

Supporting Civil Society in Building Peace in Nepal

May 2006

Preface to the Report

This report is divided into two sections. The first section is a brief overview of the new context in Nepal resulting from the People's Movement II of April 2006. The second section comprises the substantive part of the report and offers concrete recommendations for how donors can collaborate to support civil society in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. In the current context, greater focus has been given to recommendations based on collaborative donor support to civil society outside of Kathmandu.

Context Update

Jana Andolan (II), or the People's Movement II, is a home-grown revolution that has not only changed the power dynamics of Nepali politics, but has also opened new avenues and opportunities for the nation to grow economically and politically.¹ King Gyanendra's proclamation of 28th April 2006 recognised the roadmap of the Seven Political Party Alliance (SPA) and restored the House of Representatives. These concessions are likely to culminate in the formation of a constituent assembly in the months to come. The royal acceptance of the SPA's roadmap means that Nepalis will now carve out their own destiny, with the 1990 constitution working as an interim arrangement. The latest proclamation rendered redundant the royal offer of premiership made to the parties on 25th April, reflecting the swiftness with which events overtook the calculations of many, including important foreign powers, which had initially backed the first royal move by urging the SPA to accept the offer.

The SPA seems to have understood the aspirations of common Nepalis, or is rather compelled to act positively because of people's immense pressure and are, therefore, moving towards peace talks with the Maoists and the constituent assembly election. Conversely, the Maoists have dubbed the proclamation as a deception and conspiracy to protect the monarchy and describe the SPA's acceptance of it as a big historical mistake.² They have, however, agreed to a continued cease-fire and a strings-free constituent assembly (CA). To push for the CA, the Maoists have decided keep the peace impetus going until this goal is achieved. Most importantly, there seems to be an attempt from the Maoists to capitalise on the momentum of the People's Movement II.³ The Maoists continue to stage mass meetings across the nation with the 'red-corner, terrorist tag', remaining intact. Through these actions, the Maoists appear to be trying to demonstrate the following:

- Show their accountability towards their cadre thus proving that their ten years of struggle has not been in vain;
- That their agenda to have a constituent assembly is likely to materialise and that it has been worth fighting for;
- To consistently show the masses in general that it is the Maoists who are looking forward to a peaceful political settlement (provided their minimum demands are met); and
- To prove to the masses that constant pressure should be applied to the SPA; thus illustrating the fact that the Maoists should act in a watchdog capacity over the political parties.

The Royal Proclamation of 28th April demonstrated a commitment to protect multiparty democracy, permanent peace, national unity and prosperity, but was less explicit on the future role of the monarchy. This may be interpreted to mean that the King may have

¹ *Jana Andolan* II was led by Seven Party Alliance (SPA) calls for a joint movement demanding that the King hand back power to the people. Informally supported by a more radical Maoist agenda to remove the monarchy from constitutional affairs, the 18-day movement resulted in hundreds of thousands of Nepalis demonstrating in the streets. This culminated with an announcement by the King to reinstate the dissolved House of Representatives on 24th April 2006.

² From the interview with Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai on the BBC Nepali Service, 25th April 2006.

³ Gautam; the Kantipur; 30th April 2006.

decided to leave the settlement of the issue of monarchy to the people themselves.⁴ This speculation is reinforced by the Chief of the Army staff, Pyar Jung Thapa, who has indicated a willingness to incorporate the Maoist militia into the Royal Nepali Army (RNA).⁵ The RNA seems to understand that their future lies in disassociating themselves from the monarchy. Acceptance for this broad-based integration by the RNA is an example that suggests that they intend to serve democracy and they will not stand by and watch Nepali sovereignty being compromised.⁶ However, recent lootings within the Kathmandu valley and at the high roads linking outside to the valley have been viewed as an attempt to fuel chaos and anarchy. These incidents have been largely blamed on the police and army personnel, allegations that suggest that the King's administration and his hawks are still trying to distort the situation in their favour.⁷

One outcome of the People's Movement II is that the issue of a constituent assembly that has been mooted for the past 55 years is now firmly on the agenda. This changed context has brought opportunities that could change the face of Nepali politics and the economy. However, the evident strength of 'people's power' could also pose a threat which could potentially bring civil war and further societal disintegration. The recent assault on government vehicles in Kathmandu on 16th May indicates that the momentum of 'people's power' needs to be channelled and addressed through constructive media. People's aspirations and confidence, if not channelled towards positive nation-building and peace, is likely to grow as a negative force. Given the deep distrust among the major domestic political players, the road ahead is far from smooth.

There are important questions that are yet to be debated and decided. What kind of political system should Nepal have? Should it be a federal or centralised state? How to ensure adequate representation for all of the country's ethno-linguistic groups and castes? Should there be affirmative action in favour of the most disadvantaged communities? What should the prerogatives of parliament be in overseeing the country's foreign relations? How can the economic and social rights of citizens be guaranteed? What kind of army does Nepal need? Restoration of democracy was certainly the rallying cry of the people's movement, but the driving force of the uprising was hope of the resolution of the Maoists insurgency. Peacebuilding, therefore, has to be the primary agenda of the transitional parliament that was reconvened on 28th April 2006.⁸

At the end of the day, the constitution and system that emerge from this process will stand or fall depending on how inclusive they are. Nepal's *janajatis*—the Magars, Tamangs, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus, Sherpas and others—as well as the Dalits and Madhesis would like a system which would grant them a greater say in governance. Nepal's peasants would like an end to the feudal system. Nepal's women, who played an equal part in the struggle against the King, are looking for meaningful empowerment. And there are others—the disabled, for example, or religious minorities like Muslims and Buddhists—who want their specific rights enshrined.

⁴ The Himalayan Times; New Dawn; April 26, 2006.

⁵ Based upon Pyar Jung's Thapa interview with the CNN on 25th of April.

⁶ Marks, T. A. (May 8, 2006). Hope is not a method. *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 4(43).

⁷ The Annapurna Post; 7th April, 2006

⁸ Lal, C.K. (date). Can't fail this time. *Nepali Times*, p. 2.

As the product of one of the greatest mass upsurges South Asia has witnessed for decades, Nepal's constituent assembly will be uniquely placed to create a genuinely inclusive democratic system. The challenge will be to create mechanisms that empower all Nepali citizenry rather than the economic and social elites. One can only hope that the SPA, the Maoists, and all others who eventually win representation in the constituent assembly will rise to the occasion. If they do not, Nepal will eventually sink back into violence and instability. But if they do, the modern, inclusive and empowering democratic system they create could be a model for the rest of South Asia.⁹

Currently the political situation in Nepal is extremely fluid. If allowed to drift, it may pave the way for a counter-revolution or a situation where the main arbiters of Nepal's fate are once again the two forces with guns—a monarchy backed by the Royal Nepal Army and the Maoists. The people of Nepal may then be left high and dry once again. They did not fight against King Gyanendra's executive monarchy alone. By their unequivocal rejection of violence and search for permanent peace, they were also acting to check the Maoists. If they were vehemently against executive monarchy, they were not fighting for a communist republic either. This mediating force of democratic politics—the people of Nepal—may stand in danger of getting marginalised. As it is, the new government seems to have no clear strategic vision. The political scene is hazy and full of confusion about what should be done and how. Our paper gives some ideas of how the international community could potentially support a stronger civil society that will act as both a guide and a balance in this unfolding process.

In this changed context, civil society organisations that have been playing an important role can still have a role of paramount importance in guiding the nation through a peaceful transition through peacebuilding efforts. Civil society organisations should play a catalyst role in creating the conditions for the talks with the Maoists; making them join the government; helping the interim government in exploring the modalities of the process to the constituent assembly; mediating in the management of the arms of both the army and the Maoists; and finally monitoring the election of the constituent assembly. Once this crucial role in putting the system in place is achieved, civil society organisations in Nepal can turn their attention and activities to sustaining and enriching the system through its participation and mediating role between the state and society. As one leading civil society figure observed recently, 'Civil society in Nepal must be encouraged to work with the Government, not just against it'.¹⁰

⁹ S. Varadarajan, First Glimpse of a New Dawn in Nepal, 7th May 2006, The Hindu, Sunday Magazine.

¹⁰ Alert interview with Dr. Khagendra Bhattarai, Former Chairperson of Tribhuvan University, Teachers Association and Member of Board of Advisors, FFP.

I. Introduction and Background

A legitimate, representative and capacitated civil society is essential for effective state-building and a condition for sustainable peace in Nepal. Donor support to civil society in the Nepali conflict context can be conceptualised in a number of ways. Strategies can broadly focus at the national, district and community levels, or on urban and rural constituencies. Similarly, a temporal distinction can be made between short-, medium- and long-term strategies. These categorisations can crudely obscure the fact that support to civil society can operate simultaneously at a number of different administrative, geographic and temporal levels. However, for the purposes of clarity, this paper has mainly divided recommendations along community, district and national distinctions.

The paper does, nonetheless, call for donors to prioritise their support to civil society outside Kathmandu. This is based on the rationale that after the ‘swift’ political transition at the national level, support to longer-term strategies that support mediation and conflict resolution at the district and grass-roots level would best support conditions for sustainable peace. This focus is also encouraged in response to recent perceptions that the international community has an ‘excessive Kathmandu focus’.¹¹ This is not to say that the donors do not have an important role to play at a national level, but that this has become more complicated and sensitive owing to a sense of disappointment at (some of) the international community’s reaction to the King’s first proclamation on 21st April 2006. In today’s context, rather than lending moral and political support to senior civil society leaders in Kathmandu, rebuilding trust is an important area where donors could and should collaborate to combat a certain negativity felt by civil society representatives such as Devendra Raj Pandey:

‘There is no reason any more, if there ever was, to feel that our international friends and partners are wiser and smarter than us just because they have money to distribute. The concerned donors and diplomats . . . exposed their lack of knowledge and sensitivity about this country, its history and its people and their aspirations so thoroughly that they have little right to expect us to listen to their misplaced messages that will no doubt come our way again and again.’¹²

Finally, the recommendations proposed in this paper are based on the search for a **consensus** approach to donor support of civil society. There is a delicate balance between finding practical mechanisms through which aid donors can support civil society in a truly collaborative manner and the limitations of consensus-based approaches which can result in the lowest common-denominator strategies.¹³

¹¹ International Crisis Group (10 May 2006). ‘Nepal: From people’s power to peace? *Asia Report*, No. 115, p.12.

¹² International Crisis Group (10 May 2006). ‘Nepal: From people’s power to peace? *Asia Report*, No. 115, p.12.

¹³ In the conflict context in Sri Lanka, donors have increasingly recognised the need to find consensus in order to collaborate effectively in helping to find tangible peace. Whilst coordination amongst donors is recognised as important, the search for common ground can result in less successful ‘lowest common-denominator strategies’. (Rampton & Welikala, ‘The Politics of the South: Sri Lanka Strategic Conflict Assessment 2005,’ Netherlands MFA, SIDA, DFID, Asia Foundation, World Bank). This problem is mitigated to a certain extent amongst the Re-Thinking Aid group in Nepal, but it is recognised that prioritising collaboration in strategising will necessarily result in a level of generality.

II. Recommendations for Collaboration to Support Civil Society at the District and Community Levels

There are already a variety of individual donor engagements supporting civil society in conflict transformation initiatives at district and community levels. For example, CIDA's Local Development Facility programme (LDF) has directly addressed local-level conflict resolution and peace at regional, district and community levels.¹⁴ Similarly, SDC has worked closely with NGOs, user groups (in particular FECOFUN) and associations to facilitate governance and peacebuilding programmes at the district and village levels.¹⁵ Furthermore, donors have collaborated as an entity to support the UNDP's SPDI project and dissemination of the Basic Operating Guidelines. Therefore, it is not the intention of the following recommendations to specifically re-visit these existing individual and collaborative modes of support, but instead focus on thematic areas where donors could play a **collaborative** role in supporting civil society in the transitional peacebuilding context in Nepal today. The five key recommendations for donor collaboration to support civil society at the district and community levels are as follows:

- Recommendation 1: Local-level conflict resolution and conflict transformation: Mobilisation and support of existing user group structures
- Recommendation 2: Donor collaboration to support civil societal participation in aid accountability for peacebuilding in the districts
- Recommendation 3: Donor collaboration to build 'structural blocks of unity' in civil society
- Recommendation 4: Donor collaboration to support women in peacebuilding
- Recommendation 5: Building consensus and community participation around peacebuilding issues

Recommendation 1: Local-level conflict resolution and conflict transformation: Mobilisation and support of existing user group structures

User groups are existing structures that could be optimised to help mediate and transform local conflict situations into this new phase.¹⁶ **Why** and **how**, therefore, could donors collaborate to support user groups and what limitations might exist in pursuing such a strategy?

A) *Why support user groups?*

- User groups are organisations that bring people together around shared goals/interests, for example, forest users and water users. This *raison d'être* is

¹⁴ Canadian Cooperation Office (July 2005). *Annual Report 2004–2005*. Canadian Cooperation Office: Nepal.

¹⁵ FECOFUN is the Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal, established in 1995 to strengthen the role of forest users in relevant policy-making and to support their rights through national level advocacy.

¹⁶ Should communities support the process, many of these structures would need to be resurrected as many will no longer function due to the impact of the conflict.

significant because it implies an underlying cohesiveness of purpose amongst the group that contrasts to an increasingly fragmented Nepali civil society at large. Therefore, pre-supposing a mutual interest and cooperation amongst the members, there is a potential to galvanise this social capital to coalesce around the goal of conflict transformation at a micro/community level.

- In the case of well established user groups such as FECOFUN, the network spans community, district and national administrative levels and serves to link the grass roots with the national level. Also, especially in the case of FECOFUN, organisational policy is a bottom-up process. This organisational structure has a number of advantages. Firstly, lessons learned from peace activities at the community level can be communicated up to higher levels and local people's voices can be represented in national debates. This can help to overcome the problem of dislocation between the grass-roots and higher levels of administration. Secondly, if decisions are made at the community level, they are more likely to be appropriate to specific community needs rather than being initiatives thrust upon communities from a higher and more removed level. This may help to give the community a greater sense of ownership.
- Some of the user groups have highly democratic structures ensuring regular free and fair elections for management positions and inclusive policies for women and minorities. Therefore, they can help, albeit incrementally, to embed notions of wider democratic principles in society.
- User groups are established to enable corporate bargaining and negotiation to ensure community rights and access. This makes them ideally placed to take on mediating and conflict resolution roles within the community.
- Ideally, donors would want to reach and support as many people as possible to help transform years of conflict into sustainable peace. One of the benefits of supporting user groups in this process is that a large proportion of civil society is already participating in one or more user groups. For example, FECOFUN has 5 million members.

B) How donors could collaborate to support user groups in peacebuilding

- The first step must be to select which groups donors feel comfortable working with (the risks of this selection strategy are highlighted in the following section). Alternatively, a more interventionist approach would be to coalesce and work with a network or alliance of multiple user groups who are specifically focused on the role that user groups can play in local-level peacebuilding and conflict transformation. This 'network approach' would likely be more beneficial to the overall cohesiveness of donor support because it would represent a new entity rather than supporting a group that is already working closely with one donor.
- In terms of tangible support, donors could facilitate training on community-level conflict resolution and peacebuilding, starting from small pilot training schemes and rolling out across the districts with training of trainers programmes to facilitate a wider reach for the training. For this strategy it would be more

appropriate for donors to work through a network of user groups who would be able to give a broader and inclusive idea of the issues their members are facing in regard to local-level conflict transformation and peacebuilding, which would shape the nature of the training programme. The principle being that the groups *themselves* highlight areas where training is most needed in the field of local peacebuilding.

- In addition to providing support for training, donors could help facilitate vertical and horizontal linkages between different user groups at varying administrative levels and in different regions by enabling members to take part in inter-regional meetings where they can identify their own needs in conflict transformation, share experiences and at a later stage, share their experiences on the progress of conflict training and identify further areas of need.

C) Limitations in the strategy of mobilisation and support of existing user group structures in peacebuilding

- One major concern is that while it is a good idea to work through/support existing structures, it is imperative not to set an agenda or ‘hijack’ the *modus operandi* of existing organisations. Donors could do more harm than good if they were to co-opt these groups into larger networks or create new agendas for them as the groups may lose their validity and utility in the local community. Clearly, there is a very delicate balance to be found between supporting and maintaining the indigenous integrity of any civil society organisation, such as user groups.
- Establishing training programmes in mediation, facilitating a network of groups to collaborate on this, and generate space for interaction between different administrative levels and regions will involve financial costs and goes beyond the remit of political or moral support. A joint donor fund to facilitate this strategy would involve finding further funding and a significant amount of extra organisational and management involvement from donors.
- If only one user group is selected for support, then donors may risk being seen to be taking a ‘choosing a champion approach’ which may be divisive and negate a ‘do no harm’ policy. Selecting one group may also generate an overlap between the work of one donor already supporting this group, and negate the chance for the donors to fully collaborate on the strategy.
- If donors decide to develop a strategy to support training and space for inter-regional dialogue for user groups in mediation and peacebuilding, further research and understanding must be achieved in the following areas:
 - Explore what projects are already existing to address this issue (for example CCO’s LDF programme), to ensure that work is neither duplicated or unnecessarily confused at the community level;
 - Determine an appropriate criteria for selecting groups that donors wish to work with (e.g., internal democratic structures, inclusion policy, experience in negotiation, mediation, peacebuilding issues); and
 - Determine if there already is a network of user groups that have coalesced around peacebuilding issues. If not, what would the shape and dynamics of such a network look like?

Recommendation 2: Donor collaboration to support civil societal participation in aid accountability for peacebuilding in the districts

In the transitional context of Nepal, there is a strong case for donors to collaborate to develop a mechanism where civil society has space to articulate its needs in regard to what support it will require to help build a sustainable peace. Such a mechanism may also help to address what the ICG publicly perceives as the international community's 'excessive Kathmandu focus'. It should also be recognised that civil societal participation in aid accountability for peacebuilding cannot just be limited to conflict transformation and peacebuilding *per se* but would address aid in general which can (inadvertently) generate or mitigate local-level conflict.

A. *Why support civil societal participation in aid accountability for peacebuilding in the districts?*

In the changed (and fluid) context of Nepal, it is likely that aid and development programmes may increase outside the Kathmandu Valley, in particular those related to peacebuilding. Therefore, it is crucial that donors get a far greater input from local communities in regard to their needs before money begins to flow downwards to the districts and villages.

- Potentially other vital stakeholders could also be involved in this process, such as political parties, officials and the Maoists.
- It is important to recognise and give moral support to leading civil society figures outside Kathmandu, especially in the urban areas of the Terai. Actually consulting with civil society and involving them directly in aid policies is one logical step further to providing civil society with moral support and, as mentioned at the start of this paper, helping to address an identified need for donors to re-build and sustain trust again with civil society figures.
- Facilitating aid accountability at lower administrative levels must be seen as a larger process linking community input and concerns to the national level. If implemented correctly, it can be the foundation upon which a national forum on development and peace can operate (this is elaborated upon in more detail in Section III).

B. *How can donors collaborate to support civil societal participation in aid accountability for peacebuilding in the districts?*

- Since the inception of the *Basic Operating Guidelines* in 2003, donors have had some success in collaborating to disseminate the BOG tenets in the areas of their development programmes. As a preliminary step towards developing a mechanism to include civil society (and other stakeholders) in aid accountability, a new set of guidelines should be decided on collaboratively amongst the donors which will govern how they intend to involve stakeholders in this process to ensure that the process is inclusive, useful, a viable mechanism to ensure that voices can impact on higher decision-making levels, and that the process will not serve as a divisive focal point in local communities. These guidelines should be disseminated and publicised widely before a process of consultations begins so that people understand the purpose and relevance of such a strategy.
- Capturing the voice of ordinary citizens in the process of aid accountability, particularly in the sphere of peacebuilding, is a difficult task. The logical strategy would be to initiate large forums that include representatives of associations, NGOs, user groups, political parties, officials and Maoist representatives. However, such a strategy may result in the inclusion of only the ‘gate-keepers’ of civil society. It may be possible, although certainly more ambitious, to develop smaller roundtable discussions involving a wider variety of individuals who are not necessarily active members of any organised groups, for example young professionals, students, community elders, etc. The objective of this would be to feed these smaller roundtable discussions into larger fora.

C. Limitations to the strategy of supporting civil societal participation in aid accountability for peacebuilding in the districts

- Initiating a regionally inclusive strategy for consulting civil society in the sphere of aid and peacebuilding requires extensive effort and collaboration on the part of donors to engage in the process. It would demand facilitation at both the community levels and above in order to provide meaningful linkages between all levels.
- Choosing facilitators for the proposed fora could be complex considering that they must reflect the neutrality of the donors in the process, while being able to facilitate meaningful debate on aid accountability.
- Very careful attention would need to be paid to developing a set of guidelines to initiate and manage this process to ensure that civil society (and other stakeholders) understands that they are **partners** in the process and that donors are committed to work with civil society and respond to their concerns in aid and peacebuilding assistance. A societal-donor partnership needs to be stressed from the outset.
- Donors must avoid being perceived as hijacking civil society's indigenous initiatives to develop mechanisms to help re-orient aid and peacebuilding assistance in Nepal.

Recommendation 3: Donor collaboration to support business alliances for peace

The objective of helping business associations, such as professional associations and trade unions, might be to enhance their ability to monitor the state and strengthen their corporate bargaining power on a range of interests, including peacebuilding. This might follow the model of the National Business Initiative (NBI), a group of business people working in support of peace, however, such support could relate to business associations in both the formal and informal economic sectors. In theory, both professional associations and trade unions could benefit from greater organisational capacity, nonetheless, those with far-reaching horizontal and vertical networks would be better placed to reach the grass-roots and national level throughout Nepal. The role of the donors in helping to coalesce business alliances must only be in providing organisational support; under no circumstances should they try to set an agenda for these organisations and risk discrediting the integrity and support within communities for these organisations.

A. Why help build business alliances for peace?

- The rationale may be driven by some key principles:
 - To provide organisational support to associations/unions in order to help them routinise internal democratic practises (regular elections, inclusion policies) and thus help to embed democratic governance in society at large. Through this process it is also hoped that a younger generation of leaders can emerge.

- To develop greater cohesiveness within associations/unions to help them bargain more effectively for both sectoral interests and peacebuilding issues leading to a sustainable peace in Nepal.
- In common with the larger user groups, associations and trade unions encompass vast sectors of Nepali society and thus donor support for these groups can potentially reach a large percentage of Nepali people both inside and outside the Kathmandu Valley.
- Another commonality with user groups is that professional associations and trade unions bring people together around shared goals/interests. This *raison d'être* is significant because it implies an underlying cohesiveness of purpose amongst the group that contrasts to an increasingly fragmented Nepali civil society at large. Therefore, pre-supposing a mutual interest and cooperation amongst the members, there is a potential for them to collaborate on contributing to wider issues of peacebuilding.

B. How can donors collaborate to help build business alliances for peace?

The logical steps for this strategy would be to explore and follow some of the lessons from GTZ's work with the Chambers of Commerce and Nepali Business Initiative (NBI):

- Structural rather than open funding (e.g., for teambuilding and negotiation training) may be a useful model for supporting similar organisations such as the teacher, medical and lecturer unions.
- Maintaining a donor low profile may support the independence and integrity of such organisations.
- Supporting diversity of membership in this context may enable business alliances to attract many different trade/commerce groups under one umbrella, despite holding eclectic political/government affiliations. This unity and outreach may better enable such alliances to negotiate with some effect with and between the major conflict/peace stakeholders.
- This recommendation must first be based on consultations with associations and/or unions to determine if they could benefit from organisational assistance and assess what their needs are specifically. An understanding needs to be reached that the emphasis remains firmly on organisational development rather than simple financial grants.

C. Limitations to helping to build business alliances in civil society

- There is a very real danger of compromising the integrity and national support of these organisations if they are perceived to be led or working too closely with the international community.
- Trade unions in Nepal are affiliated with political parties and donors run the risk of being perceived as partisan in their choice of which unions to support. This

- could also include a risk of being perceived to be supporting the more elite members and/or business interests among civil society.
- The notion of embedding democratic norms in wider society is a very long-term process and the success/failure of such a strategy is difficult to evaluate.
 - Appropriate criteria for selecting organisations that donors wish to work with must mitigate the real risk of the donors acting as a divisive factor amongst civil society groups.

Recommendation 4: Donor collaboration to support women in peacebuilding

The integral role of women in facilitating peace processes and mediating in post-conflict situations has been recognised in other countries, such as Cambodia.¹⁷ However, there appears limited understanding of the role that women are playing and could be playing in peacebuilding in Nepal, which warrants further research. Concern has been expressed among local stakeholders (and donors alike) that women's groups tend to be Kathmandu-focused and elitist which serves to heighten the dislocation between national-level and local-level initiatives. PACT (*Samjhauta*) is a national NGO that works to link women's community credit cooperatives to a greater role in local conflict mediation. The PACT model has two well defined objectives that could be of relevance to possible modes of donor support to women in peacebuilding:¹⁸

1. At the national level, women's groups and NGOs have failed to come together vocally around the issues of women's participation in meaningful dialogue. However, community- and district-level women's groups have been very active in initiating dialogue and mediation facilitation. PACT seeks to develop better linkages between community women's groups and those at the national level in order to bring successful local initiatives to the attention of a national forum. In adjunct to this, PACT intends that this process will result in an inclusive and high profile national consortium of women who can make corporate demands for women's involvement in the peacebuilding process and demand greater female participation in the interim government.
2. PACT tries to strengthen women's economic power (through supporting a 'village bank' idea) and link economic empowerment with training to empower women in the role of conflict mediators.

A. How can donors collaborate to support women in peacebuilding?

- Donors can choose to support an existing implementing agency that is working to promote local- and national-level capacity of women in peacebuilding, such as PACT. This may also help overcome the problem of duplicating existing initiatives that seek to strengthen women's role in peacebuilding.

¹⁷ For example see Hicks, N. (2004). *Cambodian Women Report: The situation of women in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: LICADO. See also International Alert's work with women peace builders in conflict-affected countries (including Nepal) around the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (http://www.international-alert.org/our_work/themes/gender.php?page=work&ext=set)

¹⁸ Based on an interview with PACT staff.

- Donors can still support the role of women by less direct means, i.e., by prioritising the involvement of women in user groups (Recommendation 1) or by supporting associations and unions that are characterised by high female membership (Recommendation 3).

B. Limitations to the strategy of supporting the role of women in peacebuilding

- The role of women in peacebuilding in Nepal is quite amorphous and little understood. Since there are no obvious existing structures for donors to work through, it would be very difficult and unwise to develop a new structure for this purpose.
- Supporting an existing implementing body such as PACT would require *ad hoc* funding.

Recommendation 5: Building consensus and community participation around peacebuilding issues

Donors could play an important role in helping to build consensus in wider civil society around peacebuilding issues. In a civil society that is fractured along a number of fault lines, building consensus over the smallest issue is a difficult task and, in common with a number of other recommendations forwarded in this report, donor support does risk being perceived as overly interventionist. There are some obvious processes that donors could develop to help build consensus, such as providing neutral meeting spaces for civil societal actors to enter into dialogue and building consensus around basic operating guidelines. However, these initiatives tend to involve the participation of established civil society organisations rather than a broader range of civil societal actors.

In recent times it has been recognised that donors working in conflict-affected countries need to expand their funding to civil society and look more widely to support a broader range of actors.¹⁹ However, the real challenge is finding constructive ways to support civil society in peacebuilding without developing entirely new and to a certain extent, artificial structures, and also involving people who are not members of established organisations or associations. One model that has involved community participation and consensus-building is the development of People's Forums (PF) in the Karnali region. PFs were originally intended to mobilise community members for the construction of the Karnali Highway. The Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC) acted as the 'political entrepreneurs' to galvanise all the community stakeholders and local people to coalesce around this shared objective and find consensus on continuing construction in the conflict situation.²⁰ Community consensus was also sought in the selection of candidature for positions within the PFs. Five PFs have been established along the road construction sites of Karnali and they have rapidly expanded to take on extra functions within the community and at times, act as a community organisation to fill a vacuum in the absence of elected government officials and public services. To some extent,

¹⁹ Rampton & Welikala, 'The Politics of the South: Sri Lanka Strategic Conflict Assessment 2005,' Netherlands MFA, SIDA, DFID, Asia Foundation, World Bank, p.7.

²⁰ Using a political-economy approach, Samuel Popkin argues that people will not work together in their shared interest unless an outside force—the 'political entrepreneurs'—act to galvanise people into groups of shared interest. (Popkin, S. (1979). *The Rational Peasant*, California: University of California).

PFs have been at the interface between the state, Maoist authorities and society and they have been the natural mediators amongst these contesting forces. To support this role they have received training, *inter alia*, on conflict transformation, peacebuilding and good governance.

In the current cease-fire and pre-peace talks situation, community conflict resolution is highly apposite to building a sustainable peace throughout Nepal. Community organisations that people have some sense of local ownership of would be the natural bodies to help mediate and participate in conflict resolution. Rather than setting up new structures, donors could collaborate to improve the ability of PFs (or similar existing local structures) to help conflict transformation in the new context and assist in building PF's organisational capacity.

A. How can donors collaborate to support peacebuilding through community participation in PFs?

- Interviews with Karnali-based staff involved in PF development have highlighted that PFs have been successful in ongoing mediation between conflict stakeholders. They also highlight the role that PFs are playing in acting as representatives of local people in the absence of locally elected representatives. However, PFs still do not have adequate skills and knowledge to act as peoples' representatives and negotiating bodies without harming others or indirectly contributing to further conflict. Therefore, there is an opportunity for donors to help build the capacity of PFs in this sphere.
- Karnali-based staff also felt that PFs could benefit greatly from better organisational structures, i.e., democratic election procedures and accountability procedures. Providing such organisational support would operate in similar principles to those proposed in Recommendation 3.
- The PF-KIRDARC model is not without flaws and problems. The initial step for donors interested in following this strategy would be to assess how much local ownership people feel of PFs and how responsive the PFs are in practice to local community needs.

III. Supporting Civil Society at a National Level

As mentioned previously in this report, due to the changed political context in Nepal, there is a greater need to support civil society outside Kathmandu in a cease-fire and pre-peace talks scenario. However, this is not to say that there is not the potential for different modes of support to civil society at the national level. Indeed some of the previous recommendations for support at the district and community levels are contingent on developing better linkages at the national level too. One option could be for donors to support a Civil Society Peace Forum; however, would such a concept be suitable for the changed circumstances of Nepal today?

A. Will a peace forum be appropriate in the current context?

A peace forum that truly represents all voices in Nepal could be one model that helps draw eclectic civil society organisations together on one single platform and generate a cohesive voice for peace and development. It could also serve as a watchdog body to oversee the political process to ensure that it is responsive to public sentiment—a model based on the theory of ‘the power of the powerless’, propounded by Vaclav Havel. With functioning vertical and horizontal networks, it can help to routinise democratic practices and accountability and enhance social capital among the diverse communities that comprise Nepal.

A peace forum is a mechanism with its own complexities. Some of the greatest challenges such an approach might face would be ensuring genuine inclusion, giving space to new voices, and building consensus amongst diverse groups whilst remaining non-partisan. The other important factor could be the context itself. The unaccountable political society that was involved in rampant corruption in the past is now showing some degree of accountability towards the people of Nepal. This has been largely possible because of the changed context; people’s pressure will need to be channelled effectively and positively to be able to bring peaceful social change and not challenge the government with violence.

The success of people’s power has been attributed to Nepali civil society, which in the past, was partially blamed to have been ineffective due to its inherent problems of being partisan and dependent on donors. Nepali civil society has finally come of age and fulfilled its duties by reinstalling democracy in Nepal for the second time.²¹ Thus, the chance for an effective civil societal forum working for long-term peace and social cohesion has a better chance to succeed now than in previous years.

²¹ Bhatta, C.D. (2006, 14 May) The power of the powerless. *The Rising Nepal*.

IV. Concluding Comments

There is one leitmotif that underscores all the recommendations in this report: donors need to be prepared to take measured risks in pursuing strategies that support civil societal organisations in peacebuilding. A legitimate, representative and capacitated civil society is essential for effective state-building and a condition for sustainable peace. It is only through taking risks that donors can hope to regain the initiative and momentum that many feel have been lacking in recent months. The effectiveness of any of these strategies will also necessarily lie in strong collaboration and cooperation amongst the donor group in implementing a programme to support civil society. If we consider a weakness of civil society to be its fractured nature which inhibits finding consensus and concerted action, then it is worth reflecting on these principles among donors themselves.

The two secondary themes that lie at the heart of the proposed recommendations represent two concerns that should be addressed. The first theme is the need to solidify and recapture the trust of civil society which can then lead to meaningful dialogue. This need is most obvious at the national level where senior society figures have been openly critical of the international community. It is also equally relevant in the districts. Partnership rather than intervention is implicit in donor relations, but it also needs to be explicit too.

The second theme is the need for donors, particularly in the changed context, to look more closely at strategies for supporting conflict resolution and building a sustainable peace at the district and community levels. There are opportunities to assist in training, opening space for dialogue and helping in organisational development for a variety of communities, but the challenge is finding meaningful and effective ways to link the local levels to the national level.