Peace building: a conceptual framework

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Peace building: a conceptual framework

An interdisciplinary legal and social work framework for peace building is presented. Inequality and its eradication are identified as linking factors transforming conflict into coexistence. Peace building is determined to entail participation in the struggle for social justice. Three conditions are identified as central to the peace building process. The first necessitates the establishment of inclusive, autonomous communities, each free to express religious, cultural and national aspirations and identity. The second requires the recognition of the legitimacy of each community to assert rights and claims without denying those of the other. This premise supports the view of the individual in relation and notes that coexistence can only be advanced through the building of mutual relationships. Finally, peace building requires recognition of human rights as a tool to promote relationships both within and between societies.

Introduction

This article will begin to develop an interdisciplinary conceptual and practice framework for peace building applicable to ethnic, racial and social conflict in the post-cold-war world. Peace building is a relatively new field (Bertram, 1995). As such, there are few, if any models that have conceptualized what peace building might actually entail. The distinction between a number of peace-related concepts, defined by Boutris-Ghali (1992), is helpful in beginning to define the parameters of peace building.

Preventative diplomacy seeks to resolve disputes before violence breaks out; peacemaking and peacekeeping are required to halt conflicts and preserve peace once it is obtained. If successful, they strengthen the opportunity for post-conflict peace building, which can prevent the recurrence of violence among nations and peoples (pp. 11–12).

Peace building refers to those conditions that will enhance the transition from a state of conflict to coexistence and thus contribute to sustainable peace. To begin to understand what this might necessitate, it is useful to structure the two seemingly dichotomous concepts, conflict and coexistence, as complementary ideas on a continuum. Arranging contradictory concepts in such a way lends to the formation of new perspectives. It helps to identify attributes common to the two conditions that might have gone unnoticed previously. Defining commonalities is useful in overcoming the divisions that tend to make the transition from conflict to peace seem like an unattainable ideal. Framing the two as interrelated as opposed to dichotomous concepts may not render them less complex. It will, however, have certain advantages that are pertinent to the articulation of a peace-building agenda.

First, constructing the two as complementary conditions contributes to a sense of hope. As the interrelationship between the two conditions is clarified, the distance between conflict and peace appears less insurmountable. Hope motivates. In the transition from a state of conflict to one of coexistence, motivation is a crucial element in mastering the many obstacles along the way. Second, focusing on the aspects that the two conditions have in common summons a new balance between conflicting parties. As each begins the transition from conflict to peace, both intra-communal and inter-communal barriers become evident. Universal issues emanate. Universal issues can form an agenda for partnership and exchange as each community seeks to generate and advance solutions. “Combating” joint problems creates a motif that can transcend difference. Third, the search for solutions to universal problems serves to reinvest the power that sustained conflict in a struggle for communal growth and well-being. The success of the struggle requires communal effort and participation. As such, it creates opportunities for new players to take part in the development of their own future. Lastly, such a continuum invites the application...
of existing tools, knowledge, and skills. This contributes to the manageability of the transition itself, providing structure to a potentially chaotic process.

Both conflict and peace express human aspirations. Peace building begins by identifying the human aspirations that are at the root of both conflict and peace. Economic despair, social injustice, and political oppression have been defined by Boutris-Ghali (1992) as the deepest causes of conflict. Conflict erupts and is sustained within a context that promotes discriminatory policies amongst diverse ethnic, racial, social, and religious identity groups. Inequality and injustice reinforce competition and opposition between diverse identity groups by creating conditions that prohibit the realization of basic human needs for all people and by reinforcing a sense of relative deprivation (Burton, 1990; Gurr, 1970). This premise advances the notion that “competition results as much from being in the same environment as from being in relationships with each other” (Horowitz, 1985: 142).

Inequality and injustice are experienced not only in the realm of material resources and opportunities. Individual and group exclusion from participation in decision-making processes affecting one’s life similarly fosters feelings of disparity and inequity, threatening the plausibility of sustainable peace (Suu Kyi, 1995). Participation in decision-making processes provides opportunities to secure conditions and entitlements promoting growth and development. It also provides one with a sense of control over one’s destiny. Participation implies legitimacy. It reinforces recognition of one’s worth and dignity. It strengthens a sense of belonging and relationship within a community, often larger than one’s own particular identity group.

Three themes that may serve to bridge the transition from conflict to coexistence emerge. First, conflict is waged when policies of inequality and injustice prevent human well-being, growth, and development. Second, participation in the transition from the endurance of discriminatory conditions to advocacy for social change creates a shared destiny and is empowering. Third, preservation of a communal identity is paramount to peace building efforts. If we accept these basic tenets, then peace building entails the struggle to eradicate social, economic, and political policies and procedures that promote conditions of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, discrimination, and fewer opportunities to ensure human growth and development. Similarly, peace building entails a struggle to ensure that groups that have been traditionally marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes become recognized partners in defining the future development of their communities and society. Peace building is based on the premise that the very same struggle that guides conflict can be transformed into a positive force for social change – with two crucial differences. First, law, protecting all in the struggle for justice, must govern the peace building process. Second, unlike conflict that seeks to wipe out whole communities to ensure justice for one’s own, peace building must lead to relationships and coexistence between communities. Peace building can thus be defined as a process that entails the creation of autonomous and interdependent communities that work for the realization of justice and equality for all people through active civil participation and community building. This process and policy can lead to a relationship of coexistence between conflicting ethnic, racial, social, and religious identity groups.

Two disciplines emerge as integral to a peace building framework: social work and law (Torczyner, 2000). Social work is concerned with the development of human potential and the conditions that will enhance human growth. Relationship is at the core of social work practice. Relationship is the medium through which individuals and groups are empowered to access both internal and external resources affecting human growth and development. Inter-group work, mediation, conflict resolution, empowerment-based practice, community building, and group-community problem-solving efforts form the foundations of professional practice, the goal being the promotion of social justice and the enhancement of individual and communal well-being. It is in the context of relationships, and particularly community, that the rule of law is given life and meaning.

Law provides the necessary structure to govern and protect relationships. It outlines rights and obligations between individuals, groups, and the state. Law articulates the expectations, patterns, mores, and duties implicit in relationship, and which are essential for individual and communal welfare. Legal principles that inform human action can advocate for just and peaceful relationships. It is law that structures the conditions for the support of growth and development.

Both social work and law aim to enhance human welfare. The pursuit of equality, justice, and the realization of human development are the raison d’être of each of the professions (Dominelli, 1997; Kendall, 1978; Brieland & Lemmon, 1977). Both are concerned with issues of diversity. Both embrace the values of self-determination, autonomy, and mutual inter-dependence and are keenly aware of the role of rights and obligations in the interactions between individuals, groups, and government (Minow, 1990; Bateman, 1995). Peace building requires interdisciplinary practice that will on the one hand promote relationships and institutions that strengthen human development and growth, and on the other will provide...
the necessary structure to govern and protect. When combined, social work and law, specifically community building which promotes civil participation, and universal human rights law, which addresses issues of individual and group rights, equality, justice, and basic human needs, form the interdisciplinary practice for peace building (Torczyner, 2000). The application of human rights law and community building strategies form the foundations of peace building. Transforming human suffering to human growth and development is the goal.

This article explores the ideas set forth thus far. It is divided into four sections. The first elaborates on various interrelated conceptual perspectives on conflict and peace that will lend credence to the peace-building agenda that has been set forth. The second and third sections will move from an analysis of conflict and peace to the identification of the tools and processes of peace building. In the second section the role of human rights and in particular social rights as an instrument to empower the promotion and protection of core human needs will be articulated. The relationship between a human rights approach and peace building will also be defined. The third section will articulate the role of participation in the promotion of social rights, community development, and civil society in advancing a peace-building agenda. The last section will defend the interdisciplinary framework for peace building and draw conclusions.

Injustice, conflict, and peace building

Recognition

Peace building is a process that transpires in the transition from conflict to coexistence. The signing of a peace declaration or treaty initiates a process of change. Peace treaties summon up individual and communal hopes and desires for a better future, improved welfare, and well-being. At the same time, declarations generate anxiety and fear as new roles and relationships replacing the old have yet to be interjected, experienced, and applied. Transition signifies a passage from one stage or place to another and is characterized by a sense of movement, development, and evolution, as well as by hesitation, resistance, and fear. Transition bears the potential for growth and opportunity. On the other hand, the passage from the familiar to the unfamiliar is not always paved with improved life chances. Whether hailed or feared, transition entails struggle.

As is the case in any process of conflict resolution, there will be those who will look upon a peace agreement with favor, and those who will oppose it. In either case what peace agreements are intended to achieve is formal recognition of the other. Peace treaties create a context to express mutual recognition of the rights of each nation and people to assert its own (national) identity. Recognition signifies inclusion for those who have been previously excluded. It is an expression of legitimacy. Recognition creates an opportunity to transform dichotomous relationships characterized by dehumanization, into a reality that recognizes multiple truths about each party to the conflict. It validates and legalizes the right of each to define its identity, needs, beliefs, history, and meaning systems, rather than having them defined by the other.

The Webster (1988) dictionary defines the term recognition or to recognize in two ways that are pertinent to a conceptual model for peace building. The first definition of recognition is “... one entitled to be heard” (p. 984). Entitlement indicates the right to benefits, claims or conditions that are specified by law. In fact, recognition sets into place a dynamic process of defining one’s “formal status with which legal consequences are associated” (Reisman & Suzuki, 1976: 406). “Recognition is regarded as an invitation to enter into political relations” (Bot, 1968: 63). It entails explicit inclusion in decision-making forums where policies affecting one’s life or the life of one’s identity group is determined. As such, policies and procedures favoring particular identity groups over others must be reshaped to formalize the status of the other as equal. Recognition initiates a process of social change as concepts of “participation, group myth, community structures, authority, control patterns, and procedures for the use of values” (Reisman & Suzuki, 1976: 414) are reevaluated and reconstructed to facilitate new relationships. Recognition in the context of peace building implies that injustices and dis-entitlements that have governed conflictual relationships of the past must be transformed to policies that promote justice.

To recognize is also defined as “to perceive to be something or someone previously known” (Webster, 1988: 984). This definition suggests that one is only able to know the other through the understanding of self. This seems to indicate that the transition from conflict to coexistence is not only a process that transpires between formerly conflicting parties. It similarly entails a process of self-identification and exploration. This is perhaps a precursor for the inter-group empathy that peace building necessitates.

The two definitions of recognition, when combined, form a third definition. Recognition involves the process of both being heard and hearing about the parallel historical disenfranchises and contemporary circumstances faced by each of the parties to the conflict in a manner that does not disqualify the experience or legitimacy of the other. In fact, sharing one’s narrative of injustices within a context of mutual
recognition allows for broader analysis of the roots of disentitlement. In identifying personal woes as shared public issues, an agenda for the alleviation of universal injustices is delineated as the core content of peace building.

Injustice, or the “violation of right or of the rights of another” (Webster, 1988: 623), denies access to the power or privilege of entitlements. Two conceptual perspectives illustrate the relationship between injustice and the root causes of conflict. The first, developed by Gurr (1967, 1970), foresees relative deprivation as the motive for violence. The second, a human needs perspective (Burton, 1990), envisions threat to basic human needs as the foundation for conflict. Both advocate for structural change to prevent conflict and promote peaceful relations. Combining the two allows one to understand not only the core content of peace building, but also the process crucial to its success. Together, the two become synonymous with the definition of “positive peace” (Reardon, 1988; Van Soest, 1994), lending to the implementation of peace building strategies.

Relative deprivation

Relative deprivation is defined as

Actors’ perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their environment’s value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are justifiably entitled. The referents of value capabilities are to be found largely in the social and physical environment: they are conditions that determine people’s chances for getting or keeping the values they legitimately expect to attain (Gurr, 1967: 3).

Relative deprivation emerges from a perceived discrepancy between expectations and actuality (Gurr, 1970). Perceived discrepancies may be attributed solely to changes in expectation levels. However, they may be a function of comparison with one’s past condition, an abstract goal or desire, ideals voiced by a leader or particular identity group, as well as an outcome of abrupt change in political or economic spheres (Gurr, 1967). The concept of relative deprivation links expected legitimate entitlements and conditions with an ability to attain and/or maintain a particular set of values. Societal apparatuses that ensure entitlements and opportunities for growth and development reflect members’ value expectations. The inability to guarantee universal conditions fosters inequalities and cultivates a sense of injustice, advancing the notion of relative deprivation. Gurr (1970) articulates the centrality of values as a derivation of basic human needs. Based upon the work of Maslow (1943), Lasswell and Kaplan (1950), and Runciman (1966), Gurr (1970) defines a value typology composed of welfare, power, and interpersonal components:

Welfare values are those that contribute directly to physical well-being and self-realization. They include the physical goods of life – food, shelter, health services, and physical comforts – and the development and use of physical and mental abilities . . . Power values are those that determine the extent to which men can influence the actions of others and avoid unwanted interference by others in their own actions . . . Interpersonal values are the psychological satisfactions we seek in non-authoritative interaction with other individuals and groups (pp. 25–26).

Within this typology, welfare values are referred to as “economic and self-actualization values” (Gurr, 1970: 25). Welfare values and self-actualization are presented as reciprocal in nature in that the advancement of each can be instrumental in the attainment of the other. They emphasize that provision of the physical goods of life not only ensures basic survival, but also development that goes much beyond. Satisfying these needs is crucial to reducing a sense of relative deprivation. The second set of values, power values, include “the desire to participate in collective decision-making – to vote, to take part in political competition, to become a member of the political elite . . . self-determination and security” (Gurr, 1970: 25–26). Power values merit inclusion in decision-making processes that shape one’s future. Inclusion ensures the ability to advocate for the policies and procedures that will secure conditions for growth and development. The third and last set of values, interpersonal values, focuses on the importance of social interaction. Social roles created through membership in family, community, and organizations enable one to construct a sense of self and group recognition. Within these relationships one formulates beliefs and understandings of society and the laws and norms that govern societal interactions. Denying the recognition of a collective community advances sentiments of relative deprivation. Promoting welfare, power, and interpersonal values satisfies basic universal human needs. These are expressed in conditions that promote physical security, development and growth, opportunities to participate in defining one’s future, occupying social roles, and belonging to a recognized community. These appear to be crucial ingredients to a context that promotes justice and supports coexistence. Horowitz (1985) cites a complementary concept, “relative group worth” (p. 186), as central to intergroup conflict. According to Horowitz (1985) “the equal treatment of individuals is the touchstone by which deviations from it are measured” (p. 89). Equal
treatment lends to feelings of legitimacy, individual and collective worth, a sense of pride in one’s identity, inclusion, and belonging. To feel and be regarded as worthy are fundamental human needs. Protecting a collective identity is thus rudimentary to coexistence. This message is echoed in the work of Kymlicka (1989):

Liberals should be concerned with the fate of cultural structures, not because they have some moral status of their own, but it’s only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value (p. 165).

Horowitz (1985) contends that it is through collective social recognition that identity groups are able to achieve collective self-esteem leading to a sense of worth. The political system renders the primary channel to attain social recognition. Political affirmation means “identification with the polity” (Horowitz, 1985: 185). Inclusion in and identification with the polity advances “claims to group legitimacy [and] provide[s] alternative ways of measuring worth” (Horowitz, 1985: 186). Promoting a context to structure what one is rightfully entitled to and accessibility to these entitlements create recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of each and every human being. Identity groups that are unable to access the political system are likely to be excluded from commensurate policies and treatment, provoking feelings of illegitimacy. Gurr and Harff (1994) add credence to this claim. They report that “nearly 80 percent of the politicized ethnic groups identified in 1990 lived with the consequences of historic or contemporary economic discrimination . . . or political discrimination . . . or both” (p. 6). According to their study “most [groups] are poor and are politically underrepresented compared with the majority groups in their societies. In many cases these inequalities are perpetuated by policies and practices that violate widely recognized standards of human rights” (Gurr & Harff, 1994: 6).

Relative group worth and relative group legitimacy expressed through political inclusion and exclusion thus join to form what Horowitz (1985) terms the “politics of entitlement” (p. 186). The transformation of the politics of entitlement to policies that ensure universal individual and communal growth and development through the promotion of economic, social, political, and cultural rights form the contents of a peace-building agenda. When advanced and enhanced through active civil participation, and governed by laws and norms that fully recognize each of its members, they improve possibilities for peace. Their pivotal affinity with coexistence is similarly reflected in the human needs perspective.

Human needs perspective

A simple definition of conflict found in the Webster (1988) dictionary initiates an inquiry into a human needs dimension of conflict. “Competitive or opposing action of incompatibles; . . . struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes . . .” (p. 276). Conflict can be understood as the outcome of seemingly competing needs, drives, wishes, and/or forces perceived to be incompatible. Amongst groups in conflict, competing needs perceived to be incompatible lead to mutual opposition of the other rather than to the examination of common structural conditions that shape the context for competing needs and claims. Competition invariably involves resources being contended for in order to satisfy needs, power being among the most acute of these resources. Power facilitates the accumulation of political control and influence. Political control and influence ensure the development and growth of particular individuals and communities by facilitating access to status, resources, benefits, rights, decision-making processes regarding welfare, and more. At the same time, it has the ability to marginalize. Marginalization and exclusion nurture and reinforce group identity. Threat to the promotion of human growth and development of identity groups through acts of marginalization heighten the potential for competition and conflict.

Growth, development, and the preservation of one’s identity are basic universal human needs. Human needs theory contends that:

there are certain ontological and genetic needs that will be pursued and that socialization processes, if not compatible with such human needs, far from socializing, will lead to frustrations, and to disturbed and anti-social personal and group behaviors. Individuals cannot be socialized into behaviors that destroy their identity and other need goals and, therefore, must react against social environments that do this (Burton, 1990: 33).

Threat to basic human needs, then, can provide the incentive for protracted conflict as individuals and groups strive to preserve and protect their identities. An array of basic human needs has been defined in the literature. Among them, a need for response or reciprocity, distributive justice, security, stimulation, meaning in life, recognition, control of environment, autonomy, identity, dignity, a need for bonding and valued relationships, development, participation, and belonging (Sites, 1973; Burton, 1990; Marris, 1996; Galtung, 1980; Mallman, 1980; Azar, 1986). These needs must be attended to if intractable conflict is to be avoided or resolved. While their expression may differ from one identity group to another, their
significance is universal and cannot be compromised. The task then becomes the translation of these needs into policies and procedures that both recognize and preserve them, while at the same time ensuring the validation of the needs and rights of the other. These needs are not dependent upon economic resources alone, but rather upon the will of nations and peoples to ensure policies and relationships that facilitate inclusion, universality, and reciprocity.

The concept of “need” has been used by political authorities to promote and justify policies imposed on people from above. Needs interpretation is politicized (Fraser, 1987), lending to the sentiment that needs are arbitrary and their satisfaction a matter of benevolence. Proponents of the basic-needs approach contend that political commitment to basic needs must focus on the methods by which needs are defined and satisfied. Needs can only be relevantly addressed when their definition and the means by which they are met “so empowers poor people that they become agents in creating a more just society” (Wisner, 1988: 30). The basic needs approach requires that inequality be transformed not only through redistribution of wealth and assets, but also through the restructuring of power and the creation of valued relationships with the wider society. This entails political mobilization of the poor and other marginalized groups so as to satisfy needs for recognition, self-determination, autonomy, security, participation, national and cultural identity, and more (Streeten, 1981). Advancing justice through processes that attend to basic human needs is synonymous with coexistence and positive peace.

Positive peace

To coexist is defined as “to live in peace with each other especially as a matter of policy” (Webster, 1988: 256). We may turn our inquiry to the concept of positive peace to gain an understanding as to the type of policy required to ensure a state of coexistence. The concept of positive peace has been articulated in the literature as the promotion of human dignity allowing people to reach their full potential and experience “authentic human development” (McMorrow, 1994: 48). Various additional definitions of the concept of positive peace also address issues of human growth and development. Bess (1993) cites the Italian activist, Dolci, who foresaw the operationalization of genuine peace through the eradication of “hunger, poverty, ignorance, exploitation, unemployment, and all manner of structural obstacles to the fruition of life.” (p. 182). Quinney (1995) states that positive peace, defined by Barash (1991) as “a condition of society in which exploitation is minimized or eliminated altogether, and in which there is neither overt violence nor the more subtle phenomenon of structural violence” (p. 8), can only exist “when the sources of crime – including poverty, inequality, racism, and alienation – are not present. Positive peace requires social justice” (Quinney, 1995: 155). Reardon (1988) refers to positive peace as the building of a new reality realized through social justice, economic equity, ecological balance, and political participation. Lastly, “Peace as a ‘positive’ concept . . . contends that violence is present whenever people are being influenced in such a way that they are not being allowed to reach their full potential” (Van Soest, 1994: 1810).

Together, the concepts of relative deprivation, human needs, and positive peace highlight three interrelated motifs often ignored as conflict escalates:

1) Humanity and universal human well-being must be the focus of all of our efforts to build peace. This necessitates the application of a universal framework to structure and protect all human relationships.

2) Autonomous communities who recognize their own self-worth and whose worth is recognized and appreciated by others can create reciprocal and interdependent relationships that are vital for peace building.

3) Participation in processes that promote justice is central to the labor of peace building.

Building peace – from concept to action

To advance coexistence from concept to praxis, two essential themes would need to be addressed in the peace-building process. First, social justice can be realized in part through the advancement of human rights that promote human growth and development. Second, human needs may be actualized in part through active civil participation in decision-making processes that affect one’s life and in creating solutions to common social injustices. Together the two serve to structure relationships. The application of these themes, the advancement of human rights and civil participation in promoting justice, can build strong communities and form the foundation for peace building (Torczyner, 2000). In the post-cold-war world where nationalism has become a powerful political force that questions nation and state ownership (Horowitz, 1985; Pettman, 1996), the promotion of civil participation, human rights, community development, and social justice can serve as guidelines to mediate competing claims. Their role in fostering the very foundations for the sustainability of coexistence will now be explored.
International human rights law, social rights, and peace building

Oliver Wendell Holmes said that law must be responsive to “the felt necessities of the times” (Perkins, 1981: 5). Law must respond to human needs by simultaneously ensuring that people have opportunities to aspire to them and at the same time by defining limitations so that neither the individual, the collective, nor the state can aspire to them at the expense of others. Law, then, not only responds to the necessities of the time but also provides structure to human relationships. To be relevant to both human needs and relationships, law must “identify with those aspirations and convictions that are the most fundamental articles of belief, to which peoples hold with the greatest tenacity, which peoples demand as their right because they believe them to be right” (Perkins, 1981: 139).

Human rights law serves to uphold principles of human dignity, equality, and liberty for all human beings (Chapman, 1996). Freedman (1999) suggests that “human rights are strategically valuable because they express, in the broadest terms, basic values of human dignity and social justice that have historical contemporary roots in cultures throughout the world . . . those values do not dictate a particular lifestyle, or identity, or way of being in the world. Rather, they affirm the fundamental value of human agency: the nature of human beings as effective social actors” (p. 243). It is that universal affirmation that has the potential to transcend the differences that often serve to sustain conflict. Written in the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War II, the United Nations Charter, which became the basis for international human rights law, transformed the human needs of the time to concepts of universal human rights, expressing “universal moral aspirations and claims” (Chapman, 1996: 12). The Declaration of Human Rights and the Covenant that followed (widely known as the Bill of Human Rights) address two crucial points. First, as a universal framework, human rights law advances the principle of equality as it redresses the imbalance between society’s privileged and marginalized members. Human rights are universal. They are for all people. As a framework that defines what one is rightfully entitled to, universal human rights law supports recognition of the unconditional and inherent worth and dignity of each and every human being. To support the principle of equality means to ensure conditions and opportunities for the fulfillment of basic human needs.

Second, in advancing basic human needs through universal human rights, access to rights progresses from the realm of charity to the realm of entitlement. Rights and the language of rights thus serve as tools to empower those who have been traditionally dependent on the goodwill of the state and society. As rights claimants, access to rights becomes as much a “bottom-up” (Lovett, Gunn & Robson, 1994: 177) as a top-down process. This grants claimants, otherwise contingent on the system, the autonomy to advocate for themselves. When needs are defined as rights claims, they become much more than simple subjective demands. They are transformed into an agenda for political activity. As such, the personal becomes political. The pursuit of rights becomes a form of social action and a mechanism for social change, creating a “‘bridge’ across the sectarian divide” (Lovett, Gunn, & Robson, 1994: 177).

International human rights discourse similarly recognizes the interrelationship between individual and collective rights, both of which are pertinent to a peace-building agenda.

Social rights and peace building

International Human Rights law distinguishes between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. While civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights complement one another in a peace-building agenda, the second set of rights provides a point of entry that directly addresses the issues at the root of conflict and peace. The International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights emphasizes the principle of equality. Often referred to as positive rights, the Covenant defines entitlements such as “the right to education, to employment, to social security, to health care, to equal pay for equal work, to housing, and so on, as well as the right to cultural identity and practice . . .” (Osaghae, 1996: 175). These are rights that the individual or group can legitimately claim as citizens of the state. They require the active involvement of the state in ensuring their realization, “even amounting in some cases to social reconstruction” (Cook, 1999: 261). The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights focuses on those entitlements that enhance social justice and equality.

Peace building has already been identified as a process that entails societal transformation and reconstruction (Bertram, 1995). Economic, social, and cultural problems are not limited to any one specific identity group. They are issues that cut through identity group cleavages affecting all citizens of the state. Promoting economic, social, and cultural rights creates an arena that can transcend diversity by focusing on the societal policies and structures that sustain inequality. The list of entitlements included in the International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights is both basic and broad enough to support cooperative efforts between diverse identity
groups as they seek to attain social reconstruction. In this triangle of state and two (or more) competing identity groups, guaranteeing that the state implement policies and procedures that are both universal and inclusive for all members of society becomes a point of convergence. An agenda that addresses universal social problems creates opportunities to construct new relationships, to advocate for improved social policies thus collaboratively influencing dominant government perspectives, and to participate in processes that enhance human growth and development. There are three additional factors that support the logic of beginning with economic, social, and cultural rights as an entry point to a peace building agenda.

First, poverty has been identified as a condition that lends to the erosion of social ties, the marginalization and exclusion of social groups, and the systematic denial of rights (Strobel, 1996). The promotion of social rights can provide an agenda that is meaningful to those groups and communities that have been traditionally excluded. As its members are empowered, the community is strengthened. Strong communities working for the promotion of universal rights and justice are a crucial condition for coexistence. Second, securing social rights enhances group worth and collective regard. Social rights and collective respect are complementary concepts because, as Miller (1993) notes, “the emergence of rights contributes to or enforces respect; respect encourages the development of rights” (p. 45). In other words, the advancement of social rights conveys a strong meta-message regarding group worth. The promotion of reciprocal group worth is a second crucial condition for coexistence (Torrzynner, 2000). The promotion of social rights becomes a means to achieving this end. This has implications for the third and final point.

Chapman (1996) has suggested that the international community has traditionally treated civil and political rights as more important than economic, social, and cultural rights. In creating a dichotomy between individual and collective sets of rights, Freedman (1999) notes that the legal system “ignores the extent to which individuals define themselves through, and take meaning from, their relationship with others” (p. 237). Osaghae (1996), who calls for a human rights approach to conflict management that would necessitate the inclusion of both individual and collective rights, has advanced this claim. To place economic, social, and cultural rights at the forefront of a peace-building agenda raises their relative worth and subsequently the resources, policies, and procedures necessary to ensure their realization. Moreover, it has been maintained that “without the rights guaranteed by the welfare state, gross inequalities in wealth, education and status render civil and political rights largely theoretical” (Wharf Higgens, 1997: 289).

Economic, social, and cultural rights establish a positive agenda. A positive agenda implies not only abstention from human rights violations, but more, suggests an active agenda for political activity. Ensuring the advancement of these rights through the participation of rights claimants creates a forum for social action, social change, and social transformation. Rights holders who respect the rights of others advance peace-building efforts as “the exercise of rights . . . enmeshes the parties to the interaction in that highly structured type of relationship that involves mutual obligations” (Flathman, 1976: 186–187).

The centrality of a human rights agenda in promoting peace has been recognized (Doyle, 1986; Osaghae, 1996; Chipman, 1993; Stavenhagen, 1987). Osaghae states:

... if the basis of inequality, exclusion, discrimination, domination and injustice is removed, or at least minimized by protecting the rights which belong to individuals and groups, then it would be easier to manage group conflicts (p. 172).

Yet the existence of a body of law in and of itself is not sufficient to ensure its application. The application of law as a norm requires opportunities for practice. As Shiui (1989) has pointed out:

“right is not theorised simply as a legal right, which implies both a static and an absolutist paradigm in the sense of an entitlement or a claim, but as a means of struggle . . . Seen as a means of struggle, ‘right’ is therefore not a standard granted as charity from above but a standard-bearer around which people struggle from below (p. 71).

It is through the promotion of civil society and community development that social change transpires, advancing the realization of both human rights law and peace. Marotte and Razafimbahiny (1999) reinforce this claim: “The root of a victim’s vulnerability lies in the fact that he or she can never enjoy these rights while existing social and state structures remain unchanged” (p. 111). To fully promote peace, an ongoing struggle to ensure social and structural change that will promote the ideals of human rights law and new forms of social interaction and community must be organized.

Advancing a peace-building agenda

Bertram (1995) notes that “in virtually all peace building operations, the government is one of the parties to the internal conflict; in virtually none is the government’s claim to authority uncontested” (p. 392). Peace building requires not only that the relationships between conflicting identity groups be
reconstructed, but also that the relationship between the government and its citizens be redefined. As Bertram (1995) contends, “at root, full-scale peace-building efforts are nothing short of attempts at nation building; they seek to remake a state’s political institutions, security forces and economic arrangements” (p. 389).

As the relationship between competing identity groups and between citizens and the state is redefined, questions regarding the allocation of political power emerge. Who will decide and for whom? Who will have the power to determine the nature of the state’s political institutions, its security forces and economic arrangements, and its social policies as well? In the transition from conflict to coexistence, promoting citizen participation to ensure that the voices of diversity are heard becomes a core issue in ensuring sustainable peace (Torczyner, 2000). Nation building similarly raises questions regarding the relationship between universal nation-state identity and particular identity group belonging. If one of the objectives of peace building is to advance the principle of universality, how will this impact upon issues of particularity and the autonomy of each cultural identity group within the nation-state? Anghie (1992) suggests that “to the individual belonging to the group, preservation of identity is a vital precondition for the exercise of liberal values” (p. 350). Anghie emphasizes the necessity of a strong “cultural context which provides the environment in which autonomy and independence may develop” (p. 350). There are a number of central arguments that advocate for the development of a strong community context as a means by which to organize nation building. Community serves as a manageable structure. It signifies “a sense of belonging … [to a] local, immediate and familiar social environment” (White, 1997: 64). Strong communities have the ability to serve as mediating structures negotiating between the needs of its people, other communities, governmental policies, and vice versa. As such, communities have the potential to create a connection between the individual, the collective, and the larger society. Community similarly provides a forum for participation in the development of policies and procedures that affect individual and communal well-being. As such, it creates opportunities for the development of civil skills crucial to civil society. At the same time, communities serve to preserve the autonomous identity of diverse groups. Autonomy is central to a peace-building agenda (Burton, 1990; Kotze & Du Toit, 1995). The development of autonomous communities can lead to relationships of interdependence between diverse communities.

Mediating between the tensions of the universal and the particular requires that nation building, and simultaneously the transition from conflict to coexistence, promote inclusive and reciprocal processes (Torczyner, 2000) while at the same time preserving autonomous community identity. This while remaining responsive to competing claims. Three key concepts emerge to begin to respond to such a challenge: democracy, civil society, and development. The relationship between these concepts and peace is reinforced by Boutris-Ghali (1994):

Without peace there can be no development and there can be no democracy. Without development, the basis for democracy will be lacking and societies will tend to fall into conflict. And without democracy, no sustainable development will occur; without such development, peace cannot be maintained (p. 1).

Democracy and civil society

Research has shown that democracies rarely if ever fight each other (Gleditsch & Hegre, 1997). If we accept the premise that democracies are less apt to engage in war, then promoting democratic society is pertinent to a peace-building strategy. “A vital component of a successful democracy is said to be a healthy civil society” (Kotze & Du Toit, 1995: 28). The International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development defines civil society as “the sum of all non-family social institutions and associations in a country which are autonomous, independent of the state and capable of significantly influencing public policy” (Thede, 1996: 4). Woodward (1992) defines four functions of civil society:

to create a sphere of autonomous social activity, to campaign and agitate in behalf of political and social objectives, to provide a counterweight to governmental power, and to oppose the illegitimate exercise of governmental power (p. 18).

Civil participation broadens the concept of democracy. Participation serves as the channel through which the individual and the collective are able to advance human rights. The process of advocating for one’s rights is instrumental in redefining the relationship between powerful and powerless identity groups in society. It similarly encourages the reconstruction of the relationship between citizens and the government. Participation in the promotion of human rights is empowering. It creates a sense of autonomy in that one no longer functions solely through dependency on the system. It enables the individual and the collective to become active partners in the narration and construction of one’s life. As such, a sense of control over one’s destiny is strengthened, combating feelings...
of powerlessness and hopelessness. Participation builds relationships and interactions that, in and of themselves, have the power to empower. Riger (1990) argues that both a sense of connection and empowerment “are integral to human well-being and happiness and to well-functioning communities . . .” (p. 287).

Eliasoph (1996) argues that interaction, intersubjectivity, and patterns of civility in everyday life are the basis for power. She claims that civic practice “is the power to create the public itself. It is . . . not just a response to power or powerlessness, but a kind of power in itself” (p. 263). Eliasoph (1996) goes on to note that “public-making power is not just an end in itself; it can also be a means to more instrumental kinds of power . . .” (p. 263). She adds that in the actual process of civil participation, people can become good citizens and that creating the public agenda in and of itself is a “kind of power” (Eliasoph, 1996: 267). Participation enhances affiliation and as such contributes to the development of community. Participation in processes that advocate for rights cultivates a culture of justice; one that is capable of transcending conflict by recognizing that rights are rights are rights. The more they are promoted universally, the more one can ensure his or her own access to rights. Pitkin (1981) claims that participation drives us:

- to transform “I want” into “I am entitled to,” a claim that becomes negotiable by public standards.
- In the process we learn to think about the standards themselves, about our stake in the existence of standards, of justice, of our community, even of our opponents and enemies in the community; so that afterwards we are changed (p. 347).

Pitkin’s (1981) statement emphasizes that the process is as important if not more than the topic or content of focus. Eliasoph (1996) calls this the power to give meaning to the very act of gathering together. This is “the power to make the public” (p. 286). As the distribution of power grows, so too the basis for a strong foundation to ensure both citizen and governmental accountability through the development of public standards. Civil participation provides necessary political leverage to ensure the protection of basic human rights.

Practice in civil society enhances one’s ability to regard “other persons, including one’s adversaries, as members of the same collectivity, i.e. as members of the same society, even though they belong to different parties, or to different religious groups or to different ethnic groups” (Shils, 1991: 13). Participation in the promotion of human rights for one’s own identity group with the principle of universality in mind enables each community to enhance its own development while others do the same, reinforcing a sense of inclusion and reciprocity (Tarcyner, 2000). As each community builds its autonomy under this common umbrella, it contributes to the promotion of civil society and democracy. Kotze and Du Toit (1995) refer to this process as “a wide range of civic bodies [that] mesh to form the basis for the politics of moderation, tolerance and compromise” (p. 28).

In the transition from conflict to coexistence, citizen participation can impact on the degree to which the transition will succeed. “Citizen participation helps to integrate people who otherwise are split and isolated by the processes of change” (Baker, Draper & Fairbairn, 1991: 13). Participation cultivates relationships. Valued relationships create a willingness to work through differences (Plou, 1998). They are one of the bases for the realization of peaceful societies (Marris, 1996). Ensuring a tradition of civil society entails the development of opportunities for citizen participation in autonomous institutional life, in the building of relationships between civil society and the state, and in the procurement of civil capacity.

Two additional rationales strengthen the argument for active civil participation as a cornerstone for peace building. First, civil society serves to mediate competing claims often expressed by irrational peace opposing forces. Promoting opportunities for participation counters the formation of [violent] opposition or sub-cultures to voice conflicting demands. A strong civil society creates a context for the expression and acknowledgement of competing claims, while at the same time defining clear norms to govern behavior. In other words, civil society opens opportunities for inclusion for the marginalized and alienated while setting clear guidelines to govern that inclusion.

Similarly, civil society counters irrational peace opposing forces by creating a uniformed force to overcome violence. Freud (1960) summed this up in his ability to envision “right as might” by channeling “humanity’s aggressive tendencies” (p. 200) into non-aggressive outcomes. “Brute force is overcome by union . . .” (p. 201). “Right” or law is defined as the might of the community. Like acts of violence it is “quick to attack whatever individual stands in its path . . .” (p. 201). Yet with one crucial difference. It is a communal as opposed to an individual action. The transition from brute violence to the reign of law requires that:

- The union of the majority [must] be stable and enduring . . . The union of the people must be permanent and well organized; it must enact rules to meet the risk of possible revolts, must set up machinery ensuring that its rule – the laws – are observed . . . This recognition of a community of interests engenders among the members of the
group a sentiment of unity and fraternal solidarity which constitutes its real strength (Freud, 1960: 201–202).

A strong civil society strengthens participatory democracy. As such, peace-opposing forces need not only counter government but the grassroots majority as well. As the struggle for “right as might” replaces paradigms of “might as right,” a well-informed, organized civil society becomes the best antidote to peace-opposing forces.

In the transition from a state of conflict to coexistence, autonomous, parallel initiatives that facilitate development and the promotion of human rights in each community can create the foundations for civil and peaceful societies. The objective is a common one: to construct a more just society through the promotion of human rights and community development. A common universal agenda is created for diverse identity groups without the burden of compromising group and community autonomy.

**Community development and peace**

The concept of community development and its role in advancing peace-building efforts has been widely explored in the literature (Gamble & Weil, 1997; Khinduka, 1975; Heenan, 1997; Lovett, Gunn & Robson, 1994; Longland, 1994). Community development lends to the fulfillment of basic human needs. In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development published a report that defined “the healthy condition of human populations” (Gamble & Weil, 1997: 211) as central to the concept of development. Estes (1993), who defines “development as both a process and a goal” (Gamble & Weil, 1997: 211), further defines the meaning of development through seven basic concepts. They are particularly relevant to a peace-building agenda:

- the unity of humanity and life on earth;
- the minimization of violence;
- the maintenance of environmental quality;
- the satisfaction of minimum world welfare standards;
- the primacy of human dignity;
- the retention of diversity and pluralism; and
- universal participation (Gamble & Weil, 1997: 211).

The interrelationship between community development and positive peace is further established in the definition of community development:

Community development includes a composite of process and program objectives. As a process it aims to educate and motivate people for self-help; to develop responsible local leadership; to inculcate among the members of rural communities a sense of citizenship and among the residents of urban areas a spirit of civic consciousness; to introduce and strengthen democracy at the grassroots level through the creation and/or revitalization of institutions designed to serve as instruments of local participation; to initiate a self-generative, self-sustaining, and enduring process of growth; to enable people to establish and maintain cooperative and harmonious relationships; and to bring about gradual and self-chosen changes in the community’s life with a minimum of stress and disruption (Khinduka, 1975: 175).

Burkey (1993) adds that this process can occur through participation in the economic, social and political development of community. Participation in processes of development that advance economic, social, and cultural rights form an agenda that can enhance community development. Community development fosters opportunities for the growth of its members. Community life and community welfare are strengthened through individual participation and commitment to the advancement of human rights.

Organizing communities for the promotion of social rights has been tied to a peace agenda (Kaul, 1988). Studies in Northern Ireland have shown that as women organized to address “social policy issues such as health, education and unemployment and successfully lobbied and campaigned for legislative change . . . they managed to organize in a way that transcend[ed] political differences” (Heenan, 1997: 90). Defining issues of mutual concern and organizing to develop strategies to alleviate problems provide a pragmatic approach to coexist with differences. Through the application of the international human rights discourse, common issues affecting diverse communities provide an opportunity to join together to impact on the environmental policies and procedures that might otherwise sustain on-going conflict.

**Conclusion**

Human rights law and social work practice are two complementary approaches and languages to address and advance human well-being. The human rights approach creates a framework wherein basic human needs are legitimized as human rights claims. As such, the satisfaction of human needs is not a matter of charity but rather a legal requirement. Social work is concerned with human growth and development. The primary objective of the profession is to ensure that the individual is able to reach his or her full potential by facilitating an array of more reciprocal individual and environmental exchanges. Participation in community
development advances civil society by advocating for structural conditions that will ensure both communal and individual well-being.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights focuses on societal-level determinants that enhance human well-being. It ultimately aspires to promote the development of each and every individual. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights informs the social work profession. Moreover, it provides a framework, discourse, and rank that can serve to empower those needs that the profession seeks to address. Social work on the other hand, facilitates relationship building, crucial to ensuring individual, communal, institutional, and political exchange. It provides the human resources and channels as well as the necessary skills to ensure that the struggle for human rights will continue, the goal being universal implementation.

When the two disciplines are linked, a mutually reinforcing conceptual and practice framework that is greater than the sum of its parts emerges — the capacity to build peace. Recognition of the interdependency of conflict and societal policies and procedures, and of their linkages to human rights, and the promotion of community and civil society provide the foundation for a peace-building approach. Creating public space wherein these issues can be debated, advocated for, and disagreed upon without being “perceived as a risk to solidarity” (Eliasoph, 1996: 282) by autonomous identity groups can transform conflict into opportunities for human growth, development, and coexistence. Moreover, the creation of public space serves to advance the notion of “right as might,” thus countering those forces hardest at work to deter peace.

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References


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