

# **Interpeace Style Programmes for Sustainable Peace.**

## **Recognising commonalities between programmes in different contexts.**

Discussion Paper – 4th draft      KVB, 23 May 2007

### **Purpose of this paper**

Every context has its own history, characteristics and dynamics – and everyone who wants to effect change has to adapt to the specifics of the context. A first exposure to the variety of Interpeace programmes is likely to highlight the differences – between the contexts and between the programmatic strategies, tactics, use of tools etc. Yet there are also many underlying similarities, at two levels:

- While the 'responses' may differ, there are quite a lot of similarities in the strategic and tactical challenges that the various programme teams face.
- There are also some fundamental underlying 'principles' based on a certain 'hypothesis of change' that, together, constitute what we have called an 'Interpeace-style' programme.

This paper seeks to highlight this common underlying 'hypothesis of change' and the common underlying principles.

### **1. Types of Contexts: Dangerous Fault-lines.**

Interpeace originally started out with a focus on 'post-conflict' situations (e.g. Mozambique, Guatemala, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Timor L'este, Indonesia-Aceh, Somaliland, Puntland, Macedonia). However we are also working in situations of active conflict (south-central Somalia, Israel, Palestine), or in situations that are better presented as a consolidation and deepening of democracy (Guatemala today, Peru, Nicaragua, Honduras, Rwanda today...). A situation like the one in Cyprus is often described as a 'frozen conflict'. Rather than using this ultimately not very accurate terminology (post-conflict work is often also preventative to avoid a recurrence of high levels of violence), what these contexts often seem to have in common are fault lines and divisions within societies with relatively few effective bridging and integrating mechanisms. There is then already violent polarization or a serious risk that the divisions slip into violent polarization.

Commonly agreed rules of the game, enough basic trust, and positive attitudes towards, and skills in collaborative problem-solving, are key requirements for political communities to sustain themselves in non-violent ways. In other words, by empowering 'internal' change agents, Interpeace contributes to the creation of better conditions for reaching peace and sustaining it.

In some cases there is no sense of a common 'political community', and the intermediate objective may be to foster dialogue until that is recognized. Alternatively, there may be an overwhelming desire for one or more groups to dissociate themselves from what used to be one political community; while this typically is ultimately a matter of international agreement, an Interpeace style process can help to clarify more clearly the options, the consequences of each, and what could be constructive processes to move forward notwithstanding the difficulties. In other cases there is recognition of being part of one political community but there are no or only weak mechanisms to manage the internal divisions and differences.

## **2. Purpose of an Interpeace-Style Programme.**

The overall purpose of Interpeace-style programmes is to strengthen and support national capacities within 'political communities' to act as effective bridging and integrating mechanisms, so that these political communities can manage the inevitable differences and divisions in constructive and non-violent ways.

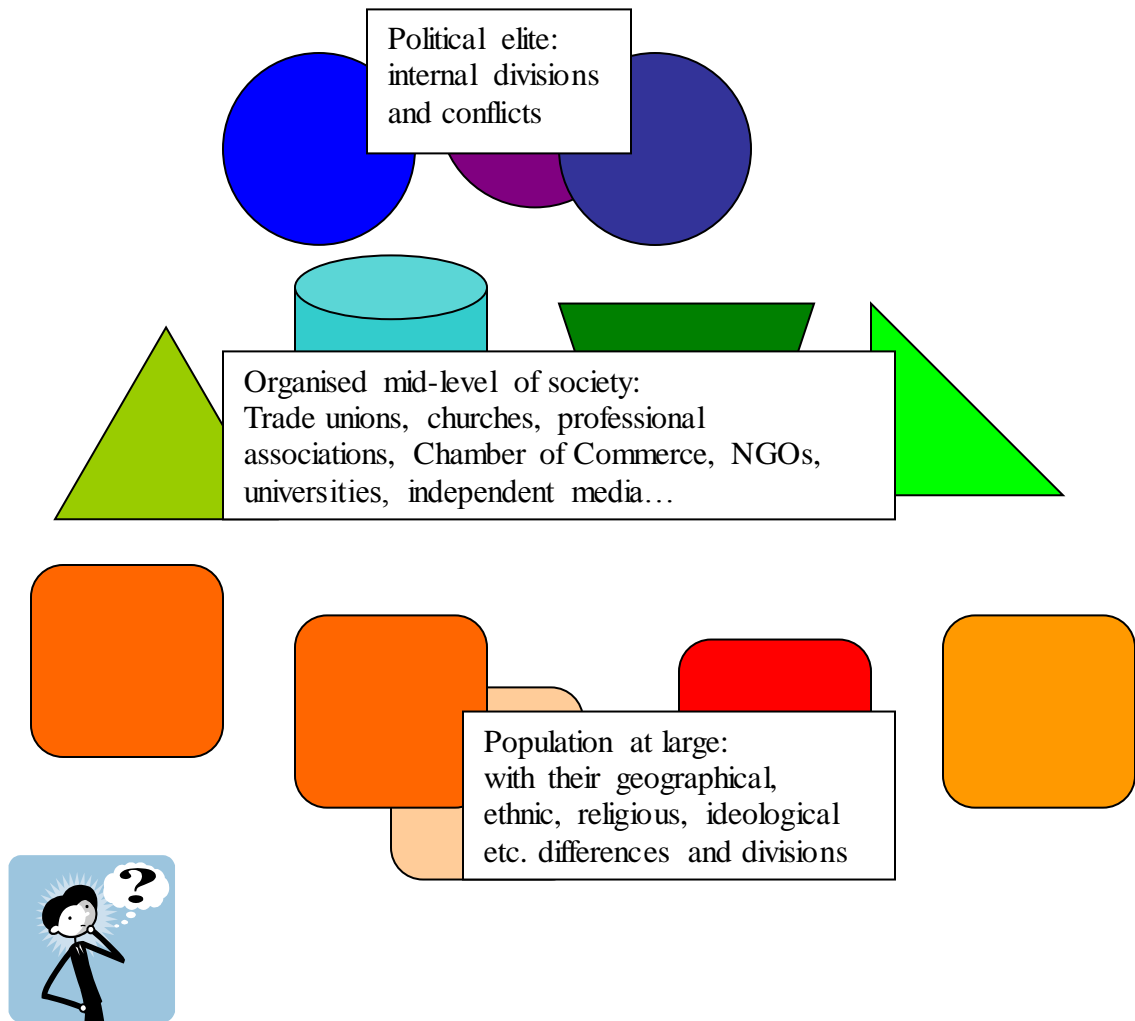
While external actors can sometimes help to reduce levels of violence and provide necessary financial resources to build or rebuild a country and a political community, for peace to be really sustainable, there have to be confident, effective and legitimate local and national capacities to overcome divisions and solve problems collaboratively. Interpeace therefore will always work with one or more national partners. Even where it may have taken the original initiative, its central role is to provide an enabling environment for its partners (and other national capacities) to develop into a real resource for their own society.

## **3. Positioning.**

There is a tendency for international peacebuilding efforts to be categorized in terms of Track 1 (the official, formal, diplomatic process), Track 1.5 (non-state actor support to Track 1 processes), Track 2 (at the level of 'civil society') or Track 3 (at grassroots or community level) interventions or processes.

Interpeace-style programmes do not correspond to such horizontally layered approach. Ultimately a political community needs to have sufficient connections and integrative mechanisms both horizontally and vertically. We see the gaps between the so called three tracks also as a part of the problem. In our programmes we therefore seek to establish or strengthen constructive connections between these levels. We sometimes refer to this as 'reducing the vertical gap'.

Interpeace-style programmes therefore reject the often antagonistic distinction between 'state' and 'civil society'. The programme teams have to position themselves in such a way that they transcend these distinctions and can be a space where the various state-actors, other political forces and organised and unorganized social forces can confidently meet.



Tactically of course we often have to work step by step: depending on our analysis of the dynamics and the sensitivities, and on our strategic planning, in one context we may start more at the elite level while in another context we start more at the grassroots or at the mid-level; in one context we may have to devote significant attention to divisions and conflicts within the horizontal segments (e.g. between divided communities, or among fiercely antagonistic leaders), but ultimately our programmes want to reduce divisions and create bridges both horizontally and vertically (the disconnect e.g. between elites and populations or the distrust of citizens in institutions of the state are 'vertical' divisions that are a contributing factor to violence).

#### **4. Trust, Convergence and Consensus on 'Solutions'.**

We seek to create a climate for socio-political actors from different background and with different interests, to collaborate together to overcome their differences, and find enough common ground to solve problems or at least find a path on which they can jointly move forward to address the problem constructively and non-violently.

That requires building trust, not only in the programme team that creates the space, facilitates the process and the interaction, but also building a certain trust among the different actors. This requires strong interpersonal sensitivities and skills.

Such transformations of the interpersonal relations are often necessary but they are not an end in itself for Interpeace-style programmes. This growing ability for genuine dialogue and for collaborative work has to be put to use to address real challenges and problems in the society. We aim for proposals to resolve the problem or to move forward that genuinely have the 'consensus' of all the participants. In practice we know that full consensus by everybody on everything may not be achievable – but our task is definitely to facilitate enough convergence between the actors to allow compromises.

## **5. Process and Product.**

How a product, be it an agreement, analysis, policy proposal, decision or something else, is achieved is often as important as the quality of the product itself. Societies are not 'technical' constructs and social engineering, be it by external or internal actors, fails in the short or the medium-term. It are processes of 'social concertation' among all the stakeholders that build the legitimacy and buy-in that is critical for the broad acceptance and implementation of any product. Although its importance is well known, process is often overlooked for a variety of reasons: it takes more time and is more costly, it is more risky as the outcomes are less 'certain', or it is deemed unnecessary because one believes to have the power and authority to decide without concertation.

Interpeace believes that 'process' is very important for building sustainable peace and will therefore put a lot of emphasis on it. There are no 'quick fixes'.

Typically our processes are 'informal' (in that sense not 'Track 1'). They are not 'official' and 'not binding'. While this appears to be a major weakness, paradoxically this is in fact a major strength because in formal and binding spaces it is often very difficult if not impossible for actors to move beyond their fixed positions. Although all key players are involved, it helps to 'depoliticize' the discussions, debates and arguments, and also protects the space and the process from the vicissitudes of the formal political processes.

## **6. Inclusiveness.**

A core principle of an Interpeace-style process is inclusiveness: all relevant actors need to be part of the process. Actors can be relevant because they are affected by the issue at stake, or because they have the power to influence what happens and can happen. While professing 'inclusion' is simple on paper, it can be difficult in practice for a variety of reasons: Certain actors may not be prepared to sit around the same table with others; certain actors may want to spoil the process rather than constructively engage with it; if there are asymmetries in power, confidence and/or knowledge about a given topic then these asymmetries may first have to be reduced before different actors are brought together; if one actor-group is internally divided the process may first want to focus on building some convergence within that actor group; the national authorities or international powers may be uneasy and even suspicious about the programme team engaging with certain actors.

Divisions in societies are divisions between people and groups of people. The most visible sign of extreme divisions is of course violence. Divisions grow and are sustained by interests, but also by distrust and an inability to collaborate across divides. One objective of our programmes is to reduce distrust and increase the ability of divided and even antagonistic actors to sit together, listen to each other and work together towards consensual solutions. That requires from the programme team great interpersonal skills and an ability to facilitate sometimes very difficult group dynamics.

### **7. Equidistance-impartiality.**

In order to be able to be such a 'bridge builder' and 'convener', both 'horizontally' and 'vertically' it is essential that the programme team is perceived as 'impartial' or 'equi-distant' (perhaps a better term than 'neutral' which may have connotations of 'passivity') to all major sectors and socio-political forces in the society. In other words, it has to be able to obtain and maintain the trust of all, across divides and antagonisms, and not be perceived as actually being 'closer to X than to Y' and certainly not as 'discreetly fostering the agenda of X or Y'. As situations are dynamic, this requires a constant and active and sometimes proactive positioning and management of perceptions. There will inevitably be periods that the programme team has to engage more intensively with one actor-group or another, which may give rise to concerns about its 'impartiality'. In the medium-term however, and throughout the process, all participating actor-groups should feel that they have been treated fairly and 'even-handedly' and can trust the programme team.

### **8. Gaining Legitimacy**

Interpeace-supported national partners typically need to first gain legitimacy, for the process and for the team that is facilitating the process. This is not only a question of 'legitimacy' in the eyes of the government, but in the eyes of all the socio-political actors. Factors that contribute to gain (and maintain) that legitimacy are: transparency of the process; trustworthiness of the team; equi-distance towards all social and political actors i.e. not aligned or seen as aligned with one particular interest or another; relevance of the process to the real issues and concerns; inclusion of all the concerned actors; sensitivity with which the process is being facilitated; no imposed agenda; growing local ownership of the process and the agenda etc.

### **9. Open Agenda.**

Many 'assistance actors' tend to come with a certain agenda that represents their own interests and competencies and/or what they see as priorities areas. Even though we may have a fair idea of what key issues are, formally we typically set out with an open agenda.

Following broad-based consultations with all sectors of society, we convene a conference where all are represented, and ask them collectively to identify priorities for focused work. Something can be called a priority because it is 'urgent', because it is 'fundamental' or both. Building sustainable peace typically requires work on the deeper issues, but sometimes this cannot happen if simultaneously some 'urgent' issues are not also addressed. The practical outcome of this is that programme teams in different contexts may be working on very different issues (see the

document 'An overview of programmes and thematic areas of work' for illustrations of topics thus concentrated on).

It is quite natural that the 'priority areas' are still defined in a very broad manner. It will then be up to the thematic working group around each topic to narrow the work further down onto what it sees as the critical key issues within each topic.

An 'open agenda' approach is of course challenging: we cannot anticipate what priority areas will be decided upon, nor can we build up 'thematic expertise' within our programme teams. But an open agenda approach is critical to allow real local ownership and a 'mandate' from the spectrum of national/local stakeholders.

#### **10. 'Broadening' Ownership.**

Over time we therefore want to see an evolution in the sense of 'ownership' over the process. Whereas initially Interpeace may de facto have the strongest ownership because it drives the initiation of the process, this becomes quickly shared with the programme team and close (local / national) associates. It is the task of the programme team then to 'broaden the ownership' so that the various and diverse national / local actors begin to feel it is *their* process and begin to take active responsibility for it. In all fairness it should be recognized that there is a broadening and not a total transfer of 'ownership' of the process, because the programme team and Interpeace retain a responsibility to safeguard the integrity of the process – and also to ensure that the process and those financing it (typically international donors) do not go in totally divergent directions.

Interpeace's engagement is also conditional on respect for what it sees as 'core principles' of its approach (reviewed here) because these have shown their relevance and strength in a very diversity range of contexts. But different programme teams will and need to apply and adapt these core principles to their specific contexts – and have the autonomy to develop new practical approaches and applications – as several have done (e.g. the 'public forum' in the Somali programme; local level 'dialogue clubs' in the Rwanda programme).

#### **11. Participatory-action-research.**

Our processes encourage 'dialogue' but more specifically collaborative work towards consensual solutions for problems that the stakeholders themselves have identified as a priority. This is not a 'negotiation': in negotiations 'interests' dominate, and negotiated agreements do not necessarily address the fundamental issues. Additionally, power remains an important factor in the dynamics and outcomes of most negotiations. We want to create another dynamic to try and reach consensual solutions and to that effect introduce 'research' into the process. This 'applied research' dimension is meant to ensure that the discussions are 'informed' and not based on perceptions or imaginations, that critical gaps in the understanding and analysis are filled, and that the debate gets depoliticized. Part of the challenge for the facilitators will also be to move away from the 'divided past' and to focus the minds on how to build a 'common future'.

The objective is for the various thematic 'working groups' to move towards consensual recommendations and proposals for constructive steps towards 'solutions'. If the working groups involve all relevant stakeholders including the decision-makers, if their group dynamics and collaborative work are well facilitated,

and if they can achieve enough convergence and consensus on their proposals, general buy-in will be high and the chances that the proposals will be implemented are also high.

## **12. Roles.**

Key roles of the programme team are:

- Creating and protecting a trusted space where all socio-political actors can and are prepared to meet
- Convening the gatherings of the socio-political actors
- Facilitating the debates, dialogues and collaborative work
- Constant and active networking with the opinion- and decision-makers to ensure their acceptance of the process, their collaboration and their buy-in in its results.

*'Mediation'*: Where there are very volatile situations with outbursts of violence or a high risk of such, some programme teams get actively involved in the *'surface politics'*, to try and defuse tensions and possibly resolve the dispute. Such role is sometimes played by the Somali teams, the Israeli and the Palestinian team. While there can be good arguments to seek to play such role, and while these teams can even be called upon to play such role precisely because they are seen as impartial and trustworthy, this is also a dangerous undertaking as it may compromise precisely their greatest asset: their perceived impartiality and trustworthiness in the eyes of all actors. In other contexts, the programme teams have felt that such role is not appropriate for them and/or that other actors are better placed and more skilled at playing it.

*'Negotiation'*: Directly facilitating negotiations is not compatible with the two previous roles. Interpeace style processes are typically *informal*, while negotiations are formal. Interpeace-style processes are typically *non-binding*, while negotiation outcomes have to be binding. Interpeace style processes are typically meant to take people beyond their positions, to reduce the *'adversarial'* sense and move towards consensus, while negotiations take place between *'adversaries'* arguing from their positions, and allow trade-offs. Interpeace style processes seek to turn debate into dialogue with the help of improved analysis and understanding – negotiations do not necessarily require an objective understanding of the issues.

*'Think tank'*: Over time, a programme team – in its own institutional house-, because of its research experience and research capacities, may come to be called upon also as a think tank. That is more likely to happen in an environment that is institution-poor, i.e. where there are no or not very effective existing think tank resources – or at least not on a given public policy domain. This is not necessarily an objective for an Interpeace style programme, but it is an indication of how that team / institution has become an asset to the society.

*'Technical support / wider capacity building'*: Notably in the Somali regions the Somali partner institutes have played significant other roles, such as providing significant technical support to the Electoral Commission (Somaliland), technical support to parliamentarians (Somaliland, Puntland), capacity building in conflict resolution for women's organizations (south-central Somalia). These again are not typical roles. Taking on such additional roles can make sense in environments where there are few capable institutional actors – but the risk of losing the image of

impartial facilitator or simply of getting distracted into other tasks, needs to be acknowledged and carefully managed.

### **13. Tools.**

There is a wide array of 'tools' that are used in Interpeace-style programmes, most commonly

- Individual interviews
- Group consultations
- Group debates / public debates
- Dialogue facilitation
- Video (see the separate paper on 'Uses of Video')
- Participatory action research with and by 'working groups'
- Conferences and seminars
- Surveys and case studies

While programme teams need to have 'technical mastery' of each of these tools, the real skill is in the strategic and tactical management of a process to transform (at least elements of) the socio-political dynamics (or sometimes prevent it from reversing into a downward spiral). There is definitely a need for '*technical skills*', but even more for '*strategic competence*' in managing the process within a real-life socio-political context with its own characteristics and dynamics.

### **14. Implementation.**

Mention has already been made of the fact that Interpeace-style processes are informal and non-binding. The informality of course is also their limitation – we know and recognize that the government has the prerogative to formally make, and implement, 'public policy'. It is important therefore to involve government-actors in the process and to build legitimacy and support for the process in government circles. While generally we see positive attitudes among the authorities towards the proposals generated through these processes, we recognize that we may want to find ways to further support the authorities to translate the proposals into public policy, and implement them. Different teams are seeking or using different mechanisms to do so.

### **15. Demonstrating Influence and Impact.**

Often in the course of a process, our attention remains mostly focused on navigating it well. Yet it is very important that we can demonstrate that our programmes have influence and impact. In the first place for the stakeholders in our own societies and for ourselves (we want to feel confident that we are making a difference!), only later for the financial donors to the programme.

Not all influence and impacts are quickly 'visible', yet many good processes already show direct and indirect influences and effects while they are still ongoing. Some of these may have been planned, but we know from experience that others were not anticipated. We need to capture these as they happen otherwise they will get lost from memory. But we also need to try and collect 'supporting evidence', to convince us and others that a certain such effect is indeed due to our process, and not to another influence. (see the paper on 'What Types of Impact do our Programmes Produce?')