

Untying the Gordian Knot: ICT for Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding

Sanjana Hattotuwa

June 2004

Introduction and scope of study

Information Communications Technology (ICT) in South Asia, as well as in the rest of the world, is an experiment in progress. Reading the wealth of literature on ICT, it is easy to forget that it is not a panacea for problems facing developing nations. Normative assumptions about ICT tend in most cases to outstrip knowledge of how technology is actually used¹. ICTs cannot magically liberate people, alleviate poverty, erase the 'digital divide'², and ensure prosperity. Much of the literature written on ICT does not treat it as one factor amidst a myriad of others that shape inter-state and intra-state relations in developing countries. Furthermore, in planning for and using ICT, many countries often concentrate on the intervention itself, rather than what they want to accomplish through it. It must be remembered that ICT is a means to an end, not an end in itself³.

This study will concentrate on the increasing confluence between ICT, conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Case studies in this field are rare, since synergies between these fields are still at an embryonic stage. The proposed study will examine Info Share, an ICT initiative in Sri Lanka that is involved in the peace process, as an on-going experiment in the use of these radical new technologies to augment traditional conflict transformation techniques on the ground to help strengthen an on-going peace process.

¹ See Mahony, Siobhan and Barley, Stephen R., [Do Digital Telecommunications Affect Work and Organization? The State of Our Knowledge](#), *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, 1999.

² There has always been a gap between those people and communities who can make effective use of information technology and those who cannot. Now, more than ever, unequal adoption of technology excludes many from reaping the fruits of the economy. This study uses the term "digital divide" to refer to this gap between those who can effectively use new information and communication tools, such as the Internet, and those who cannot. While a consensus does not exist on the extent of the divide (and whether the divide is growing or narrowing), researchers are nearly unanimous in acknowledging that some sort of divide exists at this point in time. See <http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org/content/sections/index.cfm?key=2>

³ I have argued elsewhere that enthusiasm about ICT must not lead to the belief that it is the panacea that addresses the deep seated structural problems of countries coming out of protracted ethno-political conflict. See www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/Online_advocacy_principles_and_case_studies.pdf.

Peacebuilding processes could be greatly strengthened if organisations, peoples and regions are connected in effective multi-sectoral and peace building networks and provided with active and open knowledge banks - with instant access to effective peace building approaches and case studies. By building local, regional and national peacebuilding networks between and within government, local authorities, political stakeholders, civil society and international support and resource institutions, ICT has the potential to shape powerful conflict transformation partnerships.

The proposed study will be a critical exploration of the underlying assumptions of the creative use of ICT in peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes to encourage holistic peace building practices that in turn lead to a just and lasting peace. In doing so, this paper will also examine conflict transformation as the necessary bedrock for successful peacebuilding interventions using ICT.

Lastly, the study will acknowledge the limitations of using ICT and argue that used in isolation and without any supporting structures and holistic frameworks necessary for facilitating conflict transformation - the success of ICT interventions will be undermined and might even serve to exacerbate existing conflicts by creating new rifts within and between communities.

However, this study will not examine concepts of 'Netwar' (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1996) - the appropriation of new technologies by non-state actors for acts of terrorism - or the broader arguments of using technology for social development. There is also inadequate space to discuss fully the ways in which technology is being appropriated by societal forces who act as spoilers in a peace process. One recalls the statement of Kofi Anan, who said that "The same Internet that has facilitated the spread of human rights and good governance norms has also been a conduit for propagating intolerance and has diffused information necessary for building weapons of terror."⁴

The author is cognisant of these lacunae, and submits that a fuller understanding of the complexities of developing a new paradigm of peacebuilding using ICT dictates that further research in this area is vital.

⁴ Kofi Annan, "The Work of the Organization", A/54/1; para. 254

Conflict Transformation

“Somewhere between the Scylla of hypocrisy and the Charybdis of impotence lies the realm of the politically possible”

Kevin Clements⁵

Contemporary intra-state conflicts do not lend themselves to easy analysis. The multi-faceted nature of protracted ethno-political conflict, the structural underpinnings that both gave rise to it and are transformed by it and the resulting upheaval of societies and the complex political emergencies that it engenders are interwoven in a complex mesh of inter-related dynamics in constant flux. The sheer complexity of these situations goes beyond the capacity of traditional theories of conflict resolution to explain, explore or critique.

Contemporary conflicts cross repeatedly into cycles of violence and cycles of peacebuilding. This exhausting cycle breeds a vicious process which often saps the life energies of peoples, economies and states. Importantly, contemporary conflict also involves far more than two actors - ‘win-win’ outcomes are made meaningless on the ground, where, *inter alia*, marginalised voices in peace processes often act as spoilers to ceasefire and peace agreements between the key actors in the conflict, thereby creating added complexities in the journey towards a just and lasting peace.

The art of the possible, in countries in the throes of, or coming out of violent conflict, is often determined by inter-linkages between traditional seats of power and their contestation by new societal forces. The complexity of mapping these forces in order to draw up holistic interventions for peacebuilding is not an easy task. Too often, stale theories and imported ‘experts’ erroneously determine the contours of conflict, thereby inadvertently sowing seeds for exacerbating existing conflict, or creating new schisms between and within social groups that may give rise to instability in the future.

As Clements (2003: 6) notes “stable peace, by which is meant the persistence of non-violent cooperative relationships through time cannot be delivered simply by addressing the presenting tension, contradiction, disputes and manifestation of violence. There is a need for much deeper and shared analysis... about the underlying structural sources of the conflict”.

It is to this endeavour that we shall address our minds now.

⁵ Clements, 2003: 3

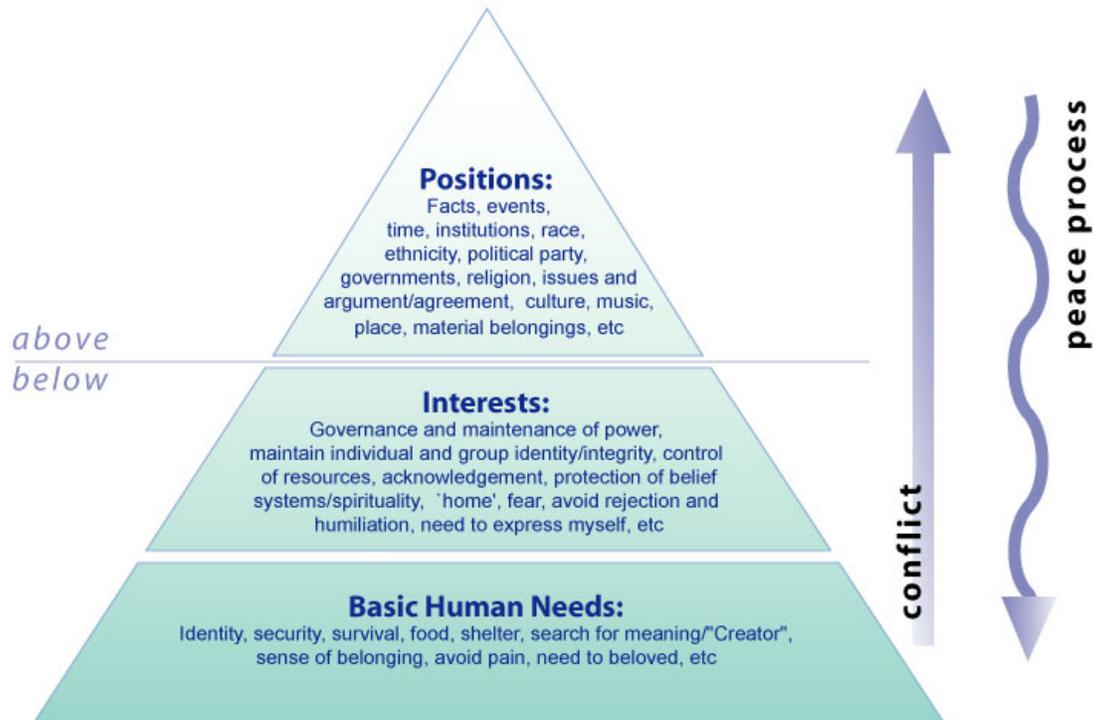


Figure 1

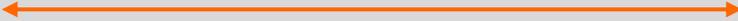
For the purposes of this paper, it is important to distinguish conflict transformation from other, related, approaches like conflict resolution and conflict management. Essentially, all three deal with the problematic pictured in Figure 1 (inspired, in part, by Lederach's (1997: 39) conflict triangle). Violent conflict is often not the result of a monocausal event or trigger, but is rather the inability of a society (or the failure of a State) to address the basic human needs and the interests and aspirations of all its constituent peoples, ethnicities and groups. These exclusions, in turn, lead to increasingly belligerent positions of marginalised and alienated groups, who over a period of time, may take up arms, in the face of constant marginalisation, in order to further their aspirations. However, while violent conflict can be viewed as a result of an inevitable and gradual hardening of positions, peace processes are relatively more complex. Addressing grievances and nurturing reconciliation is a multi-faceted and difficult process, where levels of violence may, perversely, increase (in the short-term to medium term) the closer one is to agreement, and where agreement itself is no guarantee against the re-emergence of violent conflict.

Those who espouse conflict management see violent conflict arising out of existing institutions, which in turn are based on historical relationships which are often inequitable, alienating and marginalise sizeable segments of polity and society. The resolution of such deep seated conflict, and the propensity for violence that it generates, is seen as unrealistic. As such, conflict management concerns itself with the design of appropriate institutions and channels

which serve to defray inherent tensions in societies and prevent them from erupting into violence, and also by trying to cajole powerful actors and stakeholders, having the necessary power and resources, to bring pressure on conflicting parties to resolve their differences and settle disputes constructively. (Miall, 2003: 20, Reimann, 2003: 1-2)

The corpus of conflict resolution literature argues that it is possible to transcend conflict, if parties can be helped to analyse, explore, question and then reframe their interests and positions. The aim of conflict resolution is to move away from despairingly ossified interests and positions of parties, towards constructive outcomes by processes where third parties - ‘impartial’ outsiders - play a catalytic role in helping replace mutual antagonism by new ways of thinking and the creation of new relationships that transcend old stereotypes and barriers (Azar and Burton, 1986: 1).

Adopted from Reimann (2003: 6), the following table broadly shows the three main levels between and within which processes of conflict resolution, conflict management and conflict transformation take place, and how ICT can link them.

	Track One	Track Two	Track Three
Actors involved	Political and military leaders as mediators and / or representatives of conflict parties	From private individuals, academics / professionals to international and local non-governmental organisations involved in conflict transformation	From local grassroots organisations to local and international development agencies, human rights organisations and humanitarian assistance
 ICT interventions can cut across Track One to Track Three, creating networks and channels of communications that are secure, and allow for a greater degree of participation, accountability and transparency in each level.			

While it can be argued that conflict management has an emphasis on the Track One level to transform violent conflict, and conflict resolution expands the theatre to processes on both Track One and Track Two, both conflict resolution and conflict management ignore Track Three actors, and under estimate the value of a holistic outlook towards peacebuilding that encompasses Tracks One to Three.

Viewed with this lens, “conflict transformation is therefore a process of engaging with and transformation relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of

society that supports the continuations of violent conflict” (Miall, 2003: 3). Thus, while conflict transformation recognises that violent conflicts take time to transform, it problematises and also calls for a radical deconstruction of the status quo - recognising that institutions, systems and frameworks which breed grievances need to be altered to accommodate diversity and become inclusive and participatory.

Galtung’s work in this area lays the foundation for much of the present thinking (Galtung, 1996: 70 - 126), but Curle (1971) and Azar (1990) have also contributed to the intellectual rigour of conflict transformation as a way of approaching conflict and designing peacebuilding interventions. Vayrynen (1991: 1-25) is useful for his classification of various levels of conflict transformations that are possible. Vayrynen argues against a theory of conflict that gives primacy to settlements, stressing the importance of recognising the transformation of conflicts in dynamic terms:

“The bulk of conflict theory regards the issues, actors and interests as given and on that basis makes efforts to find a solution to militate or eliminate contradictions between them. Yet the issues, actors and interests change over time as a consequence of the social, economic and political dynamics of societies.” (Vayrynen, 1991: 4) His approach, lends itself as a powerful argument for the use of ICT interventions in peacebuilding, which energise the creative dynamics of societies to fully engage with the paradigm shifts necessary for visioning a future State after protracted conflict. **ICT does not promise a goal, it fertilises the process of peacebuilding itself.** As Vayrynen points out repeatedly, subtle changes in the socio-political fabric of society can lead to the creation of a new rubric of ethno-political relations that does not resort to violence to address legitimate grievances. ICT can engender these subtle changes.

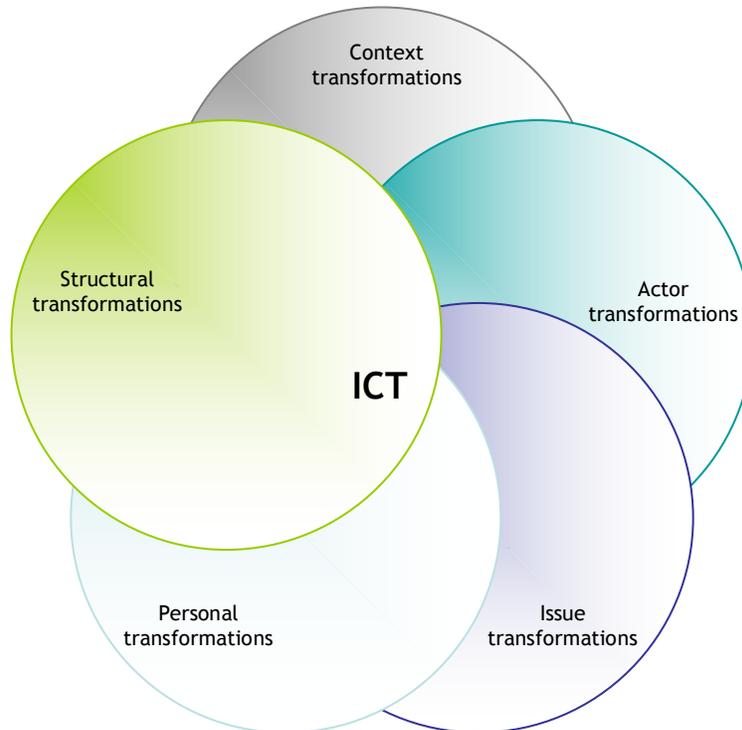
Miall (2003: 7-8) expands Vayrynen’s approach, and identifies five types of transformations (or transformers) that this study submits can form the core areas in which ICT can best used in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Context transformations	Changes in the context of conflict that may radically alter each party's perception of the conflict situation, as well as their motives.
Structural transformations	Changes in the basic structure of the conflict, that is to the set of actors, issues and incompatible goals, conflicting beliefs or relationships, or to the society, economy or state within which the conflict is embedded.
Actor transformations	Decisions on the part of actors to change their goals or alter their general approach to conflict.
Issue transformations	Changes in positions that parties take on key issues at the heart of the conflict as well as the way in which parties redefine or reframe those positions in order to reach compromises or resolutions.
Personal / elite transformations	Personal changes of heart or mind within individual leaders or small groups with decision making power at critical moments.

The timing and coordination of these transformers are crucial - Fisher and Keasly (1991) point towards the need to give adequate impetus and a sustainable momentum to these transformers if they are to be successful in creatively address and mitigate violent conflict.

It is interesting to note that this is precisely why interaction in virtual spaces can be seen as important - even when meetings between key protagonists cannot be accommodated in the real world, virtual interactions using ICTs can help sustain and nourish processes of conflict transformation.

Thus, the centrality of ICT interventions in peacebuilding can be shown as follows:



It is difficult to under-estimate the value of a well designed ICT intervention that allows for stakeholders to communicate in a sustained and transformative manner within and between each of these areas. Transformations do not exist in ether, and have no life of their own. ICT can help revitalize stagnant dialogues and help sustain difficult process of conflict transformation by providing the spaces for sustained dialogue even when Track One processes have run aground.

Full-field Peacebuilding and ICT

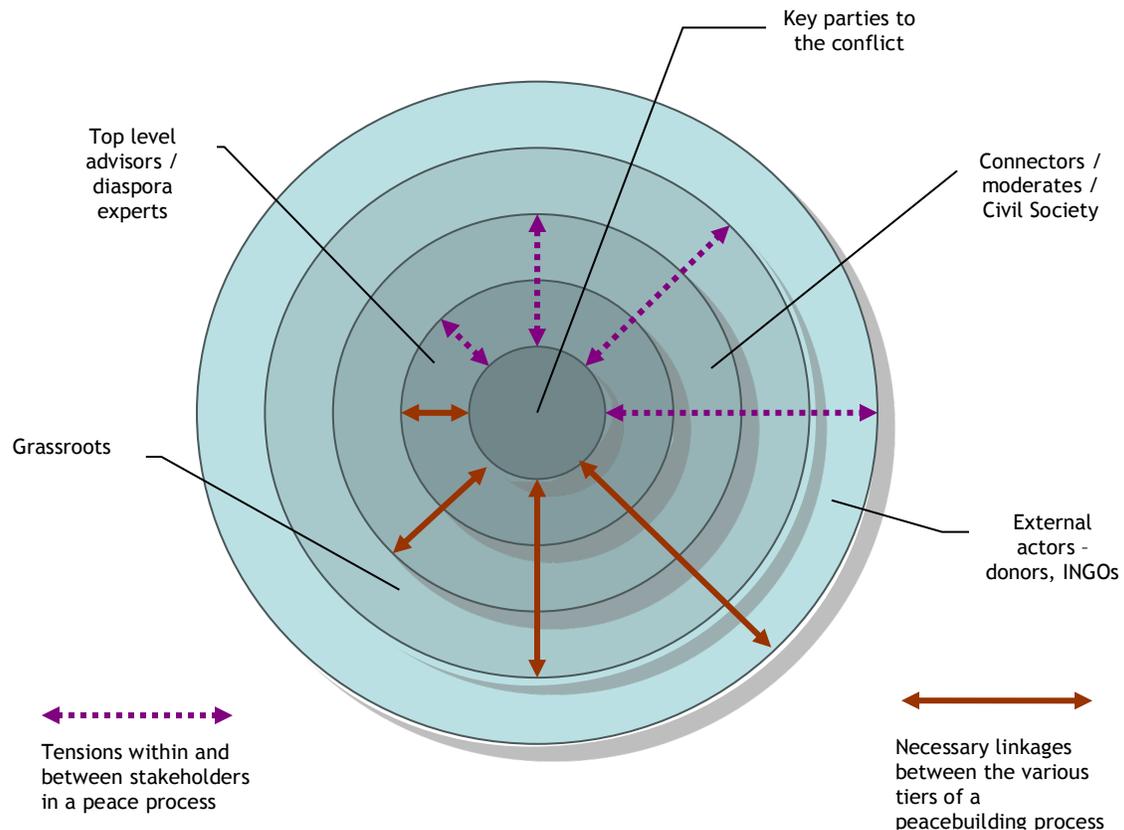
The term is inspired by Prof. Ron Kraybill⁶, who in a yet unpublished manuscript shared with the author, uses it to problematise traditional approaches to peacebuilding, which he argues are inadequate to map effectively the complexities of addressing the resulting chaos of protracted ethno-political conflict. Kraybill argues that for successful conflict transformation, a map of the geo-political terrain, of the social dynamics of the conflict and the multi-faceted relationships within and between its actors and stakeholders is necessary. It of course not argued that any single organisation or individual undertakes all of the activities thus mapped out. However, Kraybill submits that a holistic approach to peacebuilding requires as detailed a map as possible of the multiple tiers of conflict transformation - the dialogues, the interventions, the tensions, the linkages, the loopholes, the caveats and the possibilities of a particular peacebuilding process are only evident if a comprehensive macro, meso and micro level map of peacebuilding is drawn, and is continually revised and updated.

Of course, these perspectives and overarching maps need to be then broken down into many others, depending on one's particular strengths and particular interventions. One must also be deeply cognisant of the fact that just as top level State and non-State actors at the negotiating table have serious differences within their own ranks, all of the other actors and stakeholders in a peacebuilding process have many different facets to their policies of engagement and interventions and internal tensions with their own constituencies to address.

Central to the approach of 'full-field peacebuilding' is the conviction that actors and institutions in a process of conflict transformation interact and co-exist in a vigorous dynamic of interacting interests. Figure 2 tries to map out these interacting fields, captured in the Central American phrase - *red* (inter-dependent and inter-woven mesh or net), endeavouring in turn to take societies out of the *enredado* (tangled or caught in a net) of violent conflict (see Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, 2003: 157).

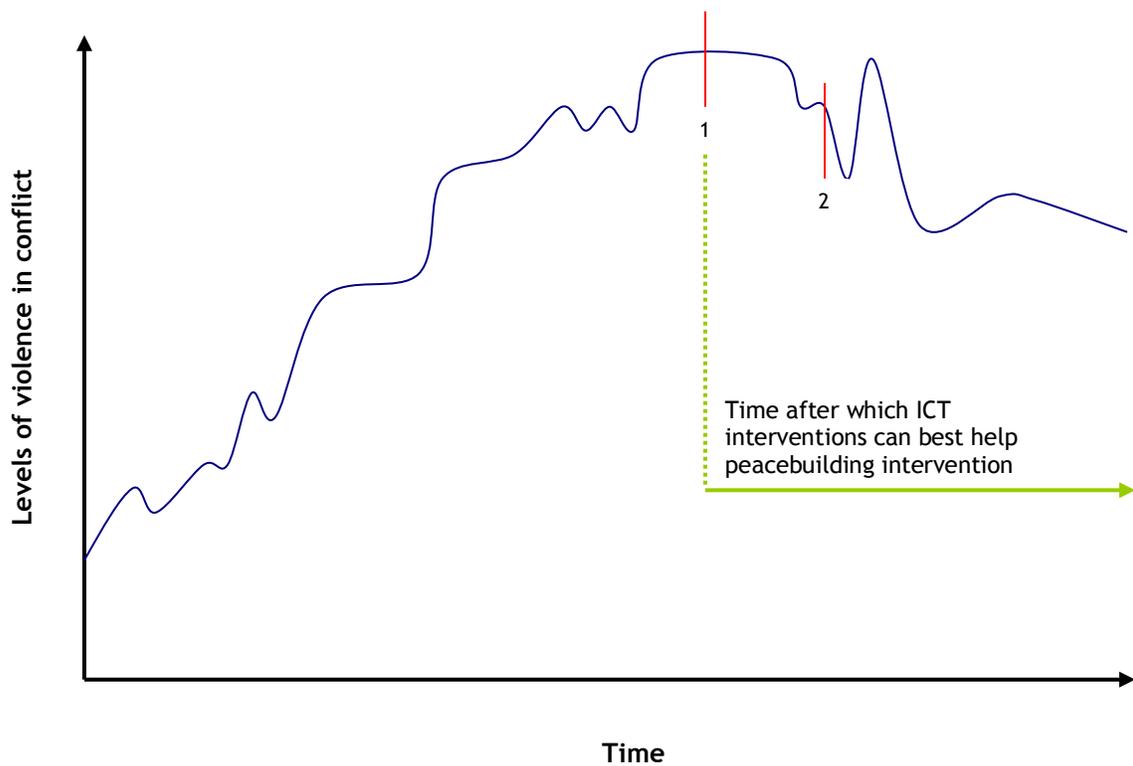
⁶ Ron Kraybill is an associate professor in the Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University. He formerly served as director of training at the Centre for Conflict resolution in Cape Town, South Africa, and as director of the Mennonite Conciliation Service in North America. He holds a Ph.D. in religious studies from the University of Cape own and has published numerous books, essays, and training manuals on mediation, facilitation, and conflict transformation. See <http://www.emu.edu/humanresources/personnel/bios/kraybilr.html> for a brief biography.

Full-field peacebuilding - Figure 2



As Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (2003: 158) point out, “this broad view of conflict transformation is necessary to correct the misperception that conflict resolution rests on an assumption of harmony of interests between actors, and that third party mediators can settle conflicts by appealing to the reason or underlying humanity of the parties’ interests, goals or self-definitions”.

The possibilities of using ICT for peacebuilding dovetails seamlessly into this definition of conflict transformation, since it can augment the efforts of peacebuilders by enhancing channels, avenues and possibilities for communication, information and knowledge sharing, collaboration, empowerment and discussion in virtual spaces, even when physical, real world meetings are impossible on account of geographical distance or political sensitivities.



Conflict and ICT - Figure 3

Point 1 in Figure 3 signifies the signing of a ceasefire agreement, while Point 2 signifies a peace agreement. As the diagram tries to show, ceasefires and peace agreements are in themselves, no guarantee of a sustainable and rapid reduction in levels of violence. This begs the question - is there a 'ripe moment' for the use of ICT in peacebuilding? (see Zartman, ed., 1996:18, Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, 2003: 162 - 163)

This study submits that there is rarely, if ever, a 'ripe moment' for any intervention in peace processes. Instead, conflict transformation stresses that an holistic and multi-track approach to peacebuilding, addressing the 'root causes', relying on interventions by different actors on different levels (see also Rupesinghe, 1996) can help transform the violent dynamics of conflict by teasing out creative approaches to resolving them.

However, this study also submits that given the morass of issues that weigh upon societies enmeshed in conflict, ICT interventions can have more impact when used for peacebuilding after a ceasefire agreement or peace agreement, when the dynamics on the ground are relatively more receptive on the need for sharing information, collaborating, appropriating technology and developing mechanisms (both physical and virtual) for communities and peoples to deal with conflict creatively and non-violently.

Needless to say, to transform conflict and address the structural inequalities of ethnicised conflicts in particular, is a long drawn out task, but one that ICT lends itself to, as we shall explore in the following section.

Information Communications Technology (ICT)

Most definitions of ICT ignore major challenges facing developing nations entering the ‘information society’ and ‘knowledge economy’. Many countries in South Asia are racked by internal conflict, border disputes and are economically under-developed, socially fragmented and very often, politically weak. While most definitions of ICTs come from countries where the exercise of nation building is complete, ICTs are an intrinsic part of the nation building exercise in South Asia, and do not stand apart from it. As such, ICTs are actually part of the complex web of inequalities and social disparities that continue to be the source of conflict in South Asia⁷. Furthermore, any study of ICT and peace building also has to address the questions of appropriation and access to the relevant technologies and whether ICT interventions, however well intentioned, may actually serve to exacerbate existing fault-lines within and between ethnic groups and communities. As Dijk (1999: 3) asks, “can technology be developed in socially sensitive ways?”

As quoted in Dijk (1999: 83), to some, “ICT is a *technology of freedom* since it enhances the freedom of choice for individuals and intensifies bottom-up relations in networks of organisations and individuals (Pool, 1983). Others claim that, since the design and introduction of ICTs are determined by leaders in governments, public administrations... and other organisations, it is primarily a technology of... surveillance and control (Burnham 1983, Loudon 1986, Gandy 1994, Zuurmond 1994)”.

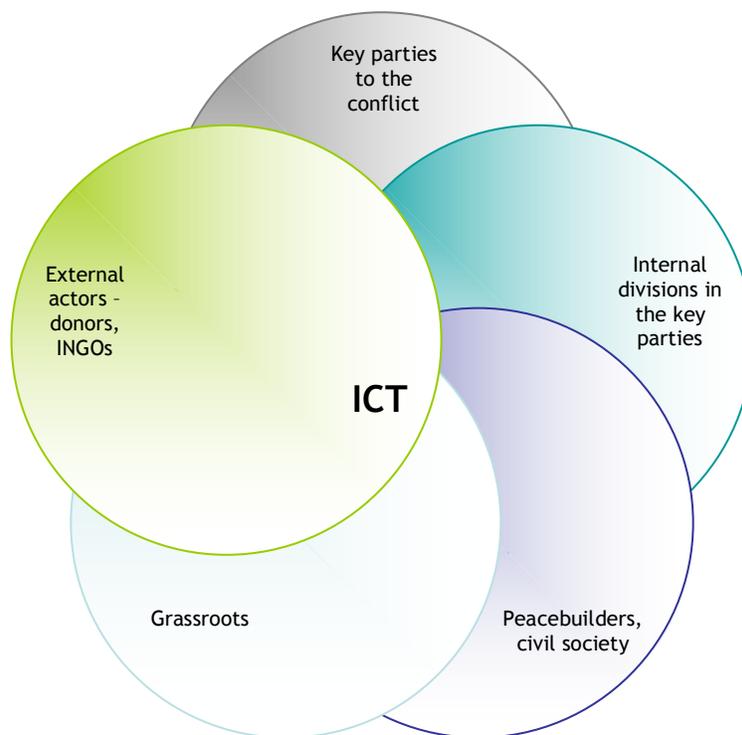
This paper submits that ICT, in the context of peacebuilding, is the use of enabling technologies to augment existing stakeholder interventions, enable hitherto marginalised actors to participate more fully in peacebuilding processes, empower grassroots communities and bring cohesion to the incredible range of activities on multiple tiers that are an intrinsic part of full-field peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

⁷ See Hattotuwa, Sanjana “Online advocacy principles and case studies within the context of ICT and Conflict Transformation”, 2003, pgs. 10 - 11, available online at www.cpalanka.org/research_papers/Online_advocacy_principles_and_case_studies.pdf

However, computers and internet connections are insufficient if the technology is not used effectively because it is not affordable, if people are discouraged from using it or if local economies and patterns of access cannot sustain long term application.

This is precisely why ICT will play, for the foreseeable future, a role limited to complementing interventions by other stakeholders working on the ground to resolve conflict. However, the converse also holds true. Recognition of the immense potential of ICT and developing inclusive, participatory long-term plans to expand existing access to ICT interventions can help those who have traditionally been excluded from developmental processes to take part in the exercise of nation building.

ICT in Peacebuilding - Figure 4



The translucent nature of Figure 3 is intended to show the constant cross-fertilisation and confluence of the various facets of peacebuilding, and also the centrality of a well planned ICT initiative, which can cut across and link the many facets of peacebuilding. ICT interventions

used in conflict transformation can integrate and connect stakeholders in each village, city, region, or sector in the country, into multi-sector and holistic peacebuilding processes that are flexible, continuously updated and instantly accessible by all stakeholders.

However, ICT in peacebuilding should not only enable stakeholders to exchange information but also address the positions of major stakeholders in a peace process - their interests and the basic human needs that underpin them.

This study argues that the defining characteristic of ICT in peacebuilding is that it enables information flows that not only radically subvert existing patterns of knowledge flows and power centres, but in empowering organisations, groups and individuals to produce and share information between other (and within sectors), helps bring a greater degree of cohesion, transparency and accountability to processes of conflict transformation that were hitherto unthinkable.

Track III / Grassroots and ICT interventions

One of the questions that invariably get raised in relation to ICTs is the inclusion of grassroots communities. Any inclusion of the grassroots in a viable, meaningful manner is thought to be unrealistic by some for a multitude of reasons - ranging from lack of ICT knowledge and hardware to inadequate internet connectivity. However, successful ICT interventions can address these problems to an appreciable degree through the proper engagement of key donors, stakeholders and grassroots communities themselves. The problem is, often, not a lack of resources for enabling the rural communities, but rather a lack of a viable blueprint for mobilizing and persuading key stakeholders of the development process or conflict transformation process; especially the donor community and the grassroots themselves. As was flagged earlier in this study, ICT are but one facet of a larger map of conflict transformation, and can only be useful in so far as they link up the various tiers of a peacebuilding process, from Track Three (the grassroots) to Track One (State and Non-State actors). **To not engage and empower grassroots communities to appropriate new technologies is to perhaps seriously undermine the potential of ICT for peacebuilding.**

However, we must also be cognisant on the need to problematise issues of appropriation and empowerment. Recognising that technology is hardly, if ever, value neutral, its appropriation is very often deeply political. For instance, ICT interventions in peacebuilding may run aground if the technologies are appropriated by spoiler mechanisms to then derail a peace process.

Thus, while it is important to give due recognition to the importance of empowering local communities, issues of mediated knowledge transfers using ICT in peacebuilding interventions requires a fine understanding of the underlying societal tensions in a particular society, region and country, if one is to consciously avoid the very opposite of what one hopes to achieve by linking stakeholders into collaborative networks⁸.

Challenges & Future for ICT in Peacebuilding

ICT has a phenomenal potential to augment the interventions of individuals and State, NGO, INGO and non-State actors in many areas of a peacebuilding process, including, but not limited to humanitarian relief and development; rebuilding trust between communities; creating dialogue within and between ethnic groups; giving voice to marginalised communities and groups; enabling grassroots participation in the dialogues related to peacebuilding; buttressing the interventions of organisations involved in peacebuilding in their respective fields of interest; geo-spatially mapping peacebuilding interventions, their outcomes and impact; engendering greater collaboration between donors involved in reconstruction and rebuilding; reintegrating IDPs and refugees; processes of reconciliation and also in drawing the social and constitutional contours of a future state.

And yet, one of the major factors which discourages the current users from more widely and regularly using the ICTs are the high capital and recurrent costs. The high telecommunications rates in Sri Lanka, and in many other places in the world, especially in South Asia, inhibit the sustained use of ICT.

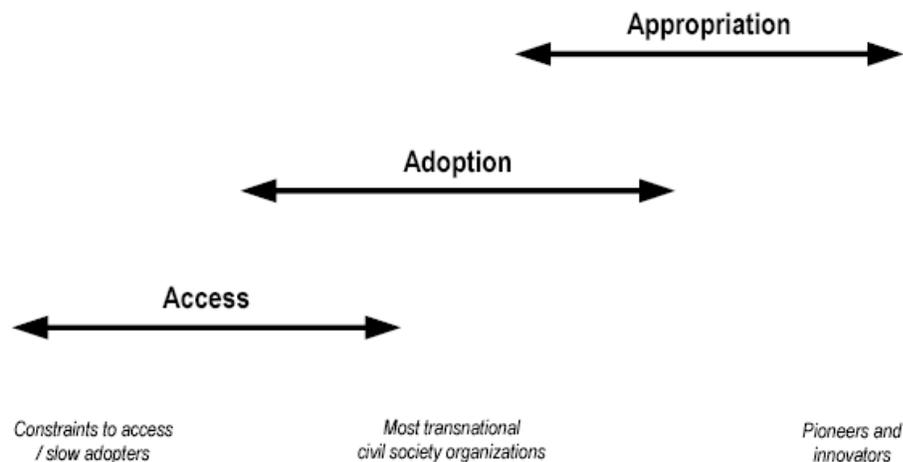
Furthermore, this paper submits there are several other key challenges that any ICT for peacebuilding intervention has to address:

- **Appropriation:** This study submits that the strategic use of ICT, where organisations use ICT interventions to seamlessly dovetail with and strengthen their existing (and planned) interventions on the ground, is pivotal to the success of the technologies in the theatres of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

⁸ The problems that NGOs encounter in using ICT are serious and form a familiar litany: lack of funding to purchase equipment or services, lack of skilled staff, too little time and interest. We must not forget that the majority of NGOs in South Asian countries by all accounts appear not to have computers, though this will undoubtedly change in the future. There are also other problems not immediately associated with the introduction of ICT to NGOs. The need for computers, bandwidth and skilled staff affects the budgetary structure of NGOs, and raises new workplace and accountability issues. Web sites are often carelessly designed, yet they are increasingly becoming the representation of an organization to the outside world. Thus while it is true that NGOs' functions significantly involve information, communication and networking, it does not follow that these functions will necessarily be improved by using ICTs.

The diagram below, inspired by Surman and Reilly (2003: 10), shows that the use of ICT is best engendered by pioneers, who **appropriate** technologies to best fit the dynamics of a particular geo-political terrain.

There is a need to further explore and problematise the often unquestioned assumption that access to technology automatically ensures its adoption and then leads to its appropriation by relevant stakeholders.



- **Equity / Inclusivity:** The biggest challenge to the strategic use of networking technologies and ICT remains one of equity. ICTs promise - and sometimes deliver - the inclusion of marginalised voices. Yet there is a need for more conscious and concerted attempts to develop an ICT paradigm that fully recognises the importance of empowering as many stakeholders as possible to have a voice in peacebuilding processes.

The lack of access to technologies by peoples may serve to exacerbate existing tensions within and between communities, and may create new inequalities even as old wounds are healed. The emphasis of ICT should, this study submits, be self-effacing.

ICT must build social capital, and invest in societal frameworks that empower local communities to grapple with conflict in non-violent ways. Technology itself should not be the cynosure, but what is achieved through it. The outcomes and the process are the most important factors in peacebuilding - not the technology itself.

However, as stated earlier, there is also the need to further problematise and examine what inclusivity and equitable access really mean in peacebuilding processes, and whether ICT interventions should consciously select the groups it empowers. Assertions about the enhancement of democratic participation by ICTs must be tempered by a broader understanding of the power dynamics between an empowered public and those who wield authority, and the creation of new centres of power.

- **Impact:** While there are examples of organisations that are publishing and collaborate online, there is little existing research on the broader social, political and cultural results of these interventions. To fully harness ICT, creative new methodologies have to be developed to garner feedback from the users and recipients of related interventions and how they've appropriated technology for their own ends.
- **Trust:** The use of ICT is inextricably tied issues of trust, especially in theatres where little or none exists between key stakeholders. As ICT for peacebuilding develops, there is a need to develop more effective cultures of collaboration based on virtual determinants of trust, which build on real world signifiers of trust, but devise revolutionary new ways of conducting critical discussions in virtual spaces whilst being assured of the confidentiality of shared content.
- **Sustainability:** The sustainability of ICT interventions is a challenge. While old strategies such project grants and programme support continue to have value, there is also a need for new organic, endogenous models to support ICT interventions, especially in the long-term. Donors and information producers alike must be willing to research and experiment with new approaches, and fully recognise many conflict transformation interventions require sustained funding that is independent from and not contingent upon the overall progress of a peace process.
- **Realistic use of ICTs:** ICTs can augment stakeholder interventions in the multiple tiers of peacebuilding, and in some instances, enable interventions that would not otherwise be possible in a given context or stage of a peace process.

However, in the broader framework, engendering a sustainable peace process depends upon, aside from increased cooperation and information access/ knowledge sharing, several other factors which are outside the strict remit of ICT interventions.

- **Relationship building:** ICTs cannot magically build mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships where none have existed overnight. Furthermore, the intensive use of

ICTs is a relatively new phenomenon for non-profit organizations and donor organizations, let alone the key protagonists in a peace process. Sustainable and stable relationships in peacebuilding processes can be augmented in virtual spaces by ICT interventions, but are also very dependent on stakeholder interventions on multiple tiers in the real world.

These are several other key challenges at present, beyond the scope of this paper to discuss fully, that have to be acknowledged those who espouse the use of ICT in conflict transformation:

1. Inadequate vernacular content / interface / questions of accessibility
2. Lack of Internet connectivity / infrastructure / bandwidth
3. Lack of in house expertise / IT knowledge
4. Lack of finances to buy hardware and software
5. A pervasive and incipient culture of secrecy, with the abysmal levels of mutual trust that protracted ethno-political conflict leave in their wake
6. A lack of willingness to collaborate and share information

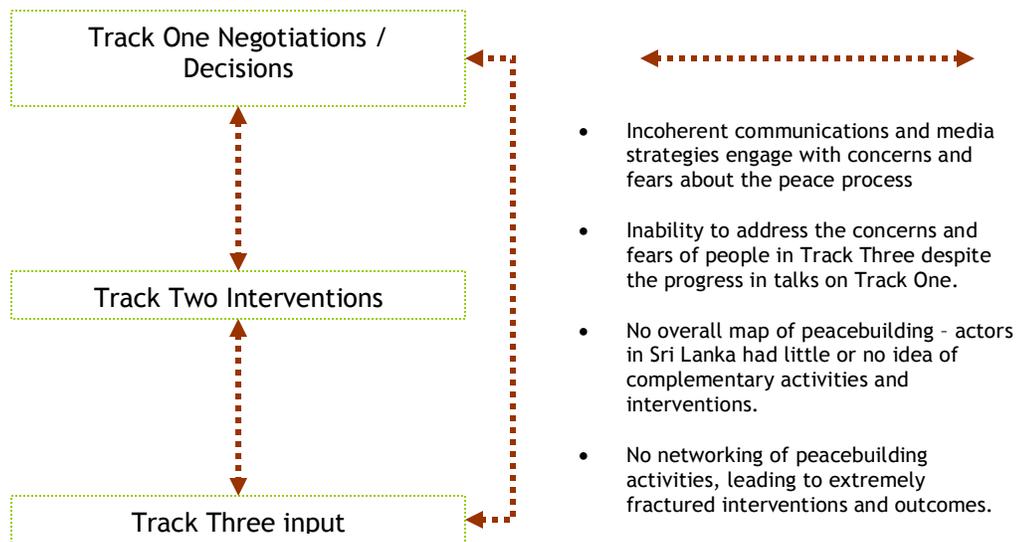
Some of these problems deal with access to technology, whereas the central thrust of this particular study is that **access to technology is no guarantee that it is appropriated, internalised and used for peacebuilding processes.**

Info Share in Sri Lanka - Using ICT for Peacebuilding⁹

In brief, the architectonics of Info Share were conceptualised to address several deep flaws in Sri Lanka's peacebuilding process using ICT, because traditional methodologies of improving communication flows were proving difficult to implement.

As the peace process progressed, unhealthy dynamics in the design of the process led to an ever widening information gap between and within key stakeholders and actors in the peace process that one can convincingly argue was one of the reasons that led to the defeat of the United National Front (UNF) government in the General Elections of April 2004.

⁹ www.info-share.org



This is not a feature that is unique to the Sri Lankan peace process - in countries coming out of protracted ethno-political strife, dilapidated institutions and systems of governance do not have the ability to keep up with the frenzy of work and interventions by multiple stakeholders on multiple tiers that take place in the heat of a fledgling peace process.

Given below are some of the linkages Info Share has been able to achieve, and is in the process of augmenting, within the peacebuilding process in Sri Lanka. The information sharing networks include large, geographically dispersed organisations, INGOs, donors, CSOs and grassroots networks, operating within and between multiple tiers of the on-going peace process.

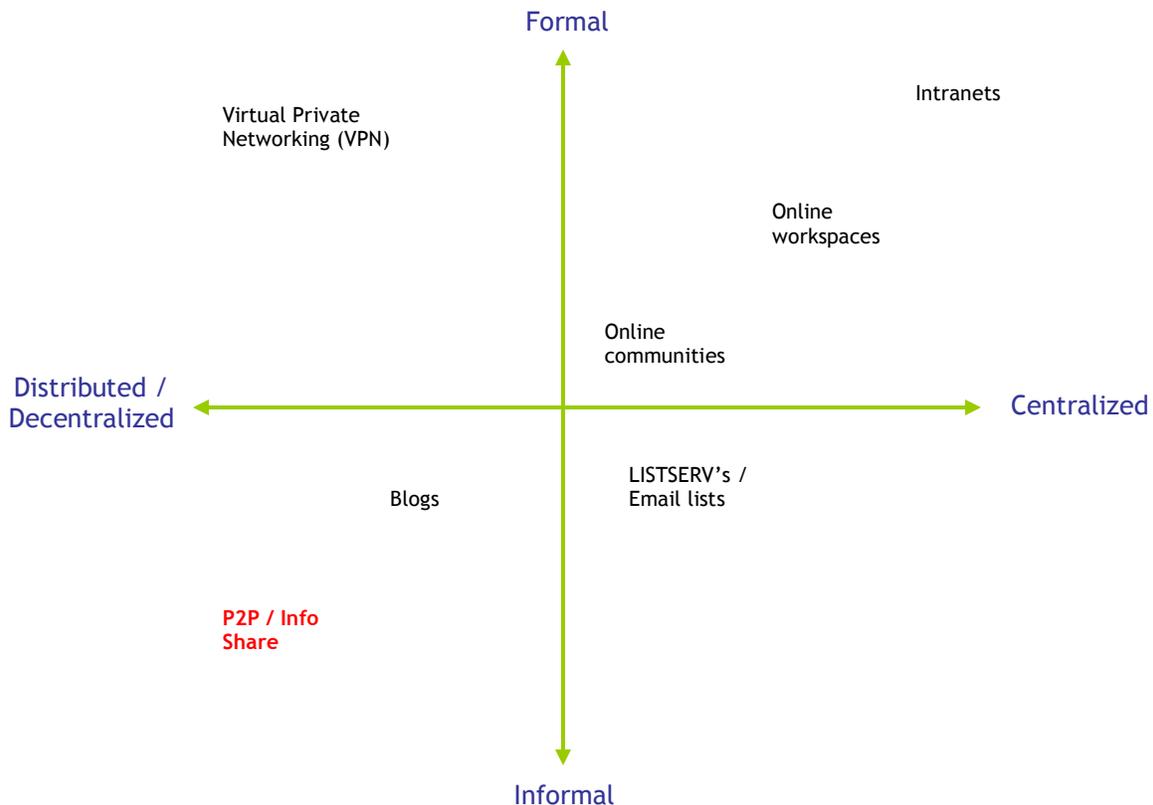


It can be argued that effective communication and collaboration is a cornerstone in any peace process, and has a pivotal factor in the progress of the process itself. For stakeholders engaged in a peace process, the overwhelming abundance of raw data must be weighed against always accessible, secure, trusted information that helps them to work together, and collaborate on programmes, projects and interventions that buttress peace building.

By providing mechanisms and applications for public and private/confidential/secured shared working spaces, Info Share hopes to enhance the capacity of people and organizations to work collectively on conflict and peacebuilding (regional, national, local or sectoral). Info Share allows stakeholders to develop and implement best practices and appropriate peacebuilding and transformation initiatives - including traditional, culturally specific methods - drawn from resources locally and internationally.

As the only on-going experiment of its kind in the use of ICT for peacebuilding in the world, Info Share has the potential to fashion, explore and test many methodologies and interventions that can in the future inform similar initiatives in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world.

Final thoughts



As this diagram shows (inspired by Surman and Reilly, 2003: 18)), there are a plethora of technologies that are already used for communication and collaboration, **but the greatest potential for the use of ICT for peacebuilding comes from technologies which are broadly termed Peer-to-Peer (P2P)** - made somewhat infamous for its potential for decentralised networking by the file-sharing application Napster in the late 90's, though the core technology itself has far wider applications.

On account of the underlying technology that beyond the scope of this paper to fully explain, many P2P technologies empower users who do not have access to high-end hardware, or technical expertise, to use technologies which buttress their existing interventions, coordinate them with similar interventions by other actors, and aid information and knowledge flows

within a peace process without an overarching body or mechanism (or a single database on a single server) that is in control of all the data that is exchanged. **By using the experience gathered during operations in Sri Lanka, and the accrued human resources, Info Share has the potential to be a pioneer in adopting and appropriating the power of ICT for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The networks of collaboration that are envisioned in this radical new paradigm, go far beyond the traditional email lists or websites - there are secure, accessible, authenticated workspaces where information can be shared with key partners irrespective of where they are in the world, and how they connect to the internet.**

ICT can help resources (human, financial, technological) from across the world help address intra-state and regional ethno-political conflict. Stakeholders can continue to engage with the complexities of peace process without having to be in the same region, and organisations can learn from each others experiences in real time if necessary, with repositories of information that are accessible securely and confidentially.

However, till date, the overwhelming majority of populations do NOT participate in ICT interventions. While this is in itself is not necessarily an impediment to the usefulness of ICT in peacebuilding, to forget this fact would be folly (see Dijk, 1999: 230)¹⁰.

Successful conflict transformation does not come in the form of technology *per se*, but in the ability of societies to organically develop their social capital to then engage with the possibilities of developing non-violent creative ways of addressing inequality, exclusion and legitimate grievances.

At the end of the day, computers and technology don't create just and lasting peace. Technology can only augment the human imperative - we make peace between ourselves and within ourselves.

ICT is at best a powerful catalyst that aids change.

People make the difference.

¹⁰ The recent Durban Declaration on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, included an entire section dealing with "Information, communication and the media, including new technologies." This declaration recognizes the potential of ICTs as a positive instrument, along with the possible risks caused by their abuse. Participants expressed their concern at the use of the Internet for the dissemination of racist and discriminatory ideas and called upon governments to take action on these issues. However, they also recognized that "new technologies can assist the promotion of tolerance and respect for human dignity, and the principles of equality and non-discrimination." Hence the need "to promote the use of new information and communication technologies, including the Internet, to contribute to the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance". (See Art. 143-145)

Bibliography

1. Adekanye, JB 2001, 'From Violence to Politics: Key Issues Internationally', paper presented to From Violence to Politics, Londonderry, Northern Ireland.
2. Arquilla, J & Ronfeldt, DF 1996, *The Advent of Netwar*, RAND.
3. Azar, E 1990, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*, Dartmouth, Aldershot.
4. Burnham, D c1983., *The rise of the computer state*, Random House,, New York :.
5. Burton, JW & Azar, EE 1986, *International conflict resolution : theory and practice*, Wheatsheaf Books ; Boulder, Colo. : L. Rienner Publishers, Sussex :.
6. Carment, D & James, P 1997, *Wars in the midst of peace : the international politics of ethnic conflict*, Pitt series in policy and institutional studies, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburg.
7. Clements, K 2003, 'Towards Conflict Transformation and a Just Peace', in M Fischer, B Schmelzle & O Wils (eds), *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, Berlin.
8. Clements, KP *Peace building and conflict transformation*, viewed 31st March 2004, <<http://www.gmu.edu/academic/pcs/clements.htm>>.
9. Cousens, EM, Kumar, C & Wermester, K 2001, *Peacebuilding as politics : cultivating peace in fragile societies*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado.
10. Curle, A 1971, *Making Peace*, Tavistock, London.
11. Darby, J & Mac Ginty, R 2000, *The Management of Peace Processes*, St. Martin's Press, New York.
12. Dijk, Jv c1999., *The network society : social aspects of new media*, Sage Publications, London ; Thousand Oaks, California.

13. Dutta, S, Lanvin, B & Paua, F 2004, *The Global Information Technology Report 2003-2004: Towards an Equitable Information Society*, 0-19-517361-9, Oxford University Press.
14. Education, G 2003, *Peace building*, viewed 31st March 2004, <<http://www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au/globaled/go/cache/offonce/pid/554>>.
15. Galtung, J 1996., *Peace by peaceful means : peace and conflict, development and civilization*, International Peace Research Institute ; Sage Publications,, Oslo : London ; Thousand Oaks, CA :.
16. Gandy, O 1994, *The Panoptic Society*, Westview, Boulder, Colorado.
17. Jensen, L 1997, *Negotiations and Power Asymmetries: The Cases of Bosnia, Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka*, vol. Volume 2 Number 1, Kluwer Academic Publishers.
18. Lederach, JP 1997, *Building peace : sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C.
19. Lederach, JP c1995., *Preparing for peace : conflict transformation across cultures*, Syracuse University Press,, Syracuse, N.Y. :.
20. Little, D 1994, *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington DC.
21. Louden, K 1986, *The Dossier Society: Comments on Democracy in an Information Society*, Columbia University Press, New York.
22. Martin, B 1999, 'Technology, Violence and Peace', in LR Kurtz (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, Academic Press, New York, vol. 3, pp. 447-59.
23. Martin, B 2001, *Technology for Non-violent Struggle*, War Resisters International, London.
24. Mattelart, A 1994., *Mapping world communication : war, progress, culture*, Minnesota University Press,, Minneapolis :.

25. Miall, H 2003, 'Conflict Transformation: A Multi- Dimensional Task', in *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, Leske & Budrich.
26. Miall, H, Ramsbotham, O & Woodhouse, T 1999, *Contemporary conflict resolution : the prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*, Polity Press, Oxford.
27. Munck, R, De Silva, PL & Dieng, A 1999, *Postmodern Insurgencies: Political Violence, Identity Formation, and Peacemaking in Comparative Perspective*, St. Martins Press.
28. Nayman, I 2001, *Peace, love, understanding and communications technology*, viewed 11th April 2004, <<http://www.spark-online.com/issue22/nayman.html>>.
29. Notter, J & McDonald, J 1998, 'Building Regional Security: NGOs and Governments in Partnership', *USIA Electronic Journal*, vol. 3, No. 3.
30. Pool, IdS 1983., *Technologies of freedom*, Belknap Press,, Cambridge, Mass. :.
31. Reimann, C 2003, 'Towards Conflict Transformation: Assessing the State-of-the-Art in Conflict Management - Reflections from a Theoretical Perspective', in *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, Leske & Budrich.
32. Renner, M 1999, *Ending Violent Conflict*, Worldwatch Paper, Worldwatch Institute.
33. Reychler, L 1999, *Democratic Peace Building and Conflict Prevention*, Leuven University Press.
34. Reychler, L & Paffenholz, T 2001, *Peacebuilding : a field guide*, Lynne Rienner Publishers in association with the Field Diplomacy Initiative, Boulder, Colo.
35. Rupesinghe, K 1995, *Conflict transformation*, St Martin's Press, Macmillan, New York, Basingstoke.
36. Rupesinghe, K & Anderlini, SN 1998, *Civil wars, civil peace : an introduction to conflict resolution*, Pluto Press, London.
37. Scherrer, CP 1999, *Peace Research for the 21st Century: A Call for Reorientation and New Research Priorities*, Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI).

38. Senghaas, D 2003, 'The Civilization of Conflict: Constructive Pacifism as a Guiding Notion for Conflict Transformation', in *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, Leske & Budrich.
39. Sisk, TD & Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. 1996, *Power sharing and international mediation in ethnic conflicts*, Perspectives series, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C.
40. Spence, R & McLeod, J 'Building the road as we walk it: peacebuilding as principled and revolutionary non-violent praxis', *Social Alternatives* vol. 21
41. Starr, H, ed. 1999, *Understanding and Management of Global Violence: New Approaches to Theory and Research on Protracted Conflict*, St. Martin's Press.
42. Stepanova, E 2003, *Anti-terrorism and Peace Building During and After Conflict*, SIPRI, Stockholm.
43. Stephens, K 1997, 'Getting Wiser by Sharing Ideas: the International Community and Deeply Rooted Conflicts', paper presented to Building Peace in Deeply Rooted Conflicts: Exploring New Ideas to Shape the, Larnaca, Cyprus, 28 September - 5 October 1997.
44. Summy, R 1996 'Building towards peace', *Social Alternatives* vol. 15 no. 3 pp. 3-8
45. Tsagarousianou, R, Tambini, D & Bryan, C 1998., *Cyberdemocracy : technology, cities, and civic networks*, Routledge,, London ; New York :.
46. Vayrynen, R 1991, 'To Settle or to Transform? Perspective on the Resolution of National and International Conflicts', in R Vayrynen (ed.), *New Directions in Conflict Theory: Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation*, Sage, London, pp. 1-25.
47. Weimann, G March 2004, *How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC.
48. Zartman, IW c2001., *Preventive negotiation : avoiding conflict escalation*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers,, Lanham, Md. :.
49. Zartman, I1996, *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*, Brookings Institution, Washington DC.

50. Zeeuw, Jd 2001, *Building Peace in War Torn Societies: From Concept to Strategy*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Conflict Research Unit.
51. Zuurmond, A 1998, 'From bureaucracy to infocracy: Are democratic institutions lagging behind?' in I Snellen & W Van de Donk (eds), *Public Administration in the Information Age: A Handbook*, IOS Press, Amsterdam.

Appendix 1

Screenshots of some Info Share Workspaces in the Sri Lankan Peace Process

Info-Share uses *Groove Workspace*¹¹ as its primary technology platform - an application that has won numerous awards as a secure and reliable platform for information and knowledge sharing. Groove Workspace® is an advanced state-of-the-art software application for person-to-person (or peer to peer), small group interaction. With Groove Workspace®, users create virtual shared



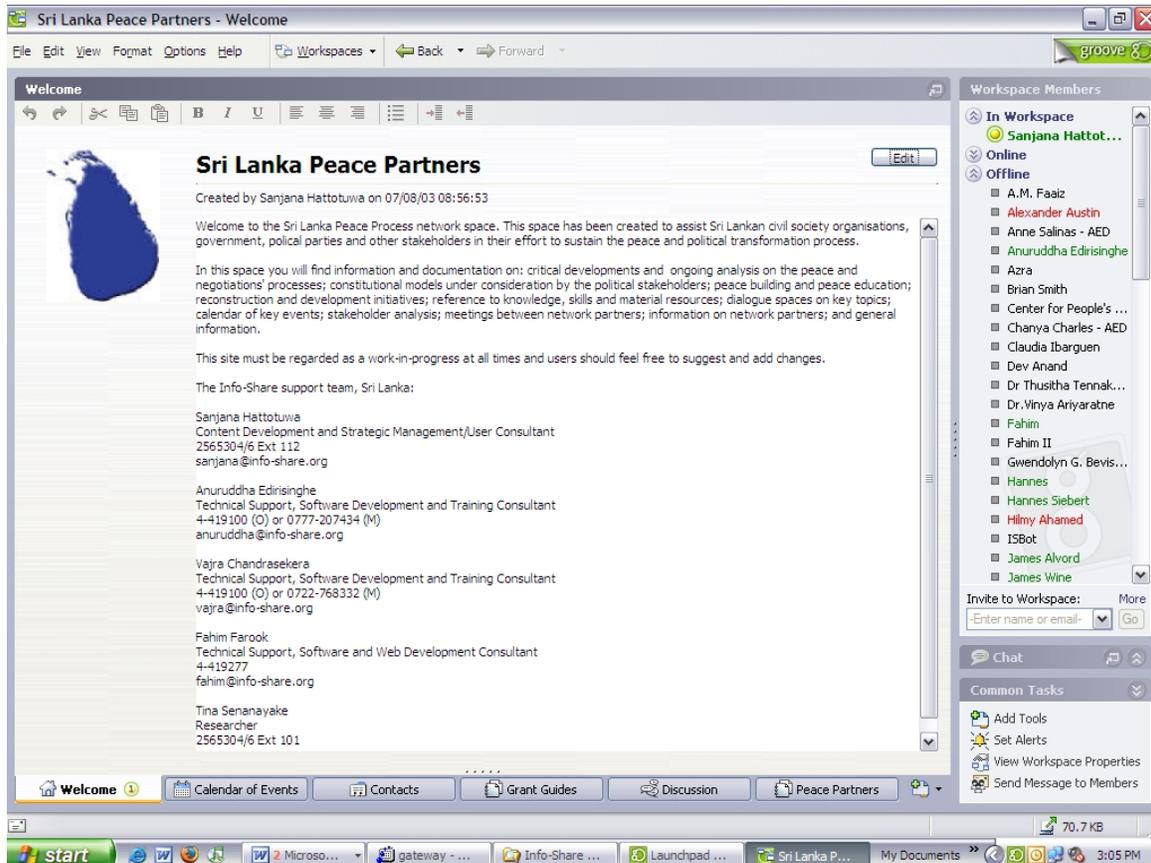
spaces which utilize non-server based peer-to-peer technologies to perform a wide variety of activities - from working on a project, brainstorming, planning an event, discussing issues, sharing drafts and proposals, coordinating schedules and so on and so forth.

A Groove workspace is a “virtual meeting place” equipped with custom tools built using the Groove Workspace software where groups of individuals can share files, co-edit/review documents, manage projects and meetings, co-browse the World Wide Web, discuss, chat and use instant messaging within and between organizations. Using Groove, you create secure interactive shared spaces where you bring together the information, people and tools you need to get your work done. Shared spaces sit on each participant's PC - there is no central server where information is stored. Work done in the space by one member is instantly updated to all members in that space. Work in the space together, or work offline, returning to the space over time and Groove automatically synchronizes any changes.

¹¹ See www.groove.net and http://www.groove.net/default.cfm?pagename=CaseStudy_Infoshare for further information.

Sri Lanka Peace Partners

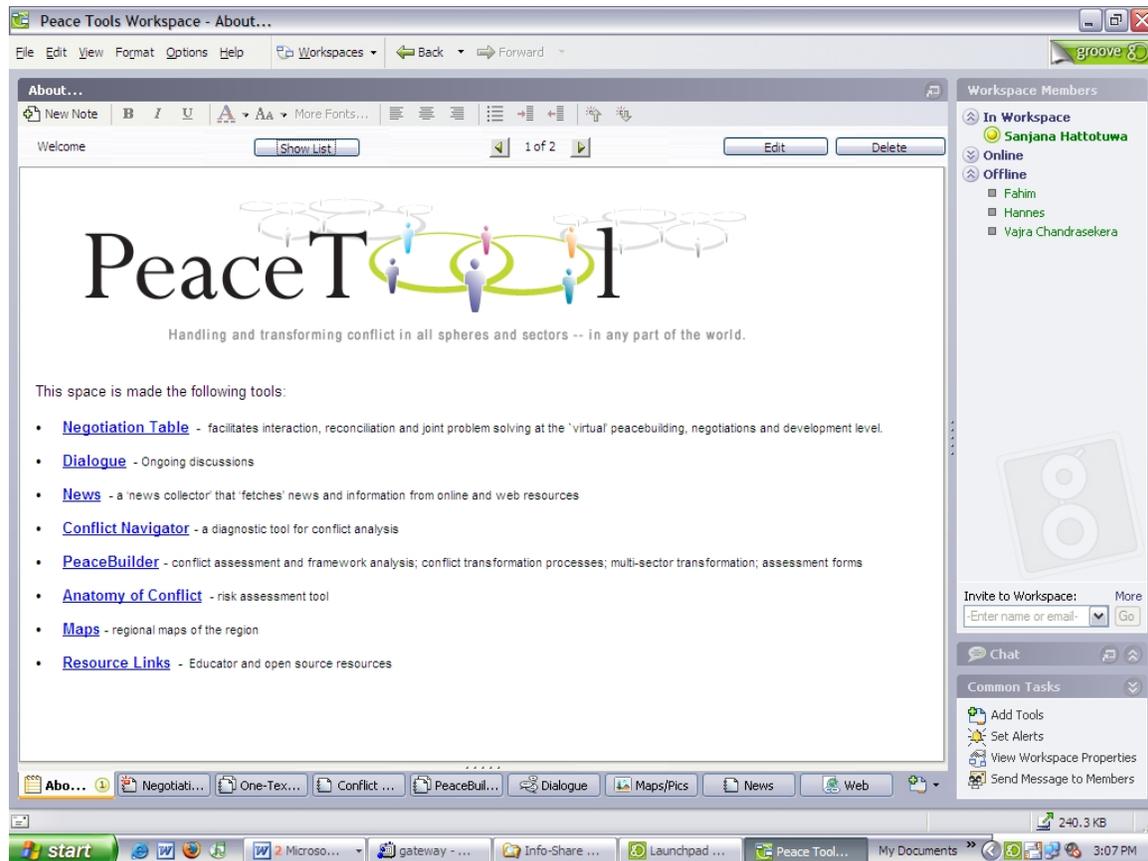
This space has been created to assist Sri Lankan civil society organizations, government, political parties and other stakeholders in their effort to sustain the peace and political transformation process.



The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Sri Lanka Peace Partners - Welcome". The browser's address bar shows "groove". The workspace interface includes a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Format, Options, Help), a toolbar with navigation and editing icons, and a main content area. The main content area features a blue map of Sri Lanka, the title "Sri Lanka Peace Partners", and an "Edit" button. Below the title, it states "Created by Sanjana Hattotuwa on 07/08/03 08:56:53". The main text describes the workspace's purpose: "Welcome to the Sri Lanka Peace Process network space. This space has been created to assist Sri Lankan civil society organisations, government, political parties and other stakeholders in their effort to sustain the peace and political transformation process." It lists various topics covered, such as critical developments, negotiations, constitutional models, and stakeholder analysis. A note states: "This site must be regarded as a work-in-progress at all times and users should feel free to suggest and add changes." The "Info-Share support team, Sri Lanka:" is listed with contact details for Sanjana Hattotuwa, Anuruddha Edirisinghe, Vajira Chandrasekera, Fahim Farook, and Tina Senanayake. A right-hand sidebar titled "Workspace Members" lists online and offline members, including Sanjana Hattotuwa, A.M. Faaz, Alexander Austin, Anne Salinas - AED, Anuruddha Edirisinghe, Azra, Brian Smith, Center for People's..., Chanya Charles - AED, Claudia Ibarquen, Dev Anand, Dr. Thusitha Tennak..., Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, Fahim, Fahim II, Gwendolyn G. Bevis..., Hannes, Hannes Siebert, Hilmy Ahamed, ISBot, James Alvord, and James Wine. Below the member list is an "Invite to Workspace:" section with a search box and a "Go" button. At the bottom of the sidebar are "Chat" and "Common Tasks" sections. The bottom of the browser window shows a Windows taskbar with the start button, several open applications (Micro..., gateway..., Info-Share..., Launchpad..., Sri Lanka P...), and the system clock showing 3:05 PM.

Peace Tools for Sri Lanka

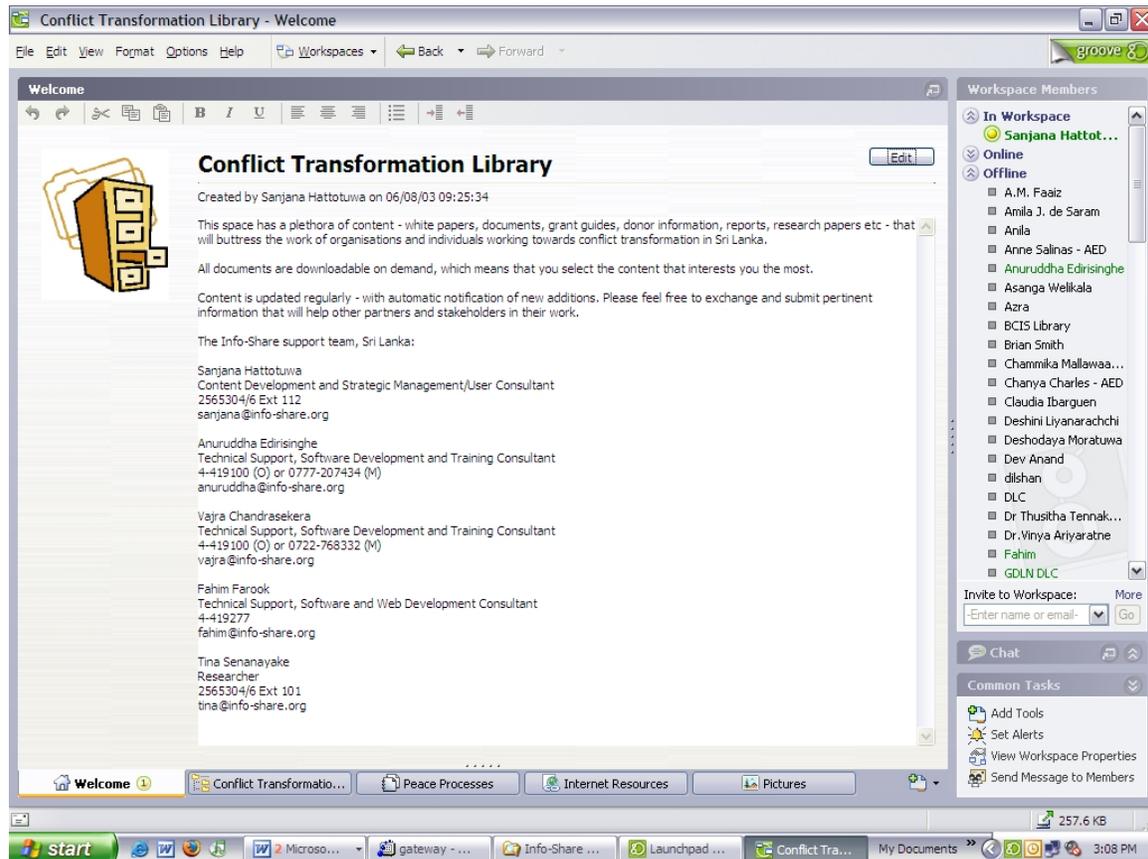
This space, presently under development, provides adjustable frameworks, analytical and management tools for conflict transformation and peace building that are customized for Sri Lanka and also provides various sectors with sector-specific resource tools, specifically designed for the business, environment, media, cultural and governance sectors.



Peace Tools are designed to help meet the core and immediate objectives of creating standardized conflict transformation and reconstruction assessments by providing interactive tools for rapid assessments and analyses. Frameworks for assessment and analyses include human development indicators from respected agencies such as the World Bank, UNDP, ICRC and others; the tools can strengthen institutions by providing active and open source knowledge banks; it can disseminate effective Conflict Transformation and Reconstruction approaches and case studies; it can build reconstruction networks between the various institutions and organizations; it will provide virtual spaces for logistical organization and collaboration; through this collaboration, it can expand training mechanisms and materials; the tool provides adjustable frameworks, analytical and management tools for conflict transformation and peace building that can be customized for Sri Lanka.

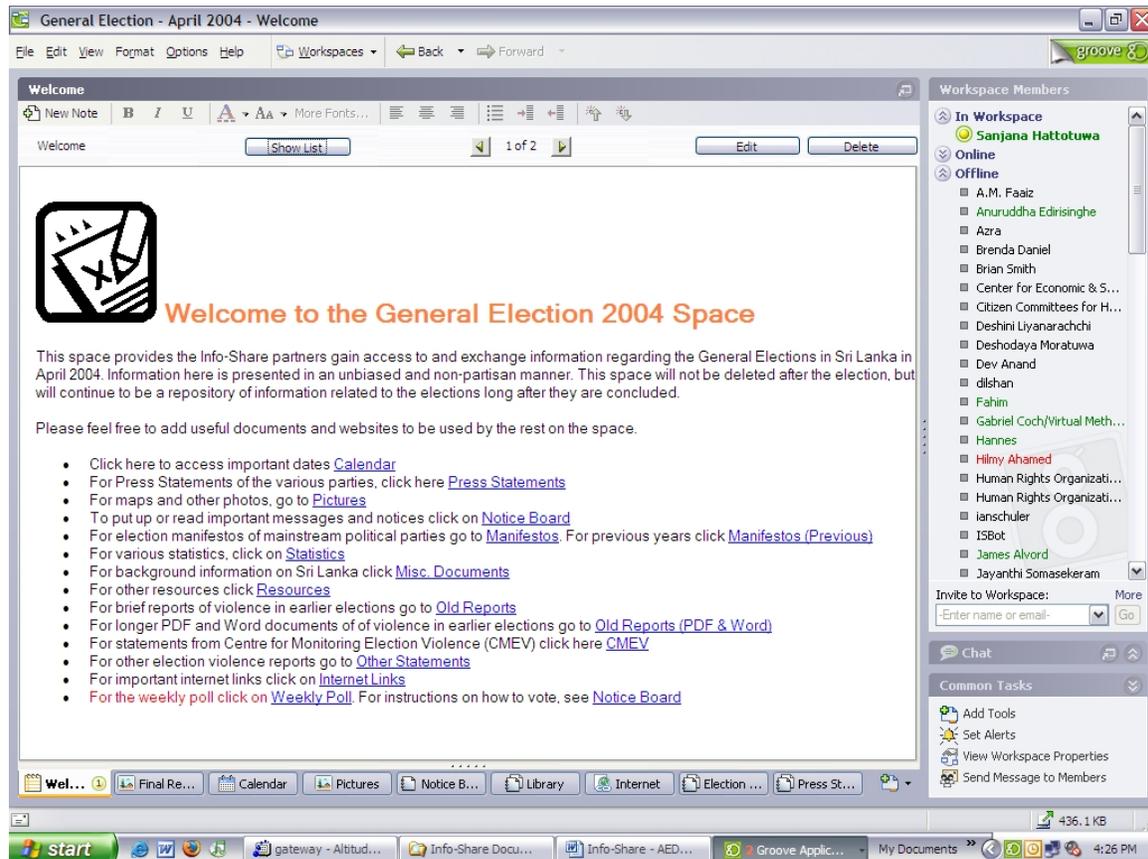
Sri Lanka Conflict Transformation Library

This space has a plethora of content including white papers, documents, grant guides, donor information, reports, research papers etc. that will buttress the work of organizations and individuals working towards conflict transformation in Sri Lanka.



This space has a plethora of content including white papers, documents, grant guides, donor information, reports, research papers *et al* related to the Sri Lankan peace process. Many of the resource contained herein are difficult to access via the web or through the internet, and can be downloaded on demand.

General Elections 2004 Information Repository



General Election - April 2004 - Welcome

Welcome

Welcome to the General Election 2004 Space

This space provides the Info-Share partners gain access to and exchange information regarding the General Elections in Sri Lanka in April 2004. Information here is presented in an unbiased and non-partisan manner. This space will not be deleted after the election, but will continue to be a repository of information related to the elections long after they are concluded.

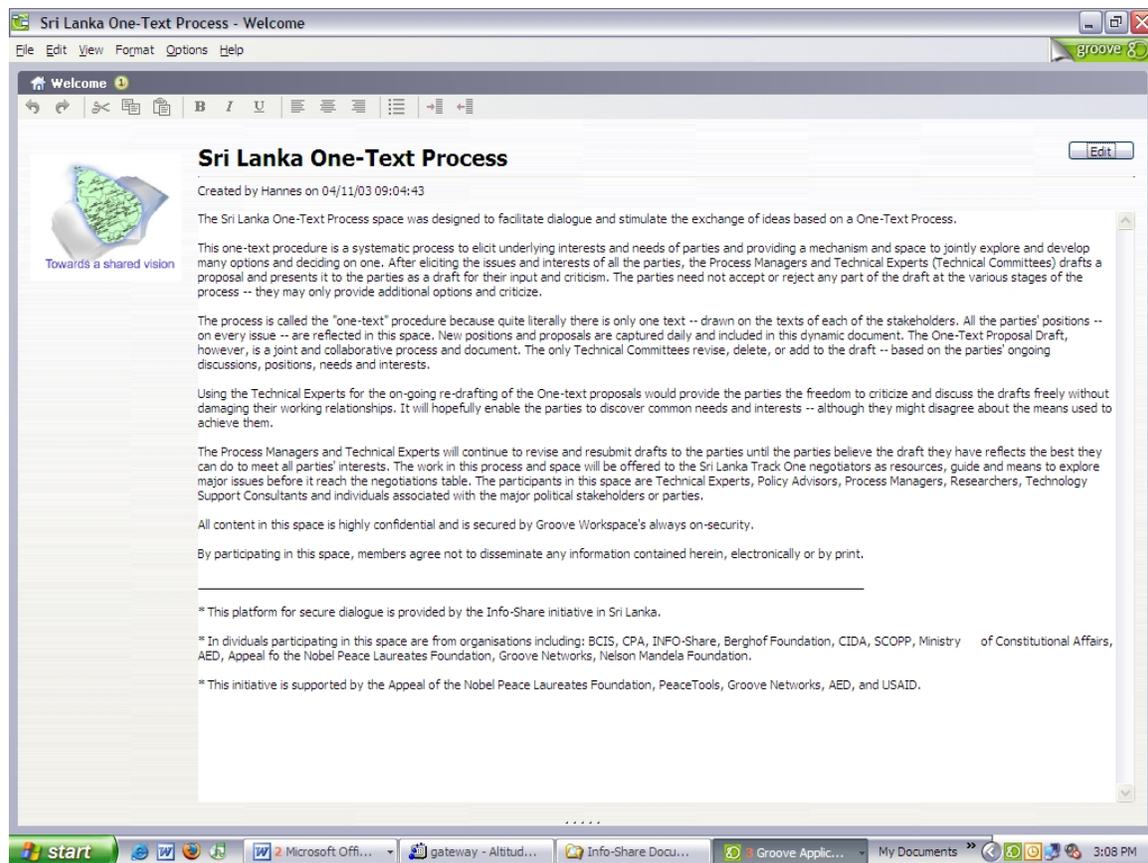
Please feel free to add useful documents and websites to be used by the rest on the space.

- Click here to access important dates [Calendar](#)
- For Press Statements of the various parties, click here [Press Statements](#)
- For maps and other photos, go to [Pictures](#)
- To put up or read important messages and notices click on [Notice Board](#)
- For election manifestos of mainstream political parties go to [Manifestos](#). For previous years click [Manifestos \(Previous\)](#)
- For various statistics, click on [Statistics](#)
- For background information on Sri Lanka click [Misc. Documents](#)
- For other resources click [Resources](#)
- For brief reports of violence in earlier elections go to [Old Reports](#)
- For longer PDF and Word documents of violence in earlier elections go to [Old Reports \(PDF & Word\)](#)
- For statements from Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) click here [CMEV](#)
- For other election violence reports go to [Other Statements](#)
- For important internet links click on [Internet Links](#)
- For the weekly poll click on [Weekly Poll](#). For instructions on how to vote, see [Notice Board](#)

The General Election 2004 space is a vast repository of information pooled from multiple sources. Content was updated daily during the run up to the elections, and the space now serves as a comprehensive database on content related to the elections, including the final results. Some of the content on this space includes:

1. Press Statements of stakeholders and political parties
2. Manifestos
3. Electoral maps of Sri Lanka
4. Background information on the constitutional and voting system in Sri Lanka
5. Pertinent websites
6. Research and white papers on the conflict, voting system, legal framework and other relevant issues
7. Press releases from the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) and other agencies
8. Detailed election monitoring reports of previous parliamentary elections
9. Media releases by other NGOs
10. Comprehensive statistics of previous parliamentary elections
11. Detailed breakdown of election results

Sri Lanka One Text Process



The One Text Process is one of Info Share's Strategic Engagement projects. Strategic engagement refers to the specialized customization of Info Share services to meet a specific communications need on the part of civil society. After analyzing the specific needs and requirements of the stakeholders involved, Info Share provides not only a communications platform but also a full spectrum of client services to maximize the utility of that platform: custom-built applications, training and capacity-building programmes, in-the-field support and consultations at each level of the strategic engagement process.

The Sri Lanka One-Text Process space was designed to facilitate dialogue and stimulate the exchange of ideas based on a One-Text Process. The one-text procedure is a systematic process to elicit underlying interests and needs of parties and providing a mechanism and space to jointly explore and develop many options and deciding on one. After eliciting the issues and interests of all the parties, the nominated Process Managers and Technical Experts (Technical Committees) draft a proposal and present it to the parties as a draft for their input and criticism.

Using the Technical Experts for the on-going re-drafting of the One-text proposals would provide the parties the freedom to criticize and discuss the drafts freely without damaging their working relationships. It will hopefully enable the parties to discover common needs and interests -- although they might disagree about the means used to achieve them.

The Process Managers and Technical Experts will continue to revise and resubmit drafts to the parties until the parties believe the draft they have reflects the best they can do to meet all parties' interests. The work in this process and space will be offered to the Sri Lanka Track One negotiators as resources, guide and means to explore major issues before it reach the negotiations table. The participants in this space are Technical Experts, Policy Advisors, Process Managers, Researchers, Technology Support Consultants and individuals associated with the major political stakeholders or parties.

In creating the One-Text space for high-level negotiations between the various political stakeholders in the Sri Lankan Peace Process, Info Share needed to create a virtual negotiations table that would enable the stakeholders to discuss issues freely and frankly, and most importantly, *privately*, without worrying about the security of their communications. This need lead to the creation of the Sri Lanka One Text Process Groove space.

In this sense, Groove Workspace® was ideal for this purpose, because of its inbuilt strong encryption and the level of trust in Groove-based communications that this engenders. The One-Text shared space makes use of both the Negotiations Table tool already available for Groove, but for the One-Text process itself, where the negotiators come together to create a single text that incorporates all points of view, required a somewhat more specialized approach. A software interface was required that would allow each party to contribute their input on each topic under discussion, and to do so in a way that gave equal prominence to all. For this, Info-Share developed a set of custom-built Forms tools, each of which targeted a specific group of negotiators and each of which was able to handle any amount of highly specific topics, first laying out each party's position summary and detailed proposals on each topic, and then providing a space for the negotiators to arrive at a consensual one-text proposal on each topic after taking all points of view into account.

Advanced Humanitarian Applications

This category encompasses a range of sophisticated technological applications that are primarily aimed at supporting humanitarian data gathering from conflict areas. This will primarily include data supporting conflict-prevention oriented early warning systems and information useful to humanitarian organizations working in conflict areas.

A potential partnership with regard to conflict mapping and monitoring is already being discussed with Consortium of Humanitarian Organizations (CHA), a large, pan-Sri Lankan NGO. CHA's Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) and Peace Building Toolkit projects have the potential to provide an ideal framework to implement this system.

