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Facilitating
Local
Initiatives for
Conflict
Transformation

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Joint Learning Exercise of FLICT

Colombo, 21-26 June



JOINT LEARNING EXERCISE
FLICT Steering Committee, Donor Group and Project Unit
 Colombo, 21-26 June 2006

Background and purpose

The idea of a Joint Learning Exercise by the FLICT Project Unit (PU), the Steering Committee (SC) and the Donor Group (DG) emerged end of 2005. It was a response to the recommendation of the Project Review Mission in March 2005 to assess FLICT's progress after one year. Since all the recommendations had been actively taken up by FLICT the Donor Group and the Steering Committee felt that another external review after such a short time would be of little added value. However, all agreed that it was important for the members of DG and SC to get a deeper understanding of the actual challenges and potentials involved in the conflict transformation processes FLICT is supporting.

The main purpose of the review was to draw some inferences about donor engagement supporting civil society, and how best to support local participation. It should help to assess the work of FLICT and to decide on a coherent strategy for the future, being aware of the changing political situation which directly influences FLICT's interventions.

Context

When the joint learning exercise was designed beginning of 2006, the political situation had already deteriorated rapidly. The current security situation now makes it even more difficult for organizations to continue their work especially in the North and East of the country. It has led to temporary suspension of activities by some donor and implementing agencies in these regions and an increase of insecurity could even lead to withdrawal. Since this fact in turn further increases the gap and disparities between the regions, it could be a reason for some to call off their interventions completely.

The changing political situation in the country requires a careful, flexible and adaptable strategy of action, in order to respond to the current needs of Sri Lankan organizations still committed to engage for a sustainable and just peace. Hence, the joint learning exercise also turned out to be an important and timely instrument to stop and reflect on the political situation and its impact on FLICT. How shall and can FLICT react? How important and influential is the current work? Is there anything that has to be changed within FLICT or to be addressed differently by FLICT?

Objectives

1. To better understand FLICT (potentials and challenges)
2. To reflect on the present situation and its implications on FLICT's work
3. To reflect on civil society support in Sri Lanka and "actors" FLICT should work with.

Methodology

The Joint learning exercise was designed so that all members of the SC and DG would be offered the opportunity to meet FLICT partners and get an overall impression of the partner's work and their beneficiaries.¹

¹ See attachment with the list of participants

Additionally a “Think Piece” was commissioned to provide an external analysis of the political context in Sri Lanka since the Ceasefire Agreement in 2002, its influences on the peace work in the country and how donors and civil society respond to the challenging changes. The paper was prepared by Dr. Camilla Orjuela.

The joint learning exercise was held over six days and comprised the following activities:

- 21.06.06** Meeting to settle the parameters of the exercise; including an open discussion on the “Think Piece” and the current political situation
- 22.-23.06.06** SC and DG members participated at FLICT’s Partner Day
- 24.-25.06.06** SC and DG members undertook a field visit to 3 partners in Puttalam.
- 26.06.06** Resume of the lessons learnt about FLICT and development of recommendation for FLICT’s future focus and work

Results and recommendations

The discussions during the six-day-exercise were intensive and rich. Many ideas how to improve and strengthen the work of FLICT have been ventilated and will be taken up by the Project Unit. The following section highlights the most crucial results and recommendations.

1. Implications of the political situation

The current political situation is a major challenge if not obstacle for the peace building community. Within the framework of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) FLICT and many other actors have been able to create a space of exchange and open debate, which is at risk and closing down very rapidly. People are slowly returning to mindsets prevailing before the CFA. It was felt that the most important contribution of FLICT is probably to continue to support and assist partners in their work and to prevent that the situation has a further negative impact on the people’s feelings and mindsets. While it might be difficult for FLICT to achieve all its objectives with the ongoing intense violence, it was felt that it is important to generally continue the work as conceptualized.

- As a political sign it might be important and helpful to secure further donor support to FLICT and herewith for civil society
- The widened gap between civil society and the state has to be addressed as well. Closer cooperation between FLICT and its Counter Ministry for Constitutional Affairs and National Integration was recommended and agreed with the Ministry.

2. Concept and Focus Areas of FLICT

The most striking shortcoming throughout the period of the Ceasefire Agreement seems to be the complete lack of structural changes. On the political level no agreement on structural changes could be reached and on grass roots level the results and impacts of conflict transformation work have not materialized in major changes either. As has been pointed out at earlier FLICT review missions, the latter is partly due to the way many conflict transformation projects have been conceptualized.

Altogether, this reconfirmed the revision of the FLICT concept in the course of last year. It was felt that FLICT has now conceptually a strong and solid base to work towards structural changes. It will remain a challenge to see how changes on grass root level can also impact on macro level. Rather than further changing the concept or engaging in new activities and new fields it was recommended that FLICT should ‘remain true to it-self’ and believe in its long term results. This also implies that focus areas should be kept as they are even though the partner

day and the field visit made evident that the outcomes to be achieved on the beneficiary level are very ambitious. It was further recommended to

- Support within focus area 2 as much as possible space and processes that allow partner organizations and people to stay in contact and exchange across the divide
- Support within focus area 3 human rights work that goes beyond the documentation of violations and ensures sustainability of the efforts.

3. Capacity building of partner organisations

The need for capacity building in the field of conflict transformation and organizational development has been widely underestimated by many donor and implementing agencies. FLICT's greater engagement in building local capacities through the training of a decentralized consultant pool was acknowledged as an important contribution. It has to be the starting point for further engagement with the partner organizations. It was noted that the partner organizations have a very diverse understanding of conflict transformation. In a few cases the real commitment to peace and non-violence was even questioned. Many of the partner organizations lack professionalism in their organizational and conceptual self- presentation. Against this background it was especially recommended to

- Develop a strategy to bring partners to a shared level of understanding on conflict transformation and FLICT focus areas within this framework.

4. National reach and variety of partners

Especially Partner Day gave a good impression of the nation wide outreach FLICT has achieved. Partners as well as many other stakeholders in Sri Lanka give FLICT special credit and recognition for this island wide operation and network of diversified groups at grassroots level. This implies also a lot of challenges (see also sections on monitoring and networking). It was generally felt FLICT should build on this network but be aware that the existence of partners from all over the country do not yet assure better understanding among each other or cooperation. As Partner Day has shown many efforts have to be made to ensure that organizations really use this platform for strategic alliances.

- The real added value of a wide outreach lies in strategic networking among these partners. FLICT should now concentrate more on strategic alliances than on covering initiatives from all over the country.
- It has to remain a constant question within FLICT whether we are working with the 'correct' partners, drivers and mechanisms to bring about desired change. It was strongly recommended to strengthen strategic alliances of FLICT and its partners with the Counterpart Ministry and state institutions.

5. Networking and "localization"

The challenges of networking became very obvious: Even after having attended Partner Day the three organizations working in Puttalam district (visited in the context of the joint learning exercise) still did not know about each others work. Partner Day also revealed many limitations in this context. FLICT was therefore advised to "localize" its work more.

- Facilitate further networking among partners but concentrate on smaller, more effective regional and local networks first in order to be gradually strengthened. Support them to also address intra-ethnic divides and fractions within groups

- Develop with partners and stakeholders in a selected region (e.g. Puttalam) a pilot strategy for the region with a local networking process and show changes and results achieved on the local level.
- Strengthen issue based alliances and networks linked to priorities within focus areas (e.g. language, human rights etc)
- Rethink Partner Day and articulate changes that FLICT wants to achieve through it.

6. Monitoring and Appraisal Mechanisms

The monitoring of the great amount of different initiatives all over the country by a small Project Unit that still awaits the support of the currently trained consultant pool has been recognized as a tremendous challenge with flaws. The following was strongly recommended:

- It is very important to have convincing stories about impacts. Ensure with partners the demonstration of practical results – how are we making a difference?
- Identify really capable partners and give them maximum support and assistance
- Develop mechanisms to check on partner's commitment to peace

7. Work of Project Unit

Dedication and conceptual strength of the work of the Project Unit were acknowledged. At the same time there was great concern that the PU is overloaded and trying to do too much. It was recommended to

- Have appropriate staffing while not expanding but rather reducing the tasks
- 'Go deeper than broader' in the outreach. While it is important to have a critical mass of projects, FLICT should now concentrate on the increase of quality of selected partners and networks with great potential
- Take the above recommendations to focus even more on actual changes and concentrate with partners on addressing structural root causes

8. FLICT approach and 'institution'

It was commended that the work of FLICT has always been understood as a continuous learning process that requires critical thinking and feedback. The open and critical engagement of donors and steering committee as well as a committed project unit that remains open to challenge and responsive to change makes the continuous process of refinement possible. It was agreed among all representatives that it is important to

- Continue the introspective and self critical learning approach
- Continue to build on lessons learnt to strengthen the approaches by different partners and FLICT and disseminate outcomes and experiences.
- Attract other donors to take part in this joint work with FLICT. Especially with DFID and DANIDA leaving in the course of the next year, it would be good to have others joining the group.
- Start reflecting on the future options of and for FLICT. The questions need to be addressed whether and how the work of FLICT should or could be institutionalised independently from GTZ.

Annex: Participants of the Joint Learning Exercise 21-26, June 2006

I FLICT Steering Committee

Current members:

1. *Ms. Malkanthi Wickremesinghe/ Mr. N.Bambaravanage (Secretary/Additional Secretary of Ministry for Constitutional Affairs and National Integration)*
2. *Ms. Kumudhini Rosa (Consultant, Development Cooperation)*
3. *Ms. Jezima Ismail (Director MWRAF, NGO Activist)*
4. *Mr. Sunil Bastian (Research Fellow, ICES)*
5. *Mr. Suresh Sha (Director Lion Brewery Ceylon Ltd/Ceylon Chamber of Commerce)*
6. *Mr. P. Singham (Chairman, SEED Vavuniya)*

Suggested new members

7. *Ms. Creseeda Senanayake – (NGO Activist)*
8. *Mr. M.C. M. Iqbal (Consultant - Human Rights Commission)*

II FLICT Donor Group

9. *Ms. Toni Michelsen (Minister Counsellor, DANIDA)*
10. *Mr. Andreas Hartmann (Counsellor Economic Coop. & Development, German Embassy)*
11. *Mr. Thomas Beloe (Social Development Adviser, DFID)*
12. *Ms. Dulani Sirisena (Political & Development Section, British High Commission/DFID)*
13. *Mr. John Culley (Political & Development Section, British High Commission/DFID)*
14. *Ms. Sundari Jayasuriya (Senior Program Officer, AusAID)*
15. *Mr. Dustan Fernando (Senior Program Coordinator, AusAID)*
16. *Mr. Alex Knox (Development Program Specialist, AusAID)*

III FLICT Project Unit

17. *Mr. Wijaya Jayatilika (National Coordinator)*
18. *Ms Stephanie Schell-Faucon (Senior Advisor)*
19. *Mr. Mohan Anthonpillai (Programme Officer)*
20. *Ms. Sutheshna Koodeswaran (Programme Officer)*
21. *Mr. Sumedha de Silva (Programme Officer)*
22. *Ms. Marisa Fernando (Programme Officer)*

Facilitation:

Ms. Sushma Bajrachariya (GTZ-FSCT Batticaloa)

Reporting

Ms. Maria Prada (FLICT intern)