CHAPTER 17: NGO FACILITATION IN PEACE PROCESSES

Summary
The Aceh peace process is an interesting example of how a non-governmental, track two actor can contribute to the peace process through a close network and collaboration with other track two actors. Aceh also offers an example of the possibilities of strategic collaboration between track two actors, local actors and regional organisations. The paper demonstrates how Aceh can be viewed as a case of thinking peace through a process which can contribute to sustainable peace through transformative facilitation.

NGO facilitation in peace processes
The involvement of Crisis Management Initiative in the Aceh conflict started in the spring of 2004. The contacts intensified in late 2004 and the first round of talks was held in January 2005. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement was signed in mid-August 2005 concluding the process for talks, which the Chairman of CMI, President Martti Ahtisaari, facilitated.

The general aim of the negotiations was to establish a process leading to a peaceful settlement of the Aceh conflict within the framework of autonomy. The CMI led the process. It was not the first time the parties had met. The previous negotiation process to end the conflict, facilitated by the Swiss NGO Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC), started in 1999 and led to a ceasefire (“Humanitarian Pause”) in 2000 and to the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in December 2002. The process broke down in May 2003, and the CMI-led talks of January 2005 were the first to be held since then. The previous efforts contributed to the efforts described in this Chapter.

Readiness of both the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement to negotiate was strengthened by the post-tsunami context. In the negotiations, where the parties committed themselves to seek a permanent and comprehensive solution with dignity for all, issues such as self-government, political participation, economic relations, amnesty, human rights and justice, security arrangements and outside monitoring were debated. The signed Memorandum of Understanding was followed by the Aceh Monitoring Mission, which supported the implementation of the MoU.

The Aceh peace process is an interesting example of how a non-governmental, track two actor can contribute through a close network and collaboration with other track two actors to the peace process. Aceh also offers an interesting example of the possibilities of strategic collaboration between track two actors, local actors and regional organisations.

Role of third party in ending violent conflict
Many believe that a number of measures can be used to affect the course of a conflict and bring the parties to the conflict to some form of political accommodation that will end violence. This approach stresses the moral obligation to intervene in civil conflict, especially when human rights violations are taking place. There are good examples where the active intervention of international actors has helped to end military hostilities, defuse tensions or build grounds for peace. Examples include Namibia, Mozambique, El Salvador and Cambodia.

Mediation is a form of intervention in a conflict. It differs from many other forms of interventions as it is not based on the direct use of force and it does not help any of the parties to win. Its purpose is to bring the conflict to a settlement that is acceptable to both sides and consistent with the third party’s interests. At its best, mediation can help the parties to find solutions, which they might not reach by themselves. Even when it


2. Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) is a non-profit non-governmental organisation registered in Finland. CMI’s core mission is sustainable security through enhanced capacity of the international community in crisis prevention and crisis management. CMI was founded by former President of Finland Martti Ahtisaari in 2000. The author is the Executive Director of CMI.
is successful, mediation can only cut through some layers of dispute and provide means for the parties to live together in spite of disputes. Mediation can neither provide deep reconciliation nor cancel the causes of the conflict.

As numerous factors are at play and influence the course of any conflict, it is easy to argue against an intervention strategy that is directed at a single cause or at alleviating only one set of social or political pressures. Inter-communal conflict contains a large number of constituencies with different demands, interests and belief systems. Intervention should therefore be considered as a coordinated series of concurrent and consecutive strategies directed toward the long-term goal of resolving the conflict. Most conflicts have a life cycle of their own, characterised by various phases and stages, ranging from a period of rising tensions all the way to rapprochement and reconciliation.

From the Aceh talks, it was clear to us at all times that any lasting and comprehensive solution would only be possible through the clear commitment of the parties themselves. They would make the peace, not the mediator, whose task was to create conditions and manage the process.

Towards a multitrack intervention strategy

A successful intervention strategy has to be multi-leveled and needs to encompass the official process of mediation, the possible quasi-official processes promoted by unofficial groups, public peace processes aimed at sustaining dialogue and the various activities of civil society. There are obvious challenges to managing multiparty mediation and the following lengthy process of peacebuilding in a multiparty manner. Management in these circumstances is not simply a matter of establishing a line of command and responsibility. Organising diverse third-party peacemaking entities is much more challenging as all actors are independent beings. The challenge is how to make a coherent whole out of the initiatives by keeping simultaneous interventions and activities of various actors from cancelling each other out. The benefit of this approach can be fully utilised if there is shared analysis of the problem and its solutions among the actors. If there is not, the messages may end up being mixed, resources wasted and the ball dropped.

At its best, a multiparty approach gains entry at different stages, opens new avenues for dialogue, creates leverage, and shares costs and risks. At its best, a multiparty approach can bring about a catalytic and transformative process for peace.

For CMI, right from the start, it was vital to plan the Aceh peace process not only with multilevel, but also with multitrack lenses. We knew our own limits, and the vital importance of the political leverage regional organisations, such as the European Union, and governments could bring to the process, should it succeed. Additionally, for us, it was vital to work as part of a network of experts and brokers, ranging from the Henri Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and Nordic Institute of Asian Studies to the Olof Palme Center, WSP International and beyond. Local actors contributed with information and facilitation on the ground and provided help and support to the negotiations. Through this network, the necessary expertise and engagement could be pulled together.

For us, limiting our own role consciously to the mediation phase during the Aceh peace talks was important. Informing the governmental and regional actors and other NGOs in the early stages of the process allowed them to engage in the process when it was necessary. By ensuring that our own role is limited, we wanted not only to ensure the quality, impartiality and transparency of our own actions, but also that various avenues of dialogue, leverage, which could be brought in by official actors, and the cost sharing would be there. Support by governments and in particular of the European Commission, both politically and financially, made our role possible. The collaborative approach was a must.

Thinking in processes – collaboration towards transformative facilitation

There is a lot of uncertainty about the actual added value and effectiveness of NGOs and civil society actors as such in peacebuilding and peace mediation. It seems that NGOs are able to provide a variety of conflict management roles by providing early warning of impending conflict; by acting as channels of communication; by serving as mediators or facilitators of official or unofficial negotiations; by contributing to the process of reconciliation through grassroots engagements; and by strengthening the civil society in the post-conflict environment to nurture the culture of peace.

NGOs can also, through their experience, contribute to innovative conflict management and resolution strategies. Local NGOs can be instrumental in addressing the escalation of violence and emergence of war. They can mobilise, at best, political will for peace, as well as develop options and strategies for response by strengthening constituencies for peace. They can not only engage in track two dialogues by using their unofficial and low-key
statutes, they can also bring the peacemaking further from reaching a political agreement between the main parties by creating conditions for pragmatic peace at local levels.

There are also limits to the involvement of the NGOs. Sometimes we, in civil society, start processes that are beyond our skills and abilities. We fail to grasp the logic of economy of war, or link efficiently justice and human rights to the logic of conflict. We may also be too small, too isolated or lack the capacity to work with each other. Also, sometimes, the legitimacy of NGOs as actors is questioned, which hampers the involvement.

The fact that civil society organisations can be perceived by many parties to the conflict as powerless may increase their attractiveness to the antagonists: if the attempt to open the dialogue fails, the parties lose little by way of reputation or potential inducements to settle.

The mediator needs to have resources to commit for medium or long-term goals. It needs to be able to reframe the underlying interests and needs of disputants. It needs to create an environment where the settlement can be made, if the parties so decide. The use of timing, deadlines, sequencing, legitimising, disillusioning, persuading and protecting are the tactical tools of any mediator. While many consider NGOs powerless, power and sources of leverage are needed in order to employ these tactics efficiently. This is the art of exercising "soft power". According to Jeffrey Rubin, "referent power" (based on the relationship between the mediator and the parties) and legitimate power (where the parties perceive that the mediator brings legitimacy and authority to the proceedings as well as expert and informational power) can be exercised. The mediator can be perceived as a knowledgeable expert, as well as a skilled communicator between the parties and the external world, if so wished.

In the case of Aceh, CMI was in an interesting position, if we analyse our activities from the point of view of power usage. CMI itself is a civil society organisation, which could use expert and informational power. Our Chairman, President Ahtisaari, clearly through his eminent personality and vast experience, could add referent power to our layers of credibility. CMI could also engage easily with other civil society and research organisations, and has been assisted by President Ahtisaari's ability to address political, governmental constituencies. This 1.5 track provided a successful solution to the Aceh talks.

A particular need for an NGO is the possibility and the ability to build strategic alliances to function, but also, if needed, to “borrow” power to reward and to coerce. Traditionally, the NGOs have acted independently, with little coordination either among themselves or with the governments, military forces or international organisations. All of this is changing. Organisational cultures, differences in mandates, objectives and capabilities may bring barriers to collaboration, but by exercise and learning many of these issues can be worked on and if the political will exists, overcome.

The strength of many NGOs is their lack of an elaborate hierarchical structure, their decentralised and relatively flat authority structures and their flexible approach to management. NGOs are often willing to act in speed when needs arise and can therefore act when presented with a sudden challenge. The downside of this ability to change strategies, shift resources and quickly expand operations is the fact that sometimes NGOs’ actions can appear, or even be, chaotic. The Aceh experience was a learning possibility for CMI as well, when it comes to the planning of the activity and communicating the process to various actors in the network and to the external world. After this experience, I believe, we have better resources to be self-reflective in our work.

I guess that all facilitators in a peace process, in particular, in civil society, dream of being able to contribute transformative facilitation. Facilitation, which would not only bring about the cognitive and decision path which would lead to a conclusion, but to a process which would transform the society little by little over a period of time toward a culture of peace. My belief is that such a process of transformative facilitation, at least in its holistic and comprehensive meaning, cannot be achieved by one actor alone. I would therefore argue for a careful collaboration between various actors committed to engage themselves to the process all the way from identifying the goals for the process, to finding entry points, firm deadlines and building in learning mechanisms.

This would argue for a new way of working together for NGOs, governments, regional and international organisations, where we would think in processes and in building strategic alliances. For me this is the best way to use the triggers and catalyst that are there to ensure a sustainable process.
Aceh is situated on the northern-most tip of Sumatra and is the western-most province of Indonesia. It has a population of around four million and was the site of the first Islamic Sultanate in what is now Indonesia. It has a long tradition of resistance to outside powers and for nearly three decades has been torn by a separatist conflict waged by the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka - GAM) against the Jakarta government rooted in issues over control of resources and cultural and religious issues.

On 15 August 2005, in Helsinki, Finland, representatives of the Indonesian government and the GAM signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aiming to end the conflict in Aceh. The immediate background to the peace talks when they began in January 2005 did not seem propitious. There had already been two failed peace accords in recent years. In 2000, a “Humanitarian Pause” had generated only a temporary halt to the violence, while a December 2002 “Cessation of Hostilities Agreement” (COHA) ended when the Indonesian government declared a “military emergency” in Aceh in May 2003 and announced that it wanted to destroy GAM once and for all.

The next two years, however, saw important changes on both sides that paved the way for a return to talks. The government’s military offensive took a major toll on GAM and gave rise to battle fatigue among its supporters. Some GAM leaders began to feel that their existing strategy of armed struggle for independence had reached an impasse. Meanwhile, a presidential election in late 2004 handed control of the Indonesian government to two men, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vice President Jusuf Kalla, who were personally committed to negotiations as a means of ending conflict. Early steps toward reopening talks occurred in late 2004 and were accelerated by the impact of the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami of December 26, which caused great loss of life in Aceh and opened the province to a substantial international humanitarian presence.

After five rounds of bargaining in 2005, the two sides eventually agreed on the Helsinki MoU. This agreement has a much greater chance of success than the previous peace accords. Unlike the previous accords, the MoU includes the outline of a comprehensive peace settlement. It deals not only with security matters but also sets out in broad terms a new political relationship between Aceh and the Indonesian state to be embodied in a new Law on the Governing of Aceh. The MoU also includes provisions concerning political participation, human rights, the rule of law, and economic matters as well as measures for the disarmament of GAM and its members’ reintegration into society. Also distinguishing it from previous accords are much more robust monitoring provisions, with an Aceh Monitoring Mission sponsored by the European Union and participating countries from ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations).