

Peace Processes as Joint Learning Processes of Stakeholders and Insider Peacebuilders: A Case Study on Southern Thailand

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1. From Conflict Analysis to Peacebuilding Impact

In 2012 two well established INGOs in the peacebuilding field, Conciliation Resources and Saferworld published a joint report on “From conflict analysis to peacebuilding impact” (Hiscock and Dumasy, 2012). It was based on 18 conflict studies across a broad range of contexts which were all focused on building the capacities of local actors to engage in participatory forms of conflict analysis and to utilize the insights for the strategizing of peacebuilding initiatives. The main conclusion of the report was that adequate conflict analyses are a key precondition for all kind of effective peacebuilding initiatives. Two other conclusions of the report were that the *process* and the *ownership* of the conflict analyses are as important as the result of the analysis.

This study resonates well with a similar experience the authors have collected in the context of the *Insider Peacebuilders Platform (IPP)* for the Deep South of Thailand.ⁱ The IPP-group was created at the beginning of 2011 as a result of a joint initiative of a few academic institutes in the Conflict and Peace Studies field, one state-based institution and several academic and civil society organizations (CSOs).ⁱⁱ The idea to establish this platform was inspired by the observation from several peace scholars and practitioners that while there had been an increasing engagement of civil society actors in the region since 2007, there had been only very few efforts to bring the different actors together to improve their joint strategizing and to explore possibilities for more effective collaboration.

At the beginning we had intensive discussions in the core IPP-team how best to develop this approach in light of past experiences that several well-intended efforts to promote collaboration and coordination among peacebuilding activists had failed due to severe differences on how to pursue them. We then came across an inspiring concept which had been published a few years before by the peacebuilding researcher and activist Robert Ricigliano (2003), the *Network of Effective Action (NEA)*. Apart from the need for a holistic approach to peacebuilding he emphasized particularly the requirement to find creative ways

to develop a common *theory of action* (respectively a common *theory of change* which is now the preferred term in the field).

Ricigliano furthermore highlighted that instead of promoting this within the context of a formalized network and an explicit division of responsibilities it would be more effective to achieve this within a rather *chaordic* arrangement. With this he meant that the collaboration should be envisioned as self-organizing, decentralized and flexible, that the network should be as inclusive as possible and that there should be space for joint learning.

It was the latter point which attracted us most. We decided that the focus of the IPP should be at the beginning primarily on joint learning, i.e. a joint conflict analysis to create a common understanding of the main challenges towards peacebuilding. We also expected that this joint learning might promote trust- and confidence-building among the participants and might later ease and assist the collaboration on joint projects. Finally, to emphasize the learning aspect of the IPP we envisioned the joint meetings of the IPP as events which would start with providing knowledge and skills on the analysis respectively assessment of conflicts in general which would then be applied to the specific case of Southern Thailand. We used the term *conflict analysis tools* for this purpose.ⁱⁱⁱ

The selection and sequencing of the tools was guided by three basic considerations:

- (1) The tools should together support a *systemic understanding* of the main features and drivers of the conflict and not just assemble data (Koerppen et al, 2011; Ricigliano, 2012; Schirch 2013).
- (2) The sequencing of the tools should support a *step-by-step trust and confidence building* among the participants. For this purpose we decided that tools which offered chances for consensus-building even among adversaries like the mapping of actors and their relationships should come before those who can easily generate confrontational disputes like the parties historical narratives.
- (3) The tools should allow *visualizations* in form of diagrams to support creativity within small working groups. For this purpose we screened a reasonable sample of the available literature on conflict analysis respectively assessment (Leonhardt, 2002; Fisher, 2005; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), 2005; Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), 2006; United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2012).

With respect to the composition of the IPP our intention was not only to invite persons who had an explicit understanding of working for (negative) peace in the sense of ending the violence, but also persons close to one or the other party with an interest to change the injustices and deeper drivers of conflict in the region. At the end, the IPP did therefore not only comprise peacebuilders striving for some kind of im- or multipartiality, but also many

political activists arguing for non-violent change in the region. We decided to summarize these two groups under the category of *Stakeholders and Insider Peacebuilders* to emphasize that this group comprises a broad spectrum of persons with different motives, positions, and interests.

The aim of the article is to document the application of five key tools in the context of the IPP between September 2011 and June 2012 and to discuss the group dynamics and the learning which accompanied the process. We will further summarize the feedback from participants on this process which was organized in the context of an Action Research project in which the core team of the IPP was involved (Chaijaroenwatana et al, in press).

In the next section we will provide a brief overview of the conflict context and describe the development of the IPP, particularly with respect to the participants, their interests and the organization of the workshops and other gatherings. In the main section we will outline the five key tools, how the participants made use of these tools and summarize the results as well as the feedback of the participants. In the final section we will review the lessons learned from this experience, encouraging conclusions as well as limitations and open questions which will require future research.

The IPP collaboration is an ongoing process. After the focus on the five conflict analysis tools covered in this article, the group has started to work on Roadmaps for peace processes and is now active to critically-constructively support the Track-1 peace dialogue efforts which are underway since February 2013. We decided to reflect on these more recent developments in a future article and to focus here on the insights from the conflict analysis phase. For the IPP-team and us it had been a fascinating phase and we see it as an important element in a sustainable peace process.

2. The Case of Southern Thailand and the Development of the *Insider Peacebuilders Platform (IPP)*

The conflict in the Deep South of Thailand has been well researched since its re-escalation in 2004. The majority of this research came to the conclusion that the conflict is deeply rooted in the history of the region between the Thai state and the local Malay-Muslim respectively Malay-Patani population and that its essence can best be described as an ethno-political legitimacy conflict (McCargo, 2008; 2012; Abuza, 2009; Satha-Anand, 2009; Askew, 2010; Joll, 2010; Barter, 2011; Jitpiromsri and Engvall, 2013; Jory, 2013).^{iv}

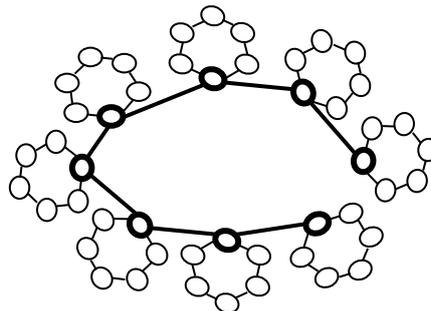
This research has also emphasized that the conflict – like in many similar cases – has developed a complex dynamism of its own, including the self-reproducing character of high levels of violence and securitization as well as non-politically driven violence. Finally,

another key feature which had triggered some significant research is the *enigmatic* character of the resistance movement and its organizational set up. But this latter aspect has somewhat changed in light of the *Peace Dialogue* process which the Thai *National Security Council (NSC)* and the leading resistance organization, the *National Revolutionary Front (Barisan Revolusi Nasional – BRN)* have agreed upon on 28 February 2013 (Lamey, 2013).

During the last decade, a multiplicity of activities has been initiated to promote peace. While the majority of these efforts was focused on security- and development-related programs, there has also been a significant increase of initiatives by CSOs, academic institutions and individuals linked to various state institutions, particularly after 2007. As mentioned above, this had been the context in which the idea of the IPP came up to create a kind of neutral space for peacebuilders and politically active stakeholders from within the conflict (therefore called “insiders”) to collectively analyze the conflict and explore ways for its transformation.

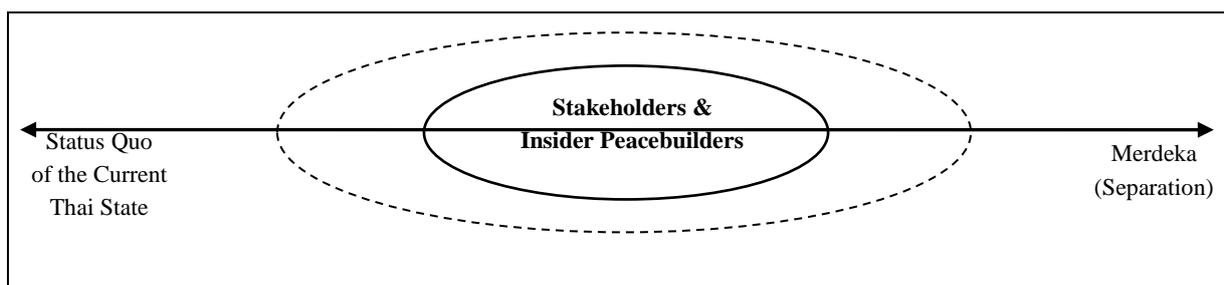
The selection of participants was based on three basic considerations: The first was to invite persons who had some kind of reference group connected to them so that they could function as *multipliers* with respect to their home organization or their constituency. This aspect is captured in the following diagram.

Diagram 1: Platform of Insider Peacebuilders



A second consideration was that the peacebuilders and stakeholders we planned to invite should represent ideally the full spectrum of different opinions with respect to the peaceful transformation of the conflict. This is obviously not a linear continuum, but most of our colleagues immediately understood the following diagram.

Diagram 2: The Spectrum of Different Opinions



A third consideration was related to the organizational affiliations, the individual characteristics as well as an adequate representation of women and youth among the participants. From these criteria it were particularly the individual features which became important references for the expansion of the group as well as the occasional rotation of participants to enhance the overall outreach of the IPP initiative.

Table 1: Criteria for the Identification of Participants

Criteria for the Identification of Participants	
1.	Insider Peacebuilders are persons from all of Thailand including and with a particular focus on the most Southern provinces, who are committed and engaged to end political violence and to transform the conflict towards peace and justice.
2.	They come from different cultural, religious, political, professional and ethnic backgrounds and reflect together the spectrum of people affected from the conflict.
3.	They do not only represent themselves, but can reflect as well the mindset of a wider network of constituents and function as multipliers within their constituency.
4.	They are open-minded to engage constructively with persons from different backgrounds and with different opinions and potentially bridge the gap between the core parties on one's side or both.
5.	They are interested in working towards a common platform of insider peacebuilders and making their joint efforts as effective and practical as possible.

Altogether approximately 50 persons participated in five workshops and several follow-up working groups. The majority of them resided in the southern border region. They included state officials, religious leaders, business people, members of women and youth groups, teachers, academics and civil society activists working on human rights, environmental and cultural issues, remedy, community development, education, peacebuilding and political and governance reform.

With respect to the representation of identity groups we regularly had an over-representation of Malay-Muslims in the IPP in comparison to Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Chinese which was mainly due to the fact that the vast majority of the people living in the region belong to this group and that they also had a strong interest in the purpose of the IPP initiative. Several of the Thai-Buddhists participants were from outside of the region, mainly from Bangkok, which was due to the fact that they either had official responsibilities related to the South or had a personal interest in conflict transformation.

For the majority of participants the IPP initiative provided a unique, but also challenging opportunity to reflect and discuss their different perspectives and experiences with respect to the conflict and its transformation. For some of them the attraction was linked to the question

of how the multiplicity of track-2 to -3 peace initiatives they were involved in, e.g. from dialogue projects to local peace journalism, might add up to some kind of macro-political impact. An issue which we also discussed in the context of the “*PEACE WRIT LARGE*” and “*peace writ little*” discourse (Chigas and Woodrow, 2009). For others the appeal of the initiative was primarily linked to the opportunity to engage with people from different backgrounds and of radically different opinions.

Both aspects encouraged the team to furnish the initiative with some academic features, i.e. to emphasize the need to learn about the current state of the art of conflict analysis as well as peacebuilding and to encourage the participants to look at the conflict from the perspective of the tools provided. Also, from a very practical security point of view, all workshops and follow up working groups were organized on the Pattani campus of the Prince of Songkla University which provided a relative safe space for this kind of engagement.

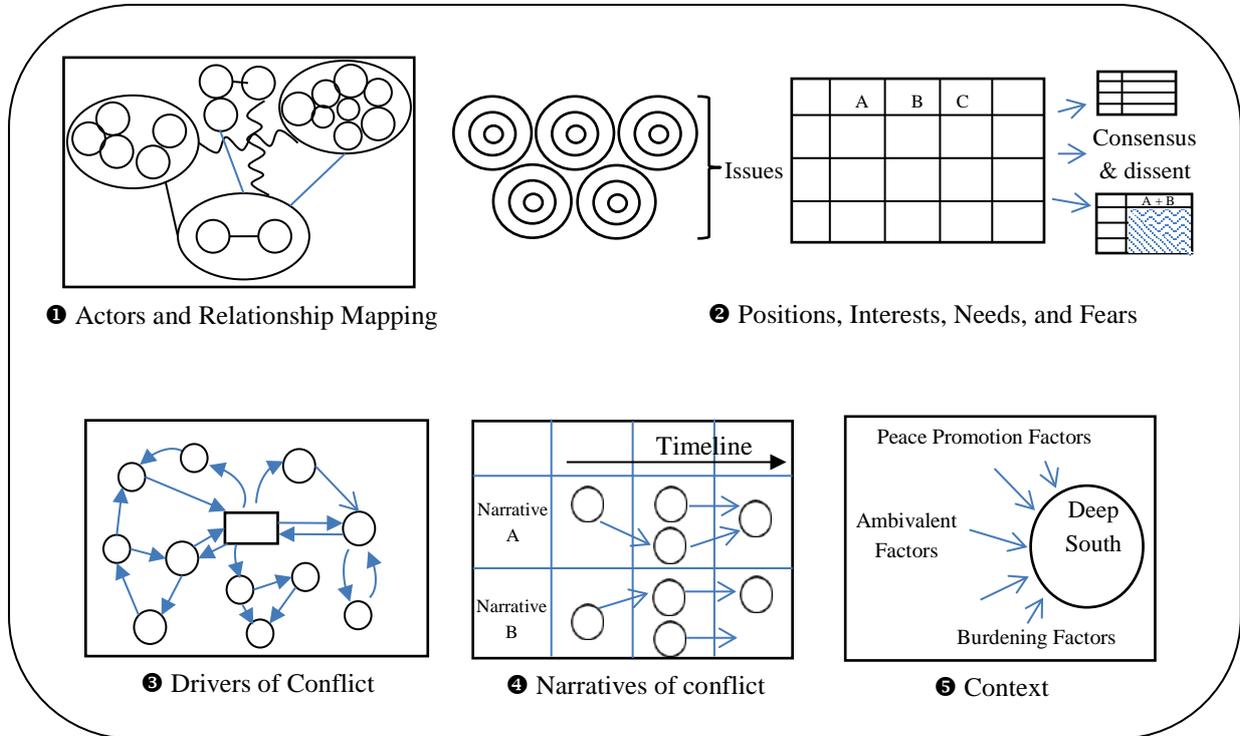
In terms of the working process, the core team was composed of members from the initiating partner organizations. Before starting each workshop of 2 to 3 days on average, the team would brainstorm on the detailed objectives, the composition of the group, the tools to be used and the agenda. The facilitation was done by a team of two more senior facilitators, one Thai Buddhist and one Malay Muslim and some supportive facilitators and persons to assist the process. Senior team members served as resource persons on conflict analysis and their application on other cases. The process within the workshop was normally composed of a mixture of plenary meetings and break-out groups in which most of the practical work would take place.

3. The Joint Series of Conflict Analysis

This section will describe the rationale for selection of the five tools, give an overview of the applied methods and summarize the outcome.

Talking about conflict analysis, it is “a practical process of examining and understanding the reality of the conflict from a variety of perspectives” (Fisher et al., 2005, p.17). In the last three to four decades a plethora of methods have been developed for this purpose. As mentioned above, for our purpose the key considerations for selecting the tools were a systemic understanding of conflict (does the combination of tools help to *see* the essence of the conflict?), the support of trust and confidence building among the persons engaging in this exercise and the practical aspect of the visualization of the tools. From the widely used scheme of *Where, Who, Why, What, How and When* (Schirch 2013, pp.67 – 74) we wanted to apply at the end all of them, but start with the less difficult ones. The question we left out in the five tools we started with, was the *How* question, i.e. how the parties applied their power (e.g. violence and securitization) because we were concerned that this might be a too sensitive topic at the beginning.

Diagram 3: Joint Series of Conflict Analysis Workshops



The sequencing of the five tools was based on the following questions:

(1) Who are the main parties and stakeholders in the conflict? In addition, how do these actors relate to each other and how powerful are they? To address these issues, *the Actor – Relationship Mapping tool* was then used. It is a visual technique to clearly illustrate parties in the conflict and their relationships ranging from alliance to severe conflict. Participants were asked to think of actors in the conflict by using different sizes of circles to represent the actors. The size would depend on how important and powerful each actor was for the conflict. After the actors were discussed, the participants were then asked to think of the quality of the relationship among these actors.

(2) What are the issues that put parties in conflict with one another? In other words, what do they want to achieve? In order to differentiate between layers of issues, the widely used metaphor of an *Onion* was introduced. It is a tool which cuts the Onion into three layers. The first outer layer indicates the positions what the parties state publicly what they want. The next inner layer indicates the interests, i.e. what the parties really want to achieve. Finally,

there is the core layer of the needs and fears describing what they must have in the end, and what they are afraid of respectively.

(3) What are the factors that make conflict violent and protracted? This activity focuses on the *drivers of the conflict*. In all protracted conflicts one can find multiple drivers that are linked with each other and create the famous self-reproduction of rivalry, confrontation, them-and-us-perceptions and violence. While one phenomenon results from a particular driver, it can then give rise to other drivers in a contiguous chain which results in a system whereby all drivers are entangled. This is to say that most cause-effect relationships do not function in a linear fashion, but are linked in a complex web-relationship with each other. These attributes reflect the fact that while all parties attempt to take actions to advance their respective objective, each and every one of them in turn lent force into constructing a system and generating complementary factors that drive and feed into the conflict itself. In the end, not a single entity has control over the situation or the system at all (Koerppen et al, 2011). Participants were first asked to choose some conflict-related phenomena and identify factors that trigger and sustain those phenomena. Based on these causal factors, they were then asked to identify what drives those factors. With this tool, participants developed a more comprehensive understanding of why the conflict has reached the current protracted stage and appears to be difficult to be resolved. This enabled them to see the complexity of the situation as well as opportunities for intervention.

(4) What are the *narratives*^v of the conflict from the perspective of key actors and stakeholders? One way to understand how the parties perceive the conflict, therefore, is to learn and be aware of the different narratives of the conflict. Certainly, there will not be a single narrative or a single version of history. Instead, there are different historical recollections from all involved of how the conflict has emerged according to their point of view. And as the conflict has broadened and deepened, so did the collection of narratives circulated among the conflicting parties. The purpose of the tool was to bring out different versions of the narratives of history to make the participants aware of their significantly different perceptions and beliefs. Participants were first asked to form groups based on their ethnicity – Malay Muslim, Thai Buddhist, and Thai Chinese. Then they elaborated their narratives and documented them on a visualized timeline. The three resulting timelines were then shared with the other groups in the plenary.

(5) What is the *context* of the conflict? This was the last step of the assessment process with respect to the ongoing conflict and at the same time already a first step towards identifying potential factors for conflict transformation. The context in this exercise was divided into factors that contribute to peacebuilding, obstruct peace efforts, or were identified as ambivalent. The tool encouraged participants to reflect on the wider context of the conflict with respect to the geopolitical environment as well as many other drivers of change outside of the conflict system.

This joint analysis process with the technical tool of visualizing the final outcomes created a mixed picture of agreements and disagreements. Whenever possible, we encouraged the participants to work towards a synthesis or a merger of their results. For this purpose we introduced the concept of a “*sufficient consensus*”^{vi} as a guideline to facilitate compromises. This helped to create a rather dynamic process of discussions, the search for new information and efforts to include different perspectives and opinions into the final outcome of the analysis.

In the following section we will review the results from the five tools in terms of substance and process. This process created to our knowledge the first participatory conflict analysis of the Deep South by people with close proximities to the two main conflicting parties. The content of the analysis which will be presented in the following, therefore, reflects a certain level of a common, multipartial understanding on the conflict. We would also like to add some observations on the participatory process and their implications for the co-ownership of the results.

1

ACTOR – RELATIONSHIP MAPPING TOOL

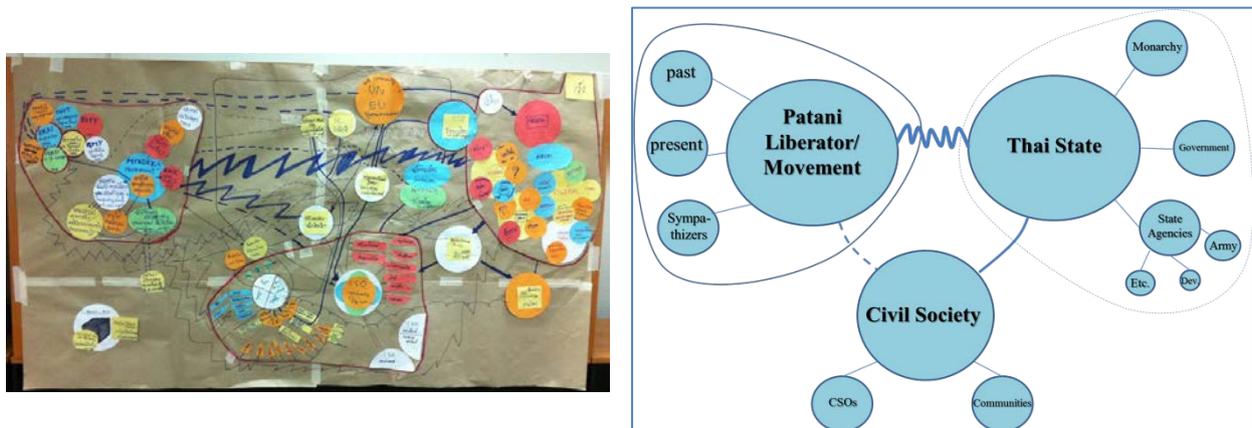


Diagram 4: Actor-Relationship Mapping with a Simplified Version

The work on this mapping exercise was the most time-consuming one because the methodology was new for most of the participants as well as the experience of “negotiating” the mapping in detail. It needed several steps of follow up working groups to generate the outcome shown on Diagram 4. The participants categorized the key actors into three major groups: the Thai State, the “liberation movement” and civil society organizations (CSOs). Obviously, as the main conflict parties they identified the Thai State and the “liberation movement”, while the civil society sector was placed between these two parties in a nearly equidistant position. Within each segment they identified a multiplicity of sub-groups. In addition to these three major groups, other actors included politicians, the media, human

rights defenders, civil society organizations from outside the region, the Thai society in general, Patani’s political exiles, international organizations and foreign governments.

Interestingly, this tool enabled participants to exchange views on the importance of some institutions like the monarchy, which are rarely discussed in public. They also spent significant time to discuss the level of influence, the strategies and the relationships of all the major actors in detail. It turned out at the end that the tool had triggered a deep dialogue among the participants. Besides this observation, some Thai Buddhist participants admitted later that it was particularly this exercise which made them realize for the first time that the “liberation” movement did indeed exist and had played a significant role in the conflict though obviously not all of them could accept the claim of “liberation” which was nevertheless tolerated as the definition of a considerable group of participants.



ONION TOOL ON POSITION, INTEREST, NEED, AND FEAR

When the Onion tool was introduced, the first discussion centered on the exact understanding of the terms positions, interests, needs and fears like in similar exercises because these terms have indeed strong overlaps and can easily lead to misunderstandings. Nevertheless, their wide use in the negotiation arena has made them important parameters for conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Following the results of the first tool, the participants decided to focus not only on the two main conflicting actors, but also to apply the tool to the positions, interests, needs and fears of the civil society sector (see Table 2).

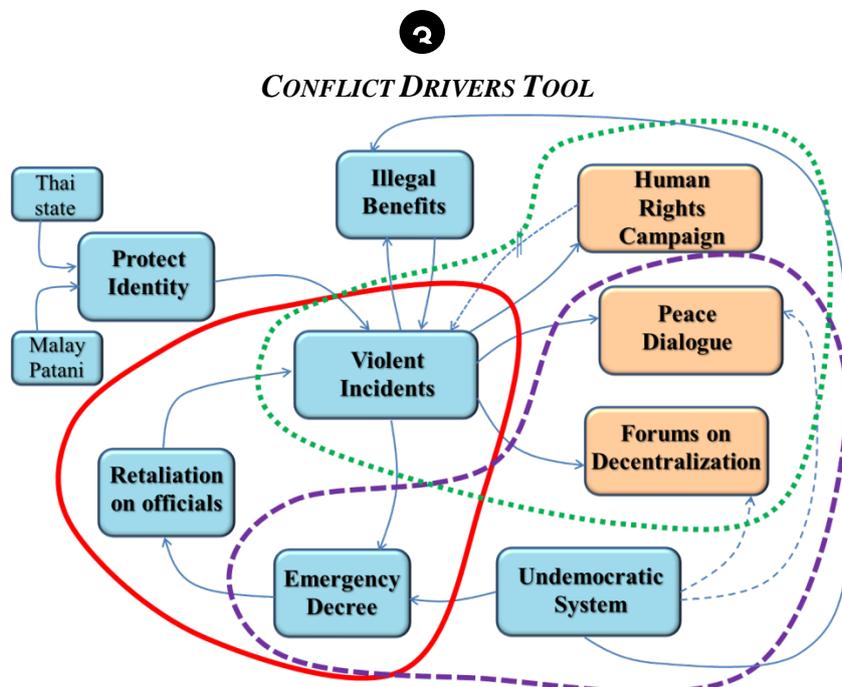
Table 2: Positions, Interests, Needs, and Fears of Main Actors in the Conflict

Category	Thai State	Liberation Movement	CSO sector
Position	- Sovereignty and territorial integrity, that Thailand is one indivisible Kingdom	- Independence from the Thai State, with its own Nation State	- Peace and justice - People’s empowerment - Self-determination (except in foreign affairs, military and finance) <i>(Malay CSOs)</i> - Social order <i>(Thai CSOs)</i>
Interest	- Ensure law and order through necessary measures to prevent and suppress violence - Centralization and upholding “Nation, Religion and Monarchy” that constitute national security - Flexibility of governance	- Autonomy, political freedom - Power to determine how they live and how they allocate resources	- Upholding equality, no discrimination - Significant decentralization - Significant local administration <i>(Malay CSOs)</i> - Harmony within pluralistic society <i>(Thai CSOs)</i>

Category	Thai State	Liberation Movement	CSO sector
	through current form of decentralization		- More power to determine local affairs
Need	- Protection of Thai identity - Upholding honor and dignity of Thai State - Political stability	- Equality - Freedom to live their lives according to religious faith and culture	- Political participation - Recognition and getting cooperation from all sides
Fear	- Losing authority and territory - Losing economic interests	- Being assimilated, ethnically, religiously and culturally to the extent of losing their Malay-Patani identity - Being unable to establish Patani Nation State - Insincerity of Thai State	- Losing life and being unsecured - Being misunderstood by the State and society that they are helping the movement - Being deprived of political participation

This exercise triggered some debates with respect to the assessment of the militant Malay-Muslim movements, particularly the BRN (Barison Revolusi Nasional) as one of the main actors in this respect. The majority of the participants assumed that their position would be one of “Merdeka”, i.e. secession respectively of forming their own independent state, but because there had been no public statement of this claim it remained an open question.^{vii} Anyhow, the result of the onion exercise then lead the participants to discuss in-depth the next category of the interests and the question how the assessment of the two sides could be bridged in a future peace process. The majority opinion was that with respect to interests the gap between the parties did not appear to be irreconcilable.

The discussion of the needs and fears level turned out to be the one which had the highest potential of facilitating a deeper understanding of each other’s deeper concerns. To promote this impact, we introduced a “fishbowl” setting in which one group (in this case a homogeneous one) talked among each other on their respectively the other sides concerns, while the remaining participants would just listen to the conversation in the inner circle. In hindsight though, we assume that we applied this method too early, because it requires a substantive level of trust to share and listen attentively to discourses on basic needs and fears.



- Line A: Violence Circle
- Line B: Peace Efforts
- - - Line C: Obstacles to Peace Efforts

Diagram 5: A Simplified Version of Conflict Drivers

The very complex system of the conflict drivers which the participants have generated can be illustrated in a simplified version as shown above. The starting point and center of the diagram are “Violent Incidents” as the key indicators of the protracted conflict. Around this center there are three “loops” identified which indicate the connection of various drivers of the protracted conflict. The first loop (line A) involves incidents of violence. This is an amalgamation of various events including targeted killings and bomb attacks. Participants were of the view that what sparked violence is a combination of many drivers that are interlinked. Some of them relate to their efforts “defending their identity”, be it as a Thai Buddhist or Malay Muslim. Besides drivers related to protect the cultural identity on each side, there are drivers linked to the retaliation of State officials’ actions which are perceived as humiliation. At the same time, the State enforces an Emergency Decree (which gives security agencies special rights) as an instrument to address violence in the region. Yet the enforcement of the Emergency Decree is one of the factors which can be interpreted as a denial of justice and equal treatment which spurs retaliation against State officials. And these loops can finally feed themselves and create the trap of an ongoing protracted conflict. To break this loop a radical change is necessary with respect to one or the other driver.

The second loop (line B) is the circle involving conflict resolution efforts that represent attempts on reduce violence. There have been advocacy campaigns by CSOs to prevent human rights violations that are consequences of some State officials’ actions. Peace talks among individuals representing the State and some fractions of the Malay-Muslim movement as well as dialogue forums on decentralization have been tried to promote conflict transformation. But so far, these efforts had only limited impact with the exception of the efforts to reduce human rights violations. A large group of the participants explained this failure with the limitations of the Thai political system concerning effective democratic participation and problem solving capacities. These factors are summarized in the third loop (line C) which can be described as a specific obstacle to conflict resolution.

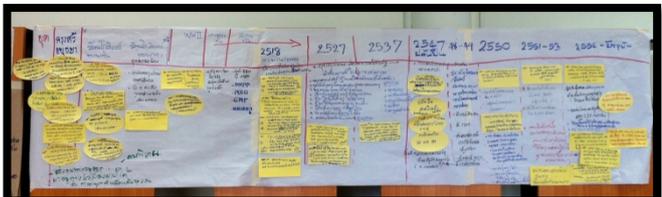
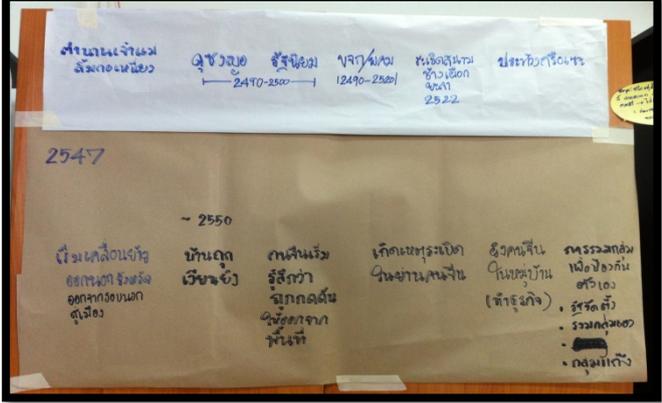


CONFLICT NARRATIVES TOOL

During the work on the drivers of conflict some of the participants got lost in the multiplicity of the drivers and the complexities of their interaction. But after the completed mappings were reviewed and efforts were undertaken to make them aware of the possibility to move between “simplification” and “complexification” this tool became an attractive focal point for understanding the essence of the conflict.^{viii} This tool also offered entry points for the discussion of strategies for change, but in light of the heavy self-reproducing character of this

approach it was decided to come back later to this approach after we had reviewed other analytical tools.

Diagram 6: Narratives of Malay Muslims, Thai Buddhists, and Thai Chinese in the Conflict

<p>Narrative of Malay Muslims <i>"We were conquered and treated unfairly for decades."</i></p>	
<p>Narrative of Thai Buddhists <i>"We had lived together peacefully until a group of people was trying to mobilize locals for their own causes."</i></p>	
<p>Narrative of Thai Chinese <i>"We are just settlers."</i></p>	

The participants were divided into three groups based on their ethnicity – Malay Muslim, Thai Buddhist, and Thai Chinese. Each group prepared its own narrative on an extended landscape flipchart. The three visualizations of the narrative timelines were then presented and discussed in the plenary. Because this tool requested to keep the different narratives separate we had proposed for the first round of the plenary discussion that there should only be questions of clarification and understanding and no immediate debate or comment. This turned out to be a helpful ground rule because the presentation of these fundamentally different narratives generated a long lasting impact on the participants.

In terms of the substance, the three narratives are shown above. In short, the narrative of the Thai Buddhists illustrated that this land in the Deep South had been governed by the (former) Siamese state since a long time, populated by diverse groups of people with different

ethnicities and religions, many of whom later converted to Islam. Nevertheless, these people of diverse backgrounds had lived together peacefully for centuries until armed guerilla groups were organized to drive a wedge among local residents and to resist State authority for their self-interest. In contrast, the Malay people’s narrative was centered on the agony of an ethnic group with pride due to the glorious history of the former Patani Kingdom. This Kingdom once had its own sovereignty and distinct cultural identity, and then it became subject to aggression and oppression by the Siamese State. The injustice and discrimination still continued from the past to present. These traumas lent legitimacy for the Malay Muslims to rise up and fight for justice.

Turning to the perspective of the Thai Chinese people, their narrative reflected that they had no sense of a shared history with the Siamese people. This statement was perceived with surprise by the Malay Muslim participants who admitted that they assumed that the Chinese living in the area and the Thai Buddhists were alike. Chinese participants emphasized that their ancestors had also suffered from the former Thai State’s policies to assimilate them. But yet they had managed to blend in and get along with other groups around them. One explanation give for this was that they viewed themselves as settlers, not inhabitants.

For a large number of participants this tool became a long-lasting eye-opener because they were for the first time confronted with three quite radically different historical perspectives on the same region. They assumed that their perspectives would be different, but they did not expect this amount of difference and they were also surprised that the markers for sequencing the history of the region would be so divergent. The concerns of the team that the final plenary on this might lead to a heavy dispute on what has been the “true history” were not confirmed though there were some comments in this direction, but they were a clear minority. Instead, it appeared that at least as this stage of engaging with each other the participants were prepared to learn about these different historical perspectives. Many of them would come back to this experience in several of the follow up meetings.

No one initiated the idea of trying to combine or merge these narratives. Instead, the attitude was rather to learn more about all narratives and to understand how particular episodes in the history had become starting points for different perceptions, glorifications as well as traumatizations. In the team we interpreted this experience as the need to find constructive ways of integrating this divided past into some kind of shared future.

5

CONTEXT TOOL

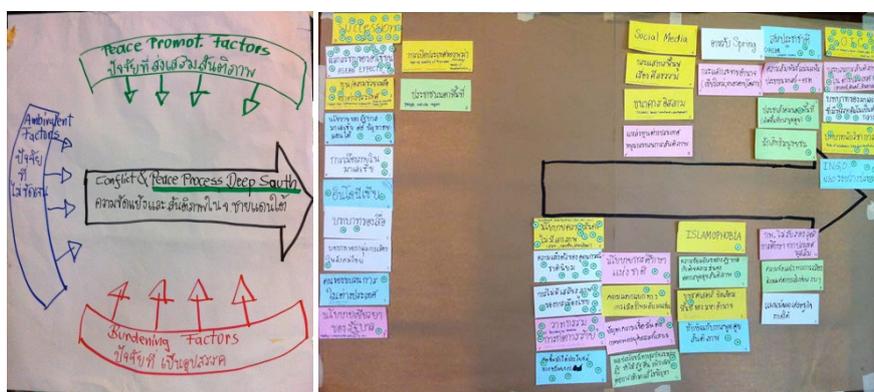


Diagram 7: Context of the Conflict

The fifth workshop was focuses on the broad dimension of “context” factors and how they might influence the conflict and its transformation in future. The tool used encouraged the participants to identify three categories of factors: 1) factors conducive to peacebuilding, 2) factors that would obstruct peace efforts, or in other words, factors that would reinforce the status quo (in 2012) and 3) ambivalent factors of which it was not yet clear if they would contribute to or obstruct peacebuilding. After the participants were divided into groups to analyze the factors in detail, they were asked for their ranking of the most important factors (shown in Table 3 in parenthesis).

Table 3: Priorities of Context to the Conflict

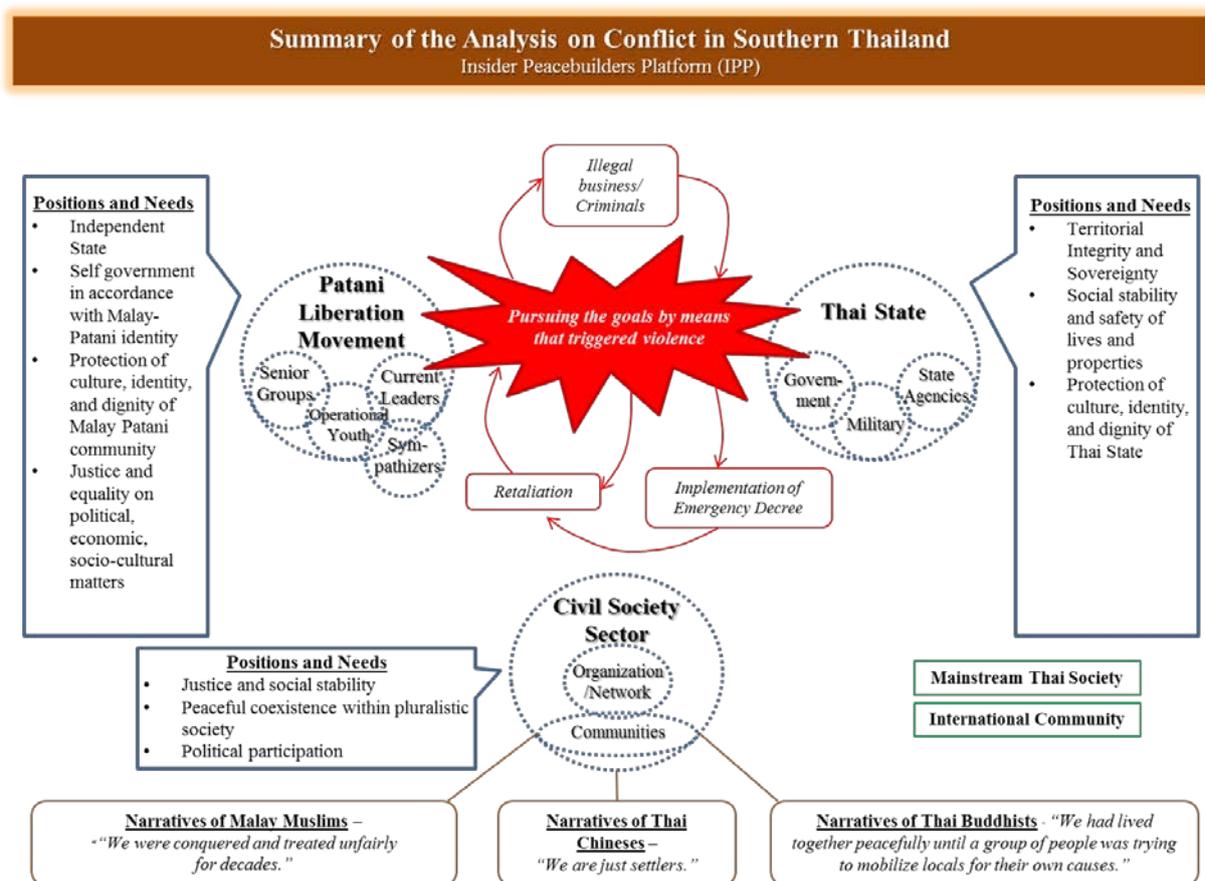
Ambivalent Factors	Peace Promotion Factors	Burdening Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Succession of the Monarchy</u> (18) - <u>Impact of ASEAN</u> (14) - <u>Funding/international support</u> (6) - Malaysian government policy towards the conflict in the Deep South of Thailand (4) - Malaysia’s domestic politics (3) - Role of Indonesia (2) - Role of mass media (2) - Role of political groups in Thailand (1) - Patanian diasporas (1) - Government’s remedy policy (1) - Opening up of Myanmar - People outside the conflict region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>OIC</u> (15) - <u>Peace agreements abroad</u> (Aceh, Timor) (8) - <u>Role of academia in stimulating debates on decentralization</u> (6) - <u>Role of UMNO (United Malays National Organization - the ruling party in Malaysia) as intermediary</u> (6) - International NGOs (4) - UN’s human rights mechanism e.g. OHCHR (3) - Strong people-to-people ties between Malaysia and Southern border provinces (3) - Role of external CSOs to provide dialogue space (2) - Human rights defenders (1) - Decentralization trend in other provinces such as Chiang Mai or Nakhon Ratchasima 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>Incoherence in national security policy</u> (8) - <u>Hardline nationalism ideology</u> (8) - <u>Instability of Thai politics</u> (8) - “Terrorism” discourse (6) - Elite class profits from resources (5) - Factionalism within mass political groups (2) - Lack of confidence in the judicial system (2) - Islam phobia (1) - Conflict between the government and security forces regarding peace talk (1)

One interesting result was that the participants emphasized the influence of the changing international environment and the potential weight of OIC and ASEAN (though the strong positive assessment of the OIC was most likely connected to their actual engagement in the country at the time of the workshop in 2012). Another one was that most of them agreed that

efforts for conflict transformation should be very much envisioned within a larger framework of factors which would influence the situation on the ground anyhow.

The chart below captures some of the essentials of the conflict analysis collectively achieved by the participants. It was used to reflect with them on the next steps in the joint engagement towards conflict transformation. The feedback of the participants which we will summarize in the next section is to a large part related to the fact that the process encouraged a circular perspective on the conflict, i.e. an analysis which reviewed its history, actors, issues and dynamism from different angles, but always with the intention to explore and understand the core drivers and their interaction.

Diagram 8: Summary of the Analysis on Conflict in Southern Thailand



4. Feedbacks from Participants

One year after the start of the IPP we decided in the core team to systematize our reflection on the course of this initiative in the context of an action research project. For this purpose all core team members met periodically in separate sessions to step back and review the development from a critical perspective. This included also a series of interviews with 17 participants outside of the sessions respectively the workshops. The feedback from these

interviews and our participatory observations is summarized in this section according to three levels of reflection: the individual, the interpersonal and the macro-political ones.

Based on in-depth interviews with 17 participants as part of the ongoing action research on the project, changes deriving from the joint learning process can be illustrated at individual, interpersonal, and macro levels. The individual level we have furthermore separated into the three categories of knowledge, attitude and behavior.

Individual Level

A general feedback was that the combination of dialogue and discussion in the mixed group with the introduction and application of conflict analysis tools did work very well. The ground rules introduced by the two main facilitators and their model of fair interaction with each other had created an inspiring and safe environment in which they could express their opinions and difference openly. Several interviewees also mentioned that they had become more tolerant vis-à-vis different opinions during the course of the workshops.

Knowledge – The most basic impact the participants reported, related to their level of knowledge. Most participants agreed that they had gained more knowledge and mentioned apart from the general insights into conflicts and conflict transformation particularly the differences between positions and interests as well as the contrasting narratives on the conflict. Some Thai Buddhists mentioned that they had for the first time realized the strong sentiments among the Malay Muslims for “liberation” and “independence”. Before joining the process, they had thought that such attitudes were only shared by a very small group in the region. Some also mentioned that they had started to look at the media and their often biased information more critically.

A peace activist who had joined the IPP right from the start observed that many participants made use of the series of workshops (which are still going on now) to exchange with the now more familiar participants from different backgrounds latest developments, to share information and to discuss ongoing trends. A similar observation was shared by many interviewees when it came to the start of the official “Peace Dialogue” on February 28, 2013. They mentioned that they had studied over one – two years a problem and a development which suddenly was in the top news and framed in a way which resonated well with their discussions within the IPP. The peace activist went on to say that “this learning process was so lively and dynamic as well as relevant to the current situation that it enabled us to truly understand what was going on in the real world” (Thai Buddhist peace activist, personal communication, 29 April, 2013).

Attitude – The most significant attitudinal changes were reported with respect to individuals coming from very different backgrounds and convictions. Interviewees mentioned that

different opinions they had heard about before, but could not understand, suddenly “made sense”. They were becoming more open to concerns and perspectives of those “who think differently”,^{ix} (Thai Buddhist documentary writer, personal communication, 13 June 2012). A Chinese businessman (personal communication, 26 February 2013) even said that he is so interested to learn more about Patani history that the colleagues at his company were surprised his profound change of attitudes. He went on to say that “my answer on the solution has not changed, but I started to empathize more of other’s concerns.” On the other hand, a Malay Muslim independent scholar (personal communication, 13 June 2012) agreed that “we have moved from our original position.” These changes have led to more acknowledgements on each other’s identity and beliefs. Although it did not mean an agreement, it led to more tolerance (Malay Muslim lawyer, personal communication, 26 February 2013). One of the participants stated that this IPP process “made us realize that actually we can live peacefully with those who are fundamentally different from us” (Malay Muslim youth leader, personal communication, 26 February, 2013). Most importantly, they also realized that in order to reach a sustainable peaceful settlement, a process in which key stakeholders could learn and think collectively are very critical (Malay Muslim community leader, personal communication, 27 June 2012).

Behavior - Considering the atmosphere and the behavior of the participants throughout the process, we observed that the participants were more relaxed and open-minded in comparison to the beginning. The development of personal and trustful relationships was important to the sense of mutual acceptance. It was obvious that in the first workshops hesitation and mistrust among participants were relatively high. Some Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim participants hesitated to sit in the same group and avoided any close interaction. However, after the processes went on, they treated each other with more respect and acknowledgement concerning their differences (Thai Buddhist community leader, personal communication, 11 June 2012).

Eventually, the process created at least among some of the persons from different backgrounds a new set up of common understanding, shared knowledge and beliefs. Nevertheless, in how far this might lead to the formation of a group capable of joint actions remains to be seen.

Interpersonal Level

In the context of decades of violence, the relationship among the communities in the region have become increasingly deteriorated and polarized. A process that could restore and nurture the relationship for positive change and cooperation is, therefore, indispensable. This is one of the goals of the IPP process. According to the interviews, a majority of the participants agreed that the process had encouraged them to interact with each other more thoroughly.

Interaction among IPP participants – The process has brought and kept together “those who could not imagine themselves working side by side,” as a leader of Malay Muslim organization has described it (Malay Muslim community leader, personal communication, 26 June 2012). One of the explanations was that the tools used in the process had set the stage for the participants to look at the conflict primarily from the joint perspective of problem-solving (Thai Buddhist community leader, personal communication, 11 June 2012). As another Thai Buddhist community worker (personal communication, 23 February 2013) elaborated: “at the first contact, I felt excited and confused at the same time meeting with someone who is totally different from me politically and ideologically. I first thought they were extremists and would definitely agree with violence. But after engaging with them throughout the process, I have learnt that actually we could have a common space to share stories and live together.” A former military officer (personal communication, 11 June 2012) went on to say that “although there are still lots of disagreement, the process has made us realize that working together is unavoidable if we want to see a peaceful resolution.”

However, there were also some critical comments relating to the relationship aspect. Some participants thought that the process had not yet been successful in building trust among different ethnic groups. This feeling was common among Thai Buddhist as minority in the region. As a Thai Buddhist politician (personal communication, 13 June 2012) pointed out that “one can see during the breaks that most of us still eat and drink among our group. We hardly mingle with them [Malay Muslims] yet.” Perhaps this was partly due to the fact that we had a smaller proportion of Thai Buddhists in the process comparing with that of Malay Muslims as well as the short duration of each workshop.

Interaction of IPP participants with their own network – A number of participants have applied the tools and the working procedure within their own work. For example, a Malay Muslim activist applied them on her work with prisoners convicted because of their involvement in the insurgency (Malay Muslim human rights activist, personal communication, 29 April 2013). Some Muslim teachers have also introduced the tools such as Actors and Relationship Mapping in seminars of Muslim elementary schools (Malay Muslim youth leader, personal communication, 13 June 2012). Some community leaders have tried to solve community conflicts by using the Position and Interest Analysis tool, e.g. in conflicts on fishery issues. Others have used them in the context of youth and community development work (Malay Muslim former chief of district, personal communication, 13 June 2012). Some of these applications have helped to raise awareness on peace efforts at the grassroots level. Additionally, participants also learnt where they stand in the conflict in relation to others and what their potential role could possibly be if the peace process develops a stronger momentum.

Besides civil society networks, a participant from the military also has applied knowledge and information gained from this process to draft a peace roadmap for southern Thailand with

his colleagues. He stated that “before joining the process, I only thought how we could win the conflict. It is only a tactical perspective. After sharing and learning with other key stakeholders, I have come to a conclusion that such process is essential to support peace process where various actors could talk and discuss a way out with each other (Thai Buddhist military officer, personal communication, 29 April 2013).

Macro-Political Level

Altogether, most participants were confident that the IPP process had created an environment conducive for conflict transformation. They commented that the process had created a common space for people from different background to understand the ongoing conflict and to develop a joint perspective for conflict transformation. They also saw an emerging loose broader network of peace advocacy. Under the current situation of a divided society, having such a space and “sharing our heart in this space” will help to manage fragile situations and nurture hope for peace (Thai Buddhist community worker, personal communication, 23 February 2013). Many participants went back to their networks and shared insights from the process. Through these efforts the IPP became step by step part of the emerging “infrastructure for peace” in the region. In comparison to the drivers of conflict, this infrastructure is still weak and fragile, but the feedback was encouraging to guide the IPP team to broaden and deepen their efforts.

5. Conclusions

The IPP process has helped to create and nurture a mixed group of peacebuilders and stakeholders committed to a peaceful transformation of the Southern Thailand conflict. It grew from about 30 participants to now about 65 persons and was just established in time to support in a critical-constructive manner the Track-1 process which was launched in February 2013. The initiative has confirmed Ricigliano’s hypothesis that informal networks of continuous joint learning and strategizing can be a promising way of improving the effectiveness and complementarity of peaceful social change. It also provided good arguments that working on joint conflict analyses across partisan divisions can enhance the quality of peacebuilding strategies.

The most important lessons learned can be summarized in four points:

1. Like in all other areas of social and political engagements also the peacebuilding field is constituted by a multiplicity of actors who complement, but also compete with each other. To establish an effective, i.e. inclusive network it is important to try to bring all key actors on board and to negotiate a sufficient consensus among them to be part of a joint initiative even if their contributions are different.
2. Joint learning based on sound tools, knowledge and experiences from elsewhere together with good facilitation and a safe environment can not only help to disseminate expertise and skills, but can also help building trust and confidence

among the participants from different conflict-relevant backgrounds. It can even become a good trigger for in-depth dialogues.

3. The most effective peacebuilding work on the track-2 level might be if persons with close affinities to the positions and interests of the key actors on the track-1 level are capable to engage with each other in a way which can outline ways towards effective conflict transformation. This is the reason why we decided to broaden the spectrum of participants to the edges even if this can make the process much more difficult. Working with this group on joint conflict analysis created a promising start, but the key challenges are still ahead.
4. Concerning the organization of the joint learning process our experience is that it is helpful for the participants to shift regularly between modes of work in homogenous and non-homogenous groups (additional to the traditional mode of shifting between plenaries and break-out groups) to broaden their perspectives and at the same time clarify their interests and needs in the conflict context.

With respect to the shortcomings, challenges and open questions we have identified three points:

1. While the IPP initiative has enhanced its outreach over the last two – three years remarkably, it comprises still a limited (approximately 65) number of people though many of them are multipliers and have made use of the IPP insights and tools within their home groups or constituencies. An open question for us is in how far it would be adequate to multiply this type of work in the form of several IPP's or rather to keep the original group together and encourage rather sub-initiatives for different issue-areas.
2. A structural challenge is that the regional majority of the Malay-Muslims is also reflected in the composition of the IPP. But for an effective engagement it is crucial to have a critical mass of Thai-Buddhist and Thai-Chinese participants, particularly from state-based organizations.
3. The shift from the phase of conflict analysis to envisioning and working on conflict transformation has mobilized the IPP participants particularly since there is a track-1 process in place. While this process is still weak and fragile, it has created an expanded public political space in which even former taboo topics like *Merdeka* are articulated openly. The safe space of the IPP is now at least partially also available in the public and has triggered a remarkable politicization in the region while the established Thai political system is still struggling to come to terms with the new situation. The current main challenge for the IPP is therefore how to keep its creative spirit of joint learning and inclusivity while moving towards the process of peace negotiations.



ⁱ The terms “Deep South of Thailand” and “Southern Thailand” are used in this article interchangeable for the region of the three most southern provinces of Thailand, i.e. Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala plus four districts of Songkla province with a Malay-Muslim majority population. Occasionally we will also use the terms *Pattani* (official Thai name) or *Patani* (Malay spelling) for the former Kingdom respectively Sultanate as a name for the overall region. The IPP generated the term *Pat(t)ani* to emphasize the need for an inclusive term acknowledging the multi-cultural character of the region.

ⁱⁱ The group comprised the Center for Conflict Studies and Cultural Diversity (CSCD) and the Institute for Peace Studies (IPS) at Prince of Songkla University (PSU), the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) at Chulalongkorn University, the Peace Information Center (PIC) at Thammasat University, the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, the Office of Peace and Governance at King Prajadhipok’s Institute (KPI), Deep South Watch (DSW), and the Berghof Foundation Liaison Bangkok.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lisa Schirch has recently proposed that the term *lens* might be more adequate than *tools* to emphasize the need for understanding the holistic character of conflict instead of taking it apart (2013, p.24) – a good point. Our experience though is that for a capacity building event the term *tool* has a strong appeal for the participants insofar as their emphasis is on learning.

^{iv} Like in many other similar situations, the terminology on and around the “conflict” (“insurgency” or *khwam mai sangop* = “disturbance” or “unrest”) is contested. We will use the academically widely accepted term conflict.

^v “Narrative” in this joint learning process is defined as collective memories of one particular group of people sharing any given identity. It is a set of stories about the conflict history seen through their respective lenses. These stories lend legitimacy to actions from each side why they decide to do certain things, which include taking up armed struggle or using force to settle conflict. Typically there are at least two perspectives to a narrative. One side features themselves as victims, with numerous grievances while the other would feature how legitimate his/her side is.

^{vi} This term is used differently with respect to the exact definition of “sufficient”. A widely used interpretation is that a majority of all participating conflict groups agrees with an outcome or decision.

^{vii} During the time of the workshop, the peace dialogue process between representatives of Royal Thai Government and BRN (Barisan Revolusi Nasional) has not initiated yet. The General Consensus on Peace Dialogue Process between the two parties was signed later on 28 February 2013.

^{vii} In the systemic discourse these focal points or clusters are also called “centers of gravity” (Schirch, 2013, p. 24) or “attractors” (Coleman, 2011, p.77)

^{vii} The term of “who think differently” is a widely use term in Thai to relate in a polite manner to persons with opposing views.

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