

“Are we doing the right thing - and are we doing it right?”

I. Ethics in Peace Practice.

Broad consultations yielded the following observations about the ethics that should guide peacebuilders and underpin their actions:

- Peace practice is honest
- Peace practice values life
- Peace practice is reliable
- Peace practice respects differences
- Peace practice eschews violence and intimidation
- Peace practice commits to justice as essential to peace
- Peace practice honours that peace belongs to the people who make it. (Anderson & Olson 2003:29-37)

Peacebuilding therefore cannot be just a ‘professional’ skill but must be a deeply personal experience.

Peace practice involves

- Being prepared to go outside your personal comfort zone: You have to be prepared to engage with people whose views and life styles and actions may be very different from yours and even of a nature that you deeply disagree with. Are you prepared to adapt enough to be able to initiate and sustain a meaningful engagement?
- Taking risks: There are risks for the peacebuilder, but also for those in groups or sectors of society that engage with the peacebuilders;
- Humility:

“Recognizing this at the personal level means that peace practitioners must maintain humility about their roles. In particular, foreign peace practitioners have no right to advocate what is “best” for people who experience war and its aftermath. One activist who works in many countries put it this way: “Very few outsiders are respectful enough of the people they are working with. You need to feel humility. You can leave, but the local people must stay.” Another aspect of personal humility involves “working quietly

and not broadcasting achievements.” Honoring the local ownership of peace entails giving credit for any success to people who live in the situation.” (Anderson & Olson 2003:33)

II. The Peacebuilding Industry.

A slowly growing problem is that ‘peacebuilding’, like ‘humanitarian’ and ‘early recovery’ aid work, are becoming an ‘industry’ but one that, unlike the private sector, is not very susceptible to the ‘choice’ and ‘influence’ of the ‘consumer’ or ‘client’. Nor is it very accountable to the people on whose behalf it claims to work.

“Incorporated into the new aid discourse of results-based management, and the subject of innumerable manuals and frameworks, ‘peacebuilding’ has lost any sense of context, and of the people in that context.(...) ‘Peacebuilding’ has become a lifestyle for a small community of global ‘cosmopolitans’ who travel from aid city to aid city. (...)... ‘peacebuilding’ will not even remain a buzzword. It will become another ‘airport’ on the global development travel routes – ‘This is the final call for the Airlines flight from “gender” to “peacebuilding”, with a quick stop-over in ‘participation’”. (Denskus 2007: 656/661)

Kathmandu in 2006: donor amnesia in ‘Aidland’

“In Nepal, after five decades of ‘development’ and ten years of violent conflict between the army and Maoist insurgents/rebels/terrorists, Kathmandu has remained in a ‘bubble of innocence’, as one donor representative described the state of mind in the city that seems remarkably far away from ‘underdevelopment’ or ‘war’. When the people formed a democracy movement in April 2006 and demonstrated on the streets of the capital, few conflict advisers and inhabitants of the bubble were able to predict the fundamental political changes that were about to happen. But they quickly shared their relief that the promising signs of the Maoist party joining ‘mainstream politics’, a forthcoming constituent assembly, and parliamentary elections will put Nepal back on the ‘road to development’.

Some donors were relieved that they could now continue with work they had planned before the violent conflict, and that the small Nepali elite in Kathmandu seems to be willing to address the challenges, ‘root causes’ that have kept Nepal in ‘poverty’ for the past 55 years.

In this fast moving environment, people in Kathmandu did not or could not spend time to reflect on the conflict that has cost around 13,000 lives so far, but started to look forward to the bright ‘post-conflict’ future of the country.

INGOs, individuals, and aid specialists from other post-war ‘non-places’ quickly arrived in Kathmandu to share their approaches, always stressing that they needed to be tailored to Nepal, of course. ‘Arms management’, ‘security sector reforms’, ‘transitional justice’ – the Fall 2006 collection arrived in Kathmandu straight from the peacebuilding catwalks in Europe without looking outside the ‘bubble’, or searching for stories in the remote villages of Nepal, asking local people about the future direction of their country.”

Denskus 2007 p. 659

References:

Anderson, M. & L. Olson 2003: *Confronting War. Critical lessons for peace practitioners.* Cambridge MA, Collaborative for Development Action pp. 30-36

Denskus, T. 2007: 'Peacebuilding does not build peace' in *Development in Practice*, 17:4, 656 - 662