practice. For some months, this range presented a real puzzle. Were the various approaches to peace comparable? Could one learn anything with such a broad and varied sample? Would it

make more sense to look at clusters of similar peace approaches in order to learn anything useful?

Although these questions were constantly in the air and on our minds, RPP could not—it turned out—exclude any type of work because people from all these areas were already involved in the RPP and wanted to learn with others. Further, the purpose of the project was to identify which approaches did work (or not) and why, so exclusion of some would limit this learning.

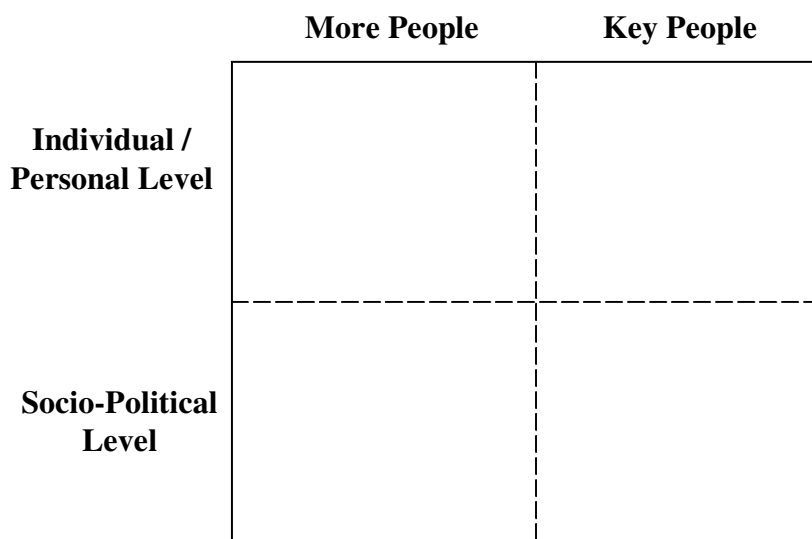
Finally, through much discussion and analysis, the project found a clear way to relate all peace activities to each other. This is represented by a simple, four-cell matrix (pictured below in Figure 1) which simply describes the approaches and levels of work of all the types of activities undertaken by participants in the RPP.

As the Figure shows, RPP found that all activities are based on essentially one of two approaches. The first of these is what we call the “More People” approach. Peace workers who take this approach do so because they believe that peace can only be built if many people become active in the process. The active pursuit of peace, they feel, must be based on broad involvement of “the people.”

The second basic approach found among RPP’s participants was what is called the “Key People” approach. Programmes taking this approach are based on the notion that certain people, identified as critical to the continuation, or the cessation, of conflict, must be involved in any effective effort to bring peace. Some people are identified as “key” because they are political leaders, or warlords, or members of a group otherwise involved in warring (such as unemployed young men). Strategies that focus on “Key People” are based on the belief that, without the involvement of these individuals or groups, no real progress can be made toward solving the conflict in question.

As the rows of the four-cell matrix show, RPP found, also, that all programmes work at two basic levels: the Individual/Personal level and/or the Socio-Political level. Those that concentrate at the Individual/Personal level take as their starting point the belief that peace is a matter of changing hearts or minds or attitudes or values. Without such change, they claim, peace is neither attainable nor sustainable. Programmes that concentrate at the Socio-Political level are based on the belief that peace requires identifiable changes in the socio-political, or institutional structures. These programmes focus on reforming, or creating, institutions that address grievances and institutionalize non-violent modes of handling conflict.

FIGURE 1: Diagram for mapping peace strategies (descriptive).



All the activities included in the range of RPP consultations and case studies fit, somewhere, on this four-cell grid. Some cover more than one cell; most fit within one.

As they considered the range of activities involved in “making” peace, the RPP participants (themselves, peace practitioners using one or more of these approaches and working at one or more of these levels) often said, “It takes many people working at many levels to bring peace. We simply have to assume that, over time, it all adds up.”

However, the evidence gathered by this large group is that, even though many people do, indeed, work at many levels, *it does not all automatically add up to peace!*

Something more than a lot of work, or multi-leveled work, is needed.

As RPP considered this reality, we began to identify which of these approaches (More or Key People) and which of these levels (Individual/Personal or Socio-Political) seem to be more effective than others. Two lessons soon became clear.

1. First, RPP found that peace work that concentrated at the Individual/Personal level, but which never links or translates into action in the Socio-Political level has *no discernible* effect on peace. Such programmes are often good for the people involved. Participants value them and indicate that they learn and benefit from them. But, if the “gains” are individual only and do not cause any change in behavior that affects others, such efforts do not factor into any of the processes found to be essential for ending war or building just and sustainable structures that support peace.

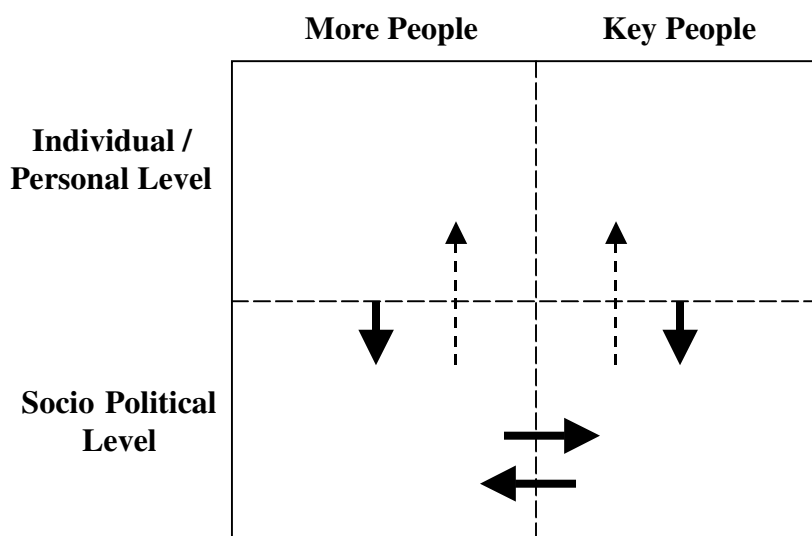
2. Second, RPP found that approaches that concentrate on More People but do nothing to link to or affect Key People—or the strategies to change Key People

that do nothing to include and affect More People—do not add up to effective peace work. There were numerous examples of programmes that had effectively involved Key political leaders in an off-the-record dialogue, for example, in which these individuals had formed lasting friendships across the lines of division. But, when these Key individuals had done nothing to convey their own learning into either the Socio-Political structures and institutions that affected intergroup relations, nor to communicate to the larger population (body politic) their change in order to affect More People’s understanding of new ways of relating, they did not contribute notably to peace. If these changed Key actors tried to sign a peace accord, they found that “the people were not ready” and that they could not abruptly “make peace” if they had not involved their constituencies in the process.

Similarly, there were examples of conflicts where a significant majority of the people indicated that they “had no stomach” for the war. Many would say “This is not our war. It is only being pushed by the warlords who gain economically or politically.” But, even though they felt this way, and openly said so in large numbers, without any conscious, strategic effort to reach and affect their “leaders” (Key People) or to take action in the Socio-Political, public realm, these widespread attitudes of non-ownership of conflict did not translate into change in the conflict.

Figure 2, below, shows these critical findings by arrows that indicate that 1) activities undertaken at the Individual/Personal level must be linked to and/or translated into the Socio-Political level and that 2) activities to engage More People must always link, strategically, to activities to engage Key People (and Key People activities must link strategically to activities to engage More People) if they are to be effective in moving toward Peace Writ Large.

FIGURE 2: Diagram illustrating how peace strategies’ impacts should be transferred to maximize effectiveness.



Finding Number Three: It Is Possible to Assess and Compare the Effectiveness of Different Peace Practice in Pushing toward Peace Writ Large

RPP participants agreed that it is unfair to hold small peace NGOs accountable for achieving Peace Writ Large. Experience shows that governments, “track-one” negotiators and international bodies must be involved in the final achievement of peace agreements that hold.

Nonetheless, they agreed also that there must be a way to know which NGO activities do “add up” toward PWL and which do not make any significant, or discernible, contribution to this goal.

A first step in arriving at a method for assessing effectiveness was to clarify what one needs to know about a conflict context in order to identify what to work on. Through comparing the vast experience included in RPP, participants found that three dimensions of context analysis are critical for effectively focusing peace practice on issues that must be addressed for effectiveness. (RPP also found that it is always better to know more in any conflict context. The following three factors are necessary to context analysis, but are not sufficient. Without these three, grave errors are made and peace practice loses effectiveness. However, all real programming in the field requires additional knowledge of local actors, histories, alliances, failures, etc.)

The first of the three essentials is: What is this conflict NOT about? Too often, RPP found, peace practitioners (both from outside as well as those within their own context) assume that all wars have certain elements in common. For example, many people talk about the “root causes” of war as if these are universal (injustice, poverty, etc.). The evidence is that some, but not all, wars are fought over these issues. (Although all leaders of wars will claim that they are motivated by such factors). It is widely recognized now that some wars are driven by greed and/or personal, political ambition. While poor people fight in most wars, their economic prospects are seldom improved by warfare (except as they rob and pillage in the short run) because conflict destroys many of the factors necessary for economic productivity (physical infrastructure and educational opportunity). By ascertaining what is NOT being fought about, peace practitioners are able to identify those areas where people, from conflicting sides of conflict, share common goals, stay connected to each other in “normal” non-war ways, do not hold grudges, etc. For effectiveness in peace practice, it is important to know what exists on which future peace can and must be built. Without this, many opportunities are lost and existing connectors are weakened over time.

The second of the three essential aspects of context analysis is: What needs to be stopped? RPP found that many peace practitioners are biased toward building the good, rather than stopping the bad. There is an implicit belief among many that if we simply create enough of the good “alternatives,” these will “somehow add up” to overtake the processes driving conflict. Again, the evidence is strong that this does not happen. Wars are driven by interests that gain from their continuation. Without an identification of who gains from war, and how and why, peace practitioners often miss the mark in their

programming. They build good relations among many people, and war continues and continues because others have the power to carry on in spite of public sentiment.

And the third essential aspect of context analysis is: What are the international and/or inter-regional dimensions of this conflict? Virtually all wars involve people and interests beyond the border of the location of the fighting. Other nations have interests in conflict zones and, often, supply weapons or other support for their own reasons. Diasporas frequently play important roles in either exacerbating conflicts in their home countries or, sometimes, in helping solve them. All peace practice need not take place in the location of the war. Much can and should be done in other locations and with “outside” constituencies. Effective peace practice requires identification of these outside factors and implementation of programmatic designs to address them.

With these three aspects of context analysis understood, RPP participants were able to identify specific Criteria of Effectiveness¹ by which to assess, in every context, whether a peace activity is, or is not, effective in making a significant contribution to PWL.

These are:

1. The effort contributes to stopping a key driving factor of the war.
2. The effort contributes to a momentum for peace by causing participants and communities to develop their own peace initiatives in relation to what needs to be stopped, building on continuing areas where people interact in non-war ways, and addressing the regional and international dimensions of the conflict.
3. The effort results in the creation or reform of political institutions to handle grievances in situations where such grievances do, genuinely, drive the conflict. (In some cases, continuing violence feeds additional violence. When this is the case, formation of institutions to allow for non-violent resolution of conflict is also central to reducing current violence and supporting sustainable peace.)
4. The effort prompts people increasingly to resist violence and provocations to violence (possibly, as above, through the creation of institutions for dealing with differences non-violently).
5. The effort results in an increase in people’s security and in their sense of security.
6. The effort connects to regional and/or international dimensions of the conflict, enabling a broader coalition of forces to work together on the issues driving the war and supporting peace.

Criteria 1, 2 and 3 focus specifically on what needs to be stopped, connecting to the context analysis described above.

Criterion 2 points to “ownership” and sustainability of peace activism and an increasing momentum for peace, involving More People (to refer to the matrix above).

¹ The RPP Project identified four criteria that have been changed here for clarification. For the original four, see Confronting War (2002).

Criterion 3 reiterates the centrality of moving beyond the Individual/Personal level into the Socio-Political level. This criterion, however, must be applied in conjunction with the analysis of what the war is NOT about and what needs to be stopped. To reform or build institutions that are unrelated to the actual drivers of any specific conflict would, of course, not be effective.

Criterion 4 again addresses a role for More People but, more importantly, connects their behaviors to the provocations often coming from Key People (such as warlords or spoilers). One way of addressing and including Key People whose influence is to promote and continue war (understood by asking the question of what needs to be stopped) is to help broad numbers of More people to “inoculate” themselves against the provocations offered by these “negative” Key people.

Criterion 5 reflects positive changes both at the actual Socio-Political level, in people’s public lives, and—as people gain a sense of their own security—at the Personal/Individual level as well. Confidence in on-going security is one element of sustainable, just peace.

Criterion 6 highlights the importance of work outside the zone of actual fighting and, implicitly refers, again, to momentum for peace (insider/outsider collaboration) and sustainability (international guarantees for peace agreements).

RPP found that each of the criteria can best be applied in any specific context if three additional questions are considered:

Is the change from this effort fast enough? Peace practice cannot be patient with continued suffering from conflict. Sooner is always better than later in the ending of violence and injustice. One should always ask: is this effort more apt to gain results faster than any other thing we might do or are there other ways we could work that would more likely produce results sooner?

Is the change from this effort likely to be sustained? Short-term gains are often undermined over time in conflicts. Peace practitioners should hold ourselves accountable to standards that look beyond the end of a particular project or programme.

Is the change from the effort big enough? Peace practitioners are too often content with small contributions while conflicts can afflict large numbers of people in vast areas. We should, again, not be content with less than the most we can do. We should always ask: is this effort the single one that we are capable of that is most likely to have the widest possible effect or is there something else we might do that would be more proportional to the actual conflict?

Section III: Relevance of RPP Findings to FriEnt and Networking

The RPP findings recounted above are relevant to individual peace practice agencies as they plan for new activities and, more importantly, as they continue with plans already

underway. These findings, and the four-cell matrix in particular, allow any peace practitioner to assess what he/she is doing. One can “map” where programmes now underway are concentrated and, then, consider the extent to which they do—or do not—have strategic linkages to the other quadrants.

When we find that the things we are now doing focus, for example, on getting many people to know each other personally on the “other side” of a conflict but that we have not built into our programme any process by which the personal change will be manifested in the public, Socio-Political sphere, then we are alerted to the likelihood that our efforts will not make much difference. Or if we find that we are having excellent dialogue among key leaders who, increasingly, are getting to understand and appreciate each other, but (again) we have not developed any strategy by which these changes at the top level are conveyed to the public at large or are translated into political action, then we can be sure that we will not be effective. If we find that our work is building a large momentum for peace among a large population but has not even considered the warlords who are enriching themselves through warfare, then we can know that our efforts will likely not bring peace.

That is, the tracing of the four quadrants and their relationships, coupled with the analysis of what the war is not about, what needs to be stopped and where there are local and international interests to be addressed, suggest a multitude of activities that need to be done at many levels.

But, and this is the key of the findings put together, this composite analysis focuses the why and how of networking and coordinating.

The RPP findings show the importance of strategic linkages among approaches (More and Key) and levels (Individual/Personal and Socio-Political). Networking is a way of making these strategic linkages. No single agency can work in all four quadrants, and at the international, inter-regional levels simultaneously. The point of these findings is *not* that everyone needs to do everything! Rather, the point is that activities in any realm need to be linked, in some conscious planned way that builds the synergism between the levels necessary to stop what needs to be stopped and build on what exists that underlies a potential peace.

Section IV: What Has Not Been Learned and What Can Be Done about It

There is still a great deal to be learned about strategic linkages. RPP was able to see that the linkages described above do matter, but the findings are less conclusive about exactly how such linkages can be planned and realized.

As we looked for examples of successful linkage, the campaign for the outlawing of land mines emerged as instructive. This campaign was carried out at many levels. Individuals were mobilized to express their opinions and to testify to the damage caused by this weapon. Governments were lobbied to sign accords outlawing them. Scientists, politicians, victims, and other “Key People” were enlisted to play roles where they had

particular experience and/or expertise. The momentum of the vast public opinion campaign was channeled into actions to affect governments, laws and protocols. The results are impressive.

This campaign suggests that one, possible, clue to understanding how strategic linkages occur across the four quadrants lies in a simultaneous focus on a single issue. Perhaps too much current peace practice is scattered across too many peace-related issues. Perhaps a common focus at the same time could increase effectiveness on any front.

But, as noted, proof of this is far from complete. Also, there may be many other examples of effective strategic linkages that will provide other lessons and ideas for networkers.

In addition, there is much to be learned still about Key People. The categories of “Key” are many (politicians, warlords, youth, spoilers, diasporas, international bodies, etc., etc.). Is there any way to identify which of these is more or less “key” in any given context? What does experience show about the variety of Key People strategies? Are some more effective than others and, if so, why?

RPP is continuing through 2004 or 2005, to work with agencies in many parts of the world precisely to help illuminate these and other issues. The success of this next phase of learning will depend, as did the previous phase, on the engagement of many experienced people in working together to gather and learn from experience. In the field of peace practice, as much as any other work in the world, theories are insufficient as guides for action. The great body of experience gained by many dedicated individuals and agencies can provide rich evidence from which new directions can be identified. Networking is critical to effective peace practice (as the above Sections show). It is also critical to the continued learning of valid and generalizable lessons in this field of peace practice.