

Sharing the Experience of Citizens' Diplomacy

**Edward (Edy Kaufman), Senior Research Associate
Center for International Development and Conflict Management
University of Maryland, College Park**

The field of conflict resolution is relatively new within the social sciences. One important source of inspiration was the ability of Soviet and American physicist to reduce the Cold War nuclear arms escalation with back-stage contacts and developing a shared understanding of the need to advance in an arms control program. Political scientists, sociologists and psychologists started more than thirty years ago to emulate with their professional tools what became known as "Track II" workshops parallel, before or after officialdom tried to resolve different armed conflicts. More formal ways of negotiating do not allow for full expression of creativity, exploring new ideas and putting ourselves in the shoes of the other.

Often we do not recognize the real needs hidden behind publicly stated positions.

Hence,. Good will, sensitivity, and learned intuition are all necessary ingredient for finding common ground. But professionalization and a good knowledge of available techniques can make a real difference.

For more than two decades extensive experimentation provided a fertile ground for generalizations that allowed to check back the theories prevailing in their respective fields. Over the last decade, a major efforts has been seen in perfecting the approach towards a systematic search for common ground. New collaborative problem-solving methods to deal with the world's conflicts, including political, ethnic, religious or local emerged including at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management {CIDCM}. In the literature on these sometimes intractable issues, words such as "resolution," "reduction," "management," "regulation," "transformation," "dissolution," "settlement," and "containment" are all used to illustrate different preferred outcomes of problem-solving exercises. As a whole, the methods of dealing with conflict consist of mainly two types: resolution or transformation, and settlement or containment. CIDCM has been concerned with the former, stressing cooperation through information sharing, relationship building, and joint analysis to address the root causes of conflict. We are of the school that seeks resolution, because if underlying causes are not dealt with in a settlement, another conflict can spring up where the first one left off.

Track-two diplomacy has been developed mainly in the United States for this purpose. I have found that the term “track two” often has a different connotation in the South, however, referring to unofficial negotiations by a small political elite. “Citizens’ diplomacy,” as used in the title of this chapter, is the term preferred particularly by my Latin American colleagues,ⁱ prominent civil society activists who use these techniques to empower them both in generating advice for the elite and for engaging in grassroots-level dispute resolution. But “citizens’ diplomacy” is not just a semantic alternative to Track II, as they involve in the negotiating process individuals at different levels of decision-making down to the grass root traditional and popular leaders in villages, the youth with a potential role in the future of their nations, becoming a method for empowering the people to address and hopefully resolve their own conflicts without the intervention of state agents or the judiciary.

The practices outlined for conducting innovative problem solving workshops are offered as one model for working with unofficial citizen representatives of the parties as “Partners in Conflict.” They are designed to facilitate resolution of a conflict based on transformation of the parties’ perceptions and attitudes, and on addressing not only potential elements for settlement of the present dispute but also its underlying causes through a reconstruction of the relationship between the parties. Complementary to classical diplomacy, second track or citizens’ diplomacy is considered an effective means especially for dealing with protracted communal conflicts—prolonged identity-driven disputes accompanied by fluctuating and sometimes high levels of violence.

As a corollary of this last point, mention should be made of the growing importance of track-two diplomacy with the end of the Cold War and the persistence of ethnopolitical conflicts when at least one of the parties is not accepted as a formal actor with diplomats and state representative. This identity driven conflicts often have deep roots and require the addressing of needs for recognition, security, perceived survival, dignity, or well-being. Hostilities are often exacerbated by irresponsible leadership, seeking legitimacy or power through playing on the fears of their own people, creating extremists even among intellectuals, academics, and professionals. Often, the bloody acts of fanatics and fundamentalists paralyze the diplomatic process; deep-rooted animosities call both for peacemaking among leaders and for broader joint reconciliation efforts.

The shift from inter-state to intra-state conflicts has also resulted in a dramatic change of the nature of the victims. While in World War I 90%

of the casualties were people in uniform, the ratio in World War II move to have have civilians and half military among the millions killed. But in the last decade, about 80% of the victims are civilians (in Africa up to 90%), most of them victims of the most illegitimate forms of violence, often called terror.

Track-two diplomacy has also increased as a result of the process of globalization, which has expanded cross-border and international interaction, while also making involvement in international affairs more accessible to individual citizens and more relevant to their daily lives. There is an intrinsic difference between track-two and “back channel” negotiations, often run in parallel or in preparation for official negotiations. The latter is mostly conducted by emissaries of the governments, often security/intelligence agents or messengers with no authority to discuss issues. Track two, on the other hand, is conducted by nonofficial individuals, with the objective of generating new options, putting themselves in the shoes of the other, testing the limits of the possible. They may report back to officials in their respective governments, bring the new shared ideas to their peers within civil society, or try to affect public opinion through the media and other informal channels.

Our workshops have been held by and with Partners in Conflict from Middle Eastern civil society as well as from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Southeast Asia, Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin America. We have learnt a great deal from the different traditions of dealing with conflict, and integrated some of their practices in what is now a universal approach. The term “Partners in Conflict” (hereafter called “Partners”) is intended to underline a common identity among participants in our workshops, such as a shared occupation or profession (e.g., academics, journalists), attributes (e.g., gender, religion), mutual concerns (e.g., environment, development), or common region (e.g., Caucasus, Middle East, Andean countries). This common identity must be based on dimensions different from those that are used to characterize the conflict (such as ethnicity, religion, language, and territory). When a peace accord has been reached and the participants are brought together to assist in its implementation and sustainability, we have referred to them as “Partners in Peace” (i.e. Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants). Lets remind ourselves that since World War II ,about fifty percent, half of the accords agreed upon the parties to state conflicts have not been totally or partially implemented. So, the need to strengthen with peace-building the peace-making of diplomats, generals and politicians needs to be recognized.

The program of exercises for Partners is for the purpose of building bridges across sometimes wide divides, by stressing commonalities. It is also meant to develop an “epistemic community”—a group of individuals who share collective understanding relating to their own issues and problems. Emphasizing commonalities and a shared identity while acknowledging basic differences encourages the establishment of a solid link between the two groups. An interesting example is bringing together people who live on each side of a border between countries in conflict. These individuals, in spite of their differences, share a certain frontier identity. Often ignored in the peace process, which is negotiated by diplomats and politicians in the capitals, these citizens can play a major role in the consolidation of a lasting peace.

Such “team building” requires not only technical input. It goes much deeper, exploring ways for Partners to transform their relationships with one another by awakening empathy and learning to move from adversarial to collaborative attitudes. It is not our purpose to erase the border between groups in conflict, as this would only make conflict resolution more difficult to achieve. In our book¹, two chapters highlight a sample day-to-day curriculum that has been developed over a decade of experimentation. For each topic we explain the rationale and practical application of the Citizens diplomacy approach, familiarizing themselves with the *know-how* of workshop planning, and then go straight to the *show-how*. And yet, often there is a degree of skepticism in trying alternative dispute-resolution methods, either from pragmatists who come from a *realpolitik* school of thought or from those suspicious that it may be a “group therapy” approach, not seen as having much value outside North American culture). To overcome this skepticism, we suggest sharing the program’s rationale to provide transparency and encourage full participation.

In broad terms, the term conflict transformation relates to three inter-related objectives: a) the need to address the roots of the conflict before trying to come up with creative solutions, namely to address the basic needs of the parties and change the causes and not only the symptoms of the conflict; b) the establishment of a working relationship among the Partners to the establishment of a cooperative problem solving attitude, through building skills for a creative thinking process and then applying them to the concrete issues at stake. And c) a personal transformation in regard to our own attitude to deal with the conflicts that we face at all levels. No doubt, an ambitious agenda, but the feedback that we get from our Partners is that it is indeed doable.

¹ Davies, John and Kaufman, Edward (Edy), Track II/Citizens Diplomacy: Applied Techniques of Conflict Transformation, (Landham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2002)

The CIDCM approach inspired by Edward Azar, the founder of the Center is based on an understanding of the basic needs of the parties. Human rights should be seen as important criteria to remind the parties that there are international standards and what we are often expected to do are not unwarranted concessions but follow such established principles. Yet human rights are a necessary but not sufficient condition to be effective in conflict transformation. While I can be respected for demanding my rights and reminded to respect the rights of the “Other” according to such “common standards of all nations” (preamble of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948), we will fare better if we attend the needs of the “Other” and find ways to express what are also our core needs to be attended in the process of transforming our conflict. Sometimes my rights are more important to be recognized as a matter of principle than a demand for immediate implementation. When I know that being attentive to the needs of the “Other” can bring a solution closer, then I may be ready to sacrifice my inalienable rights for the common good. It is my prerogative to do so

As a rule of thumb, more time should be spent on prognosis (possibilities for resolution) than on diagnosis (historical roots of the conflict). Playing back the video of the long history of fighting is not going to change the script. Conflict can be seen as a constructive or destructive driving force, mostly depending on how it is managed. When speaking about our work as part of the field of Alternative or Integrative Dispute Resolution (ADR or IDR) we mean that facilitation with Partners is an alternative to power politics, and adjudication,

Asymmetry in power relations is a factor that needs to be recognized, and in conflict the temptation to act unilaterally is powerful. Such independent, one-sided behavior, however, may end in unstable outcomes: the stronger party may win a war but have difficulty in gaining peace. A lion cannot easily kill a fly; the weak have their own weapons and can make life for an oppressor untenable by means of terror, uprisings, and obstructionism. The fragile nature of coalitions among states and nations induces changes in configurations over time, and a single powerful country can eventually be forced to confront a group of individually weaker, but collectively stronger, actors. Hence, impartial reasoning requires that we put ourselves in the shoes of the “other.” Bill Ury has often quoted Gandhi as stating that practicing “an eye for an eye. . . we all go blind.”

And what about litigation, bringing the other side to a court of justice? Even if we respect the outcome to be fair—and this is not always the case—the nature of the system is that we either win or lose. We call it adjudication, and it may tell us “You are right,” but it also means, for the other, “You are wrong” and that your minimal expectations cannot be met. So it is better to try alternatives to both power politics and litigation

This appeal is surely justified when we try to reduce levels of conflict in our workplace, neighborhood and family. If we are bound to live together, we know that inflicting pain through one-sided impositions is not a good recipe for a durable friendship. My own conviction is that appropriate dispute resolution is not a panacea but is worth trying first, and for the long term, as it may often take time to bear fruit.

Do we need a third party to intervene? Agreed, the preference is that both parties in conflict should find ways of overcoming the conflict on their own by educating themselves on methods such as “principled negotiation.”ⁱⁱ However, it is not easy for parties that are in the escalation phase of a dispute, and often before or after a fight, to cool down by themselves. In many cases, a third party is needed to help them move to a resolution.

It is worth explaining the different levels of third-party intervention, which range from early neutral evaluation to conciliation, facilitation, mediation, nonbinding arbitration, and, for official processes only, to power mediation, settlement conferences, and binding arbitration. To simplify the different levels of assistance to the parties of the conflict in three levels, depending on the authority and resources of this third party, he/she can decide for the parties (arbitration), assist the parties to reach a compromise (mediation), or provide the two sides with the tools and skills that will enable them to invent jointly new options to deal with the immediate dispute and others as they appear in the future (facilitation). The first two may be more appropriate when dealing with single-issue, interest-based disputes; the third is recommended for dealing with identity-driven, complex conflicts. Often tangible and nontangible traits are part and parcel of the conflict, and a formalistic solution may not touch upon the more in-depth needs or help to improve the larger relationship.

We move along four distinct stages: trust building, skills building, consensus building and re-entry.. The first stage is of extreme importance, and has been normally neglected in official diplomacy, the confrontation

between the two contending sides starting at an early contacts without the opportunity of breaking the ice and bringing an informal and friendly atmosphere to the negotiations. Once the Partners are fully immersed in the spirit of the location, have warmed up to one another, and understand the rules of the game the facilitators can proceed to a systematic presentation of the methods to be used and map it within the general area of alternative or appropriate dispute resolution . Exceptionally, given the experiential nature of our work, at this time, as we move toward skills building, we need to make a persuasive presentation of our underlying philosophy as well as the concrete product toward which the workshop is directed.

The second stage of skill-building involves many individual and group techniques that can improve the effectiveness of participants towards the search for common ground. The great variety of individual skills (not depending on the behavior of the “Other”) involves way in which we communicate (both express ourselves in phrases, words and body-language to the way we listen, experimenting with different techniques of “active listening”), ways to overcome intercultural communications obstacles, exercises in prejudice reduction, sensitivity towards discrimination, stereotyping and dehumanizing. Group skills (requiring cooperation of the “Other” include de-escalation, developing a long term shared vision, consensus exercises moving from compromise to win/win solutions through training in creativity, brainstorming, multiple option-evaluations and critical thinking, drafting, levels of consensus and strategies towards reaching agreement.

The third stage introduces alternative methods for consensus building, moving from personal mediation for individuals, to small communities processes of problem solving (Ho’o Pono pono from Polinesia, to which we were introduced by Joan Galtung) and macro-nation level models of reaching common ground. In the alternative models we use lateral thinking approaches (developed by Edward De Bono), and the ARIA model developed by Jay Rothman (with the four adversarial, reflexive, integrative and action phases).

The fourth stage deals with the preparations for implementation once the intense experience is over. In the past, facilitators thought it was already a success to reach consensus as expressed in a document. Without belittling the importance of stage III, the real test of the experimentation is in the ability of the implementation, once the Partners return to their habitat, often hostile to the new ideas of change. How to explain them and get those who did not take part in the workshop not only to accept them but to become their enthusiastic supporters in a major challenge. Furthermore, there may

be a fear of individual Partners that not all of them, particularly those from the contending party are not fulfilling their part of the deal. So, we need to address psychological, political and organizational issues. The drafting of an “action plan” is a skill in itself where the individual responsibilities are allocate including a timetable for implementation that can be monitored by all.

A reentry workshop should be planned and budgeted, making sure that there will be a face-to-face element of continuity. At that time, say six month later , when the Partners meet for a second time or more, still requires some ice-breakers, and allowance for airing the many grievances that may have accumulated in the interim. We can have a session in which people can speak their minds, most likely in an adversarial manner. It might be programmed as “Status of the Peace”. The rest of the “menu” needs to be thoroughly elaborated, following a new conflict assessment.

Transitions from one stage to another cannot be rigidly structured, because the rate of participants’ progress determines the rhythm of the workshop. Further, this ambitious menu could be devoured in an intensive two weeks; however, in the face of financial and temporal constraints, selection is usually required. We simply provide an optimal leaving to the creativity of the organizers the task of adapting it according to their needs and experience.

We attach a great importance to evaluation, and ideally would like to integrate in the workshop a long-term and comprehensive techniques called “action-evaluation” that has been developed by Jay Rothman in chapter of our book and elsewhere. Such process should start already at the stage of approaching a potential funder, involve the facilitators and the stakeholders in the real time assessment of progress in their work and then checking if the consensus reached has been successfully implemented in the follow-up activities. At the minimal level, a valuable way is to end each day requesting participants to fill out a One-Minute Evaluation form and to be asked for any last thoughts or questions. This form may be presented at the start or end of each following day, providing a constant participatory evaluation process that is of utmost importance to the success of the workshop. While the friendships, attitude changes, and insights that the Partners may gain from this experiment are important both for themselves and for the promotion of a conflict resolution perspective, the evaluation forms contribute to the practical success of the workshop itself. They do so by giving the facilitators information on what was effective and what was not during the day’s exercises, and on what should be added, changed or cut altogether. Although this evaluation and adaptation step is not listed again

at the end of each day's activities, it should nonetheless be remembered as an integral daily part of any successful workshop.

This is, in a nutshell, what we call "citizens' diplomacy", still a work in progress, learning from each experience how to enrich the next one. We know it works in practice, and hopefully also in theory. This transition from the experimentation in more than seventy workshops worldwide and a decade of lessons learnt has hopefully help us to single out the best practices and make a contribution to this evolving field of conflict transformation.

2. The negative reaction to track two was exacerbated when this term was used in U.S. anti-Cuban legislation and for covert operations in Chile aimed at undermining Salvador Allende's regime.

15. "Principled negotiation" as a method for parties in conflict has been developed by Roger Fisher and Bill Ury (1991); it provides the parties with ideas how to move from rigid positions into the exploration of underlying interests, looking for integrative options which give better outcomes than unilateral actions or positional bargaining.