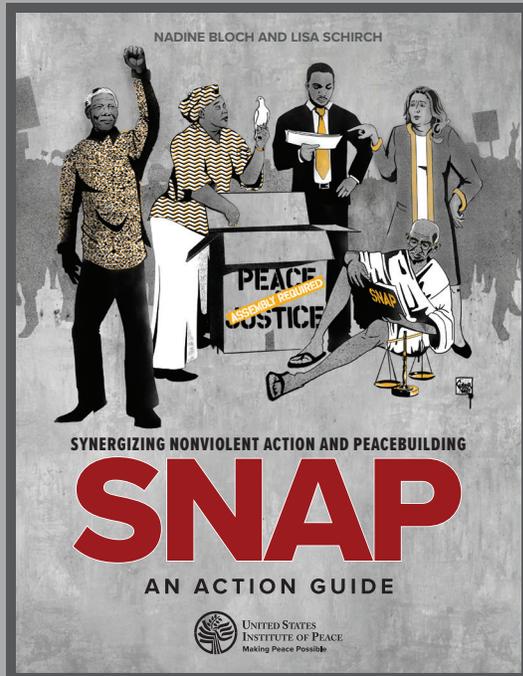




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# SNAP: Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding

BY NADINE BLOCH AND LISA SCHIRCH

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# SNAP



## Introducing an Action Guide for Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding

Boycotts and protests, or dialogue and negotiation? Pressure or engagement? Which approaches, and in what sequence, are most effective for transforming conflict and building just and peaceful societies? Scholars, activists, organizers, and peacebuilders have been grappling with these questions for decades. This is the core idea of this action guide: nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes achieve more success when they are intentionally used together rather than separately.

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# Is Combining Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding a New Idea?

Yes and no. In 1971, feminist nonviolent activist Barbara Deming wrote “Revolution and Equilibrium” asserting that activists needed “two hands of nonviolence.” One hand is held palm facing out, to say “stop the injustice!” The other hand is offered as if to shake someone’s hand. Notable nonviolent activists such as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. also advocated this two-handed approach. They supported the use of strategic nonviolent tactics to shift power while also reaching out a hand to dialogue or negotiate with adversaries.

Successful nonviolent activists have been using dialogue and negotiation for many years. At the same time, the most effective peacebuilding processes were successful in large part thanks to the support of nonviolent movements.

In Liberia, Tunisia, Guatemala, Colombia, South Africa, Nepal, and many other places, positive social and political change occurred as a result of a combination of nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes. This guide does not “invent” this synergy. Rather, it seeks to address the challenges that arise when nonviolent activists and peacebuilders encounter barriers or “stalemates” with one approach. Nonviolent activists recognize the need for so-called peacebuilding skills. Peacebuilders recognize the need for shifting power dynamics. Yet, both fields do not fully draw on the skills and strategies each can offer the other. This guide begins to address that challenge.

Quaker activist and peace scholar Adam Curle drew the Curle Diagram in 1971 to show how the tools of community organizing and nonviolent direct action were necessary to shift power and enable productive

negotiations and conflict transformation. Mennonite peace practitioner John Paul Lederach elaborated on Curle’s Diagram in the 1980s and 1990s. He also acknowledged that the fields and practices of peacebuilding and nonviolent action had developed in parallel, with the “resolutionaries” separate from the “revolutionaries.”<sup>1</sup> Lisa Schirch began teaching a course combining strategic nonviolent action and peacebuilding and published a book on this topic in the early 2000s.<sup>2</sup>

In 2017, the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict published *Powering to Peace: Integrated Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding Strategies*, a special report by Veronique Dudouet to explore this intersection.<sup>3</sup> That same year, the United States Institute of Peace published a report by Anthony Wanis-St. John and Noah Rosen titled *Negotiating Civil Resistance*.<sup>4</sup> The reports shared a key conclusion: the synergy between the strategies and skills of nonviolent action and peacebuilding can strengthen the efforts of people working for social justice, political freedom, human rights, inclusion, and environmental sustainability. This action guide follows this hypothesis: a combination of nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes can shift power and increase awareness to enable a sustainable outcome to conflicts between groups. You need both to address the injustices that fuel violent conflict and to rebuild the relationships necessary to achieve sustainable peace.

Before we go any further, let’s redefine our terms:

- *Nonviolent action* is a way for ordinary people to exert power collectively without the threat or use of violence. Sometimes referred to as

“civil resistance,” it is a means of harnessing the collective strength of organized people through nonviolent tactics such as demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and protection strategies and building alternative institutions to achieve social, political, and economic goals.

- *Nonviolent organizers and activists* are strategists, campaigners, trainers, tactical experts, skilled professionals, and others who harness nonviolent action to make social change.
- *Nonviolent movements* are fluid groups of people, organizations, coalitions and networks that use nonviolent collective action to advance change-oriented goals.
- *Nonviolent campaigns* describe the sequencing of nonviolent action methods by groups to advance specified goals. Campaigns typically have a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end.
- *Peacebuilding* is a means of transforming conflict to develop sustainable, just solutions and institutions. Though often used as an umbrella term to refer to many diverse efforts, the field of peacebuilding tends to emphasize relationship-based and problem-solving processes such as dialogue, negotiation, and mediation processes that engage diverse stakeholders. Peacebuilders are dialogue

facilitators, conflict coaches, trainers, negotiators, and mediators who advocate for peacebuilding processes. In this guide, the term *peacebuilding* refers to skills and processes that build relationships between groups to foster greater awareness of the conflict issues and potential solutions.

- *Conflict transformation* is an umbrella term for the processes that change or transform violent conflict into nonviolent conflict, where individuals use various institutional and extra-institutional channels and methods to address root causes. Conflict transformation includes both nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes to address societal problems and improve relationships between conflict stakeholders. Nonviolent activists and peacebuilders are all changemakers, people who foster change.
- *Power* is the ability to influence others to get a particular outcome. Governments and international institutions often support peacebuilding processes to address root causes and either prevent or respond to violent conflict. However, power imbalances can make negotiation and other peace processes ineffective. Nonviolent action mobilizes people to work together through tactics that shift power and empower communities. Once power is more balanced, peace processes are more likely to find sustainable outcomes.

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## From Separation to Synergy

Some view nonviolent action and peacebuilding as separate, incompatible, or contradictory skill sets. Nonviolent action focuses on shifting power to achieve victory against an (often) oppressive or unresponsive opponent. Peacebuilding processes seek to build relationships, increase awareness of underlying interests, and discover potential solutions. Each approach has its own history, community of practice, literature, and education and training programs. Nonviolent action and peacebuilding are most often taught separately in both popular and academic settings.

This action guide seeks to reduce the separation and create a synergy for both peacebuilding and nonviolent action practitioners so that the most strategic and

effective methods from each field are considered on the path toward conflict transformation. Instead of viewing nonviolent action and peacebuilding as opposing methods of change, this guide illustrates how both approaches support each other on the pathway toward change.

Some synergy has already begun, as many people working “on the ground” in many different settings intuitively use both sets of skills in their work to transform their societies—often to great practical effect. Others who self-identify as either peacebuilders, activists, or organizers are beginning to become interested in learning more about “synergizing nonviolent action and peacebuilding” strategies and skill sets.

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## Who Are We to Write This Guide?

We are two activists, trainers, teachers, and facilitators who have long explored how to synergize nonviolent action and peacebuilding. Here is a little bit of information about each of us.

*Nadine Bloch* is currently training director for *Beautiful Trouble* and an innovative artist, nonviolent practitioner, political organizer, direct-action trainer, and puppetista. Her work explores the potent intersection of art and politics, where creative cultural resistance is not only effective political action but also a powerful way to reclaim agency over our own lives, fight oppressive systems, and invest in our communities—all while having more fun than the other side. She is a contributor to

*Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution* (2012, O/R Books), *Beautiful Rising: Creative Resistance from the Global South* (2017, O/R Books), *We Are Many, Reflections on Movement Strategy from Occupation to Liberation* (2012, AK Press), and author of the special report *Education & Training in Nonviolent Resistance* (2016, U.S. Institute of Peace). Check out her column on the blog *Waging Nonviolence*, “The Arts of Protest.”

*Lisa Schirch* is research director for the Toda Peace Institute and senior policy advisor with the Alliance for Peacebuilding. From 1995 to 2017, she taught a graduate-level course on combining strategic nonviolent action and strategic peacebuilding at

the Summer Peacebuilding Institute and served as a research professor at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University. Her book *Strategic Peacebuilding* (2004) provides a conceptual framework for recognizing the role of nonviolent action in peacebuilding. Her book *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding* (2005) and her article “Strategic Arts-Based Peacebuilding” (2008) explore the role of the arts in nonviolent action. In *Dialogue on Difficult Subjects* (2007), Schirch and coauthor David Campt explore the role of dialogue in nonviolent social movements to address racism and other social problems. In *Conflict Assessment and*

*Peacebuilding Planning* (2014), Schirch provides assessment and strategic planning tools. Schirch frequently takes to the streets and the blogosphere to work for social justice.

We have also been working with a variety of colleagues in the two fields who are seeking greater synergy between nonviolent action and peacebuilding strategies and greatly appreciate their support. They have helped us develop this action guide in several ways, by participating in trial runs of training activities, commenting on the content and structure of the guide, and contributing to the reading and writing of drafts.

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## Who Is This Guide For?

This guide is for experienced trainers interested in serving the many organizers, activists, mediators, negotiators, and civil society professionals who see the need for more training in how to integrate nonviolent action and peacebuilding strategies. While many experienced trainers know either the field of nonviolent action or the field of peacebuilding, few know both fields. Users of this guide might include the following:

- The leaders of nonviolent activist groups who realize that “all we are doing is focusing on street action, and we need more organizational strength in order to win or be viable in the longer term”
- The members of negotiation teams who realize that “pressure generated through nonviolent mass action can challenge power differences and strengthen our negotiating leverage”
- The women’s empowerment project organizers who realize that existing laws obstruct women’s participation in political dialogue, negotiation, and decision making, and that “we need to build awareness and power for women’s rights” through dramatic nonviolent action
- The anticorruption activists who are asking “how do we translate public demands for transparency and accountability into laws and governance institutions that are enforced and sufficiently supported?”
- The rule of law task force members who have reached an impasse in addressing police bribery and realize that “we need community members to both dialogue directly with the police *and* press for change through nonviolent action in the community”

- The donors who see that their investments in development are undermined by poor governance practices and recognize that “we need to support communities that are using non-

violent action to raise public awareness of predatory governance”

The trick, of course, is to find a variety of ways to make this synergy common practice.

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## How Is the SNAP Guide Organized?

Transforming conflict requires strategy. Units 1, 2, 5, 6, and 9 provide a strategic framework that helps highlight the synergy of nonviolent action’s ability to build power with peacebuilding skills that foster greater awareness of the issues and interests of all groups.

Three units in this guide focus on typical peacebuilding skills. Dialogue skills in unit 3 enable changemakers to defuse conflict and build coalitions. Facilitation skills in unit 4 aid in the development of group process. Negotiation skills in unit 8 help groups find creative solutions with adversaries.

Unit 7 of this guide focuses on how to choose non-violent tactics that will shift power.

The sequence of the units follows a basic outline of good strategy. In reality, activists, organizers, and peacebuilders know that there is no straight line to success—change moves more like a helix with peaks and valleys, achievements and setbacks. Also, this action guide does not pretend to be all inclusive. For example, we do not do a deep dive on communications and messaging or changing legal systems. Rather, it is intentionally selective in an effort to create an accessible, reasonably sized guide. (There are additional materials in the “Resources” section of each unit.)

The action guide started with a primer to provide basic information about the fields of nonviolent action and peacebuilding. Unit 1 provides a detailed overview of the synergy between nonviolent action and peacebuilding. The guide illustrates this complementarity in several case studies.

Unit 2 highlights key principles and elements of strategy, necessary for all conflict transformation. Improving strategy is an overarching organizing theme for the guide.

Unit 3 explores the skills needed for building diverse coalitions, a common characteristic of successful nonviolent movements. Communication skills such as active listening, defusing anger, and effective dialogue are central to the field of peacebuilding.

Unit 4 addresses the challenge of facilitating effective meetings and making decisions in groups. These peacebuilding skills are helpful for building group cohesion and decision-making capacity. Honing these skills can help changemakers build stronger coalitions and address internal conflicts.

Unit 5 introduces conflict assessment exercises from both fields. Good assessment is necessary for good strategy. In particular, inclusive and diverse participation

in the conflict assessment processes helps ensure that the analysis is reflective of the lived experiences of different people in society.

Units 6 and 7 identify more advanced strategic planning skills to better integrate nonviolent action and peacebuilding approaches. While many groups like to jump ahead to the fun and exciting stage of choosing nonviolent direct-action tactics, this often results in ineffective tactics that are not explicitly linked to strategy.

Unit 8 returns to a focus on how to sequence and synergize nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes. It explores the concept of “negotiation ripeness” and how to determine when to use nonviolent action to build power, when to use dialogue to strengthen coalitions and public support, or when to negotiate with adversaries to find a sustainable solution. Negotiation in this context is critical to winning allies, channeling direct action into concrete outcomes, and consolidating victories. When and if a nonviolent movement has successfully shifted and gained negotiating power, principled negotiation strategies can help prepare a group to achieve tangible wins.

Unit 9 reviews the sequencing of nonviolent action and peacebuilding methods to maximize their effectiveness. It helps changemakers develop planning time lines to operationalize and implement their integrated strategies, using skills emphasized earlier in the guide, in order to achieve their goals.

Each unit can stand on its own to create an individual short training session, or units can be combined as a framework for creating longer one- to four-day training sessions or multiple weekly sessions. A typical unit includes the following:

- Learning Objectives
- Front Line Story
- Key Concepts: basic information
- Beyond the Page: exercises to help a group practice skills and apply knowledge
- Resources

This action guide is useful in both formal and informal training settings. In addition to the “Resources” section at the end of each unit, you can find a glossary of terms at the end of the guide. For access to free supplemental SNAP materials and resources, please contact [snap@usip.org](mailto:snap@usip.org).

We, of course, would love to hear from you and learn from your experiences using SNAP in your workshops and training programs. If you have suggestions or would like to share your experiences, please e-mail [snap@usip.org](mailto:snap@usip.org). We also thank you for your creativity, commitment, and contribution to effective social change and conflict transformation.

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# Making This Common Practice

## How to Maximize Learning in a Training or Workshop

We recommend that you use training approaches grounded in experiential learning and a participatory framework that builds on and synthesizes knowledge and skills that already exist in the room while accommodating a variety of learning and communication styles. Experiential<sup>5</sup> and Popular Education<sup>6</sup> techniques encourage deeper engagement with the concepts and often more meaningful and empowering participation in the learning process.

If you are already skilled in adult education and training in a Popular Education approach, this guide should

make it easy for you to design and lead (and train others to lead) workshops and extended programs on synergizing nonviolent action and peacebuilding strategies and skills. If you are less experienced but motivated and daring, this guide should help you offer educational experiences of value to your organizations and movements. Contact [snap@usip.org](mailto:snap@usip.org) for some helpful basic training tips in using this guide, as well as some other basic resources on good group facilitation and training.

## KEY REMINDERS FOR USING THIS GUIDE

# Build Bold Spaces

We consider this an advanced guide as many of the exercises are written for experienced facilitators or trainers in leading workshops with diverse audiences on complex issues. Current best practices in training emphasize the importance of preventing unhealthy social norms and oppressions through building a healthy community framework for the work that you will be doing if you use this guide.

Invest in setting up a space that is open to bold sharing but not tolerant of racism, sexism, or other oppressive ways of interacting. We believe the work itself can offer significant benefits in the here and now if grounded in this way.

Invest in solid facilitators/trainers who can

- take advantage of “learning moments,”
- equalize participation in the group to access the knowledge in the room,
- use a variety of teaching methods that honor a broad spectrum of learning styles, and
- communicate and build a commitment to the strategic importance of training and education in nonviolent movements.<sup>7</sup>

## Prioritize the Debrief

Often, the most important work in an exercise (and there are many in this guide!) is done in the debrief or evaluation section. One format is the “Quick and Dirty Debriefing Framework” that can work in very little time or can serve as a scaffolding for deep processing, based on the three “F’s”:

- **FEELINGS:** Encourage participants to process their feelings by asking, “How did that feel?”

*NOTE: If the exercise brought up intense energy or trauma, this may need to be handled more formally before being able to move on to thinking about what happened or what was learned.*

- **FACTS:** Ask “What happened?”

*NOTE: This section is about learning what people experienced from different perspectives in the group, not about establishing “facts” per se. In a role play, it is often very eye-opening to some, that one group of participants (e.g., role-playing police) would have experienced something very different from another group (e.g., role-playing protesters).*

- **FUTURE:** Ask “What lessons/learnings/aha moments can we take with us?”

*NOTE: This is the essence of taking the experience forward or into the future beyond the workshop.*

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# Resources

- Bloch, Nadine. *Education and Training in Nonviolent Resistance*. Special Report 394. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, October 2016.
- “A Brief History of Folk Schools.” Folk School Alliance. Accessed December 8, 2017. <http://www.peopleseducation.org/a-brief-history-of-folk-schools/>.
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## Notes

1. John Paul Lederach, "Revolutionaries & Resolutionaries: In Pursuit of Dialogue," *Conciliation Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1989): 87.
2. Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004).
3. Veronique Dudouet, *Powering to Peace: Integrated Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding Strategies*, vol. 1 (Washington: DC: International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, April 2017).
4. Anthony Wanis-St. John and Noah Rosen, "Negotiating Civil Resistance," *Peaceworks*, no. 129 (July 2017): 5–20.
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