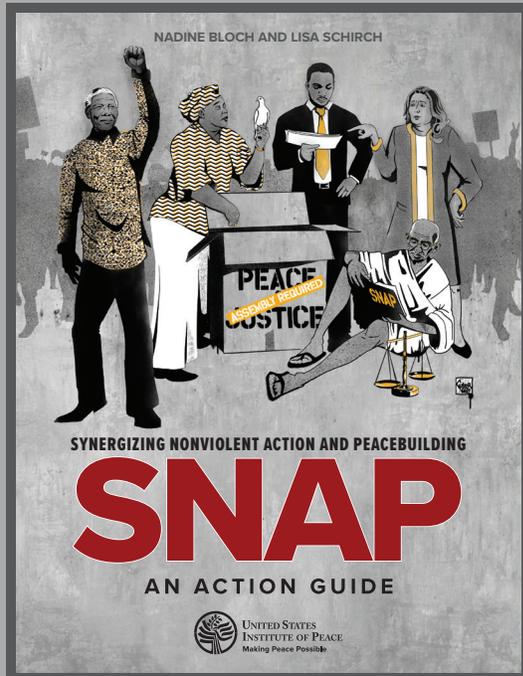




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A Primer on Strategic Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding Processes

This action guide makes the case that both nonviolent action and peacebuilding approaches—direct action and dialogue—are necessary to transform violent conflict and increase the likelihood that groups will achieve their goals. This unit provides a primer on nonviolent action and peacebuilding so that we may begin to understand how they can be integrated in the conflict transformation process.

What Is Conflict Transformation?

For our purposes, *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 a variety of nonviolent methods to address root causes and build a just and sustainable peace.

People advance a just and sustainable peace using different methods. Some favor institutional methods, like elections and court cases. For example, human rights lawyers will focus on legal strategies and rule of law systems, and high-level peacebuilding specialists may focus on diplomatic solutions to conflict. Extra-institutional methods, like nonviolent action and local peacebuilding efforts such as intergroup dialogue, work outside of formal institutions. For example, community leaders may employ traditional councils to resolve neighborly disputes, and grassroots activists may organize a boycott to hold a company to account for polluting local water sources. We'll return to those concepts later in the guide.

The path to transforming conflict is neither linear nor straightforward. Peacebuilding methods like dialogue, mediation, and negotiation may be needed as activists begin to organize and build movements, and nonviolent action tactics like mass protests and strikes may be needed to help negotiators use conflict resolution methods to bring a more just, rights-respecting peace agreement over the finish line.

This guide does not address the entire scope of conflict transformation. The point of this guide is to show specifically how people can use nonviolent action and peacebuilding approaches in tandem to transform conflict and achieve a more just and sustainable peace. Different approaches are necessary at different times and in different contexts.

TABLE 1.

Types of Change

KIND OF CHANGE	WHERE IT PLAYS OUT
Personal change	Individual and internal work: self-awareness of one's identity, sources of power, skills, attributes, knowledge
Relational change	Interactions between people; dialogue and communications
Cultural change	Societal shifts in values—away from domination and violence and toward partnership, justice, equity, and nonviolent approaches
Structural change	Institutional shifts away from harmful structures, institutions, laws, and regimes

Adapted from John Paul Lederach, Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

WHAT KINDS OF CHANGE ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

This action guide is relevant to individuals, organizations, and movements aiming to achieve just and sustainable peace in their societies and communities. That requires four types of change, as shown in table 1.

In practice, this means that those that seek to create positive change, or changemakers, focus on personal reflection and growth, building organizations and diverse coalitions, modeling fair and participatory internal decision-making processes, and addressing structural injustices. This guide identifies strategic

planning processes for addressing each of these dimensions of conflict transformation.

Moving from personal to structural changes requires challenging, and often confronting, the structural barriers (e.g., exclusionary policies, corruption, institutional discrimination) that marginalize or repress individuals and groups. It entails developing processes to resolve inevitable conflicts in both the short and the long term, and it requires integrating nonviolent action and peacebuilding approaches and techniques into a successful strategy.

What Is Nonviolent Action?

Nonviolent action is a method of advancing social, political, and economic change that includes tactics of protest, noncooperation, and intervention designed to shift power in a conflict without the threat or use of violence. These methods are nonviolent in that they do not include the threat or use of injurious force to others. Nonviolent action is also known as “people power,”

“civil resistance,” “nonviolent resistance,” or “nonviolent direct action.”

Nonviolent tactics attempt to change the status quo for a variety of purposes, including harmful ones. Here, however, we are referring only to nonviolent action grounded in a respect for universal human rights that

Nonviolent action methods, like those shown in table 2, can take a variety of forms to help build awareness and shift power.

aims to build more just and inclusive societies. It differs from *nonviolence* as a principled way of life that rejects violence for moral or ethical reasons.

Nonviolent action is grounded in a particular *understanding of power*. Regimes, governments, and non-state actors (corporations, militant groups, terrorists) rely on the consent and obedience of ordinary people in order to rule or wield power. Understanding this is key to a “social view” of power, in comparison with a “hierarchical” lens that sees only the top dog with power. When the people who make up the organizations and institutions that support the regime or other power holders refuse to obey or withdraw their consent and cooperation from that system by engaging in mass civil resistance, the opponent’s power can be undercut, disrupted, and even disintegrated.

The strength of nonviolent action is that it builds and shifts power by heightening awareness and participation in the process of applying social, economic, and political pressure, so that powerful groups cannot ignore the needs and interests of other groups in society. The weakness of nonviolent action is that balancing power and creating pressure for change alone may not lead to sustainable changes.

Nonviolent action requires courage and a willingness to take risks. It is not weak or passive. It is an active engagement and a powerful way for people to advance their rights, freedom, justice, and self-determination—without the use of violence. While it is true that violent warfare or terrorist attacks can disrupt or destroy a regime or an institution, these do not commonly lead to peace or justice. Nonviolent methods, however, can challenge unjust institutions in ways that can

enable a more just and peaceful society.¹ History shows that the success of nonviolent action is not dependent on the kind of regime or opponent (autocratic, democratic, or violent) that is faced but rather relies more on the capacity and skills of ordinary people.²

WHAT ARE THE METHODS OF NONVIOLENT ACTION?

Some methods protest, disrupt, or interrupt the present power structure, while others reward it or build alternatives to it. Some methods confront the system with, for example, symbolic protests or consumer boycotts. Other methods build power by providing services and governance. In 1972, Gene Sharp identified 198 methods of social, economic, and political nonviolent action;³ today a new catalog of nonviolent resistance methods is under way—with hundreds of new methods identified.⁴

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SUCCESSFUL NONVIOLENT ACTION?

Data in *Why Civil Resistance Works*⁵ show that nonviolent campaigns have been more than twice as effective as violent campaigns. When we use the term *nonviolent campaign*, we are referring to a series of observable, continual nonviolent tactics in pursuit of a goal.

Successful nonviolent campaigns do the following:

Support mass participation: Successful nonviolent campaigns choose tactics that enable more people to participate; they are on average eleven times larger than campaigns that use violence. Larger numbers of participants strengthen the power and legitimacy of a nonviolent campaign or movement, increase the power and make it more

TABLE 2.

Nonviolent Action Methods

NATURE OF METHODS	PENALTY/CONFRONTATIONAL (NEGATIVE)	REWARD/CONSTRUCTIVE (POSITIVE)
Nonviolent Methods Category (General Behavior)		
Expression (Saying Something)	Protest Action that is primarily communicative with the intent to criticize or coerce	Appeal Action that is primarily communicative with the intent to reward or persuade
Acts of Omission (Not Doing Something)	Noncooperation Refusal to engage in expected behavior by acts of omission	Refraining Halting or calling off disruptive actions or expression to reward or persuade
Acts of Commission (Doing or Creating Something)	Disruptive Intervention Direct action that confronts another party to stop, disrupt, or change their behavior	Creative Intervention Modeling competing behaviors and constructing competing institutions

Source: Michael Beer, "Revisiting the Methods of Nonviolent Action," *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict Blog Post* (forthcoming 2018).

difficult to crush or infiltrate a campaign or movement, and lay the groundwork for ongoing involvement.

Maintain nonviolent discipline: Successful nonviolent campaigns use tactics that leverage power while maintaining nonviolent discipline. Keeping actions nonviolent increases participation and reduces the potential for infiltration and the likelihood of repression by authorities. Such repression often backfires when movements maintain nonviolent discipline—moving bystanders to sympathize with

nonviolent activists over repressive opponents, and encouraging loyalty shifts or defections from the authority's supporters.

Invest in planning: Successful nonviolent campaigns and movements engage in ongoing strategic planning that harnesses assessment, sequencing, escalation, and innovation of tactics to lead to a successful end game. Planning encourages creativity, imagination, connectivity, and sustainability. The more groups unite around goals and innovate tactically, the more likely they are to win.

What Is Peacebuilding?

Peacebuilding is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of efforts by diverse actors in government and civil society. Peacebuilding addresses conflict at the community, regional, or national level through participatory processes that involve dialogue, prin-

cipled negotiation, mediation, and collective problem solving. High-level peacebuilding led by the United Nations (UN) or nation-states includes official diplomacy and conflict prevention efforts to solve deep-rooted drivers of conflict. Locally led peacebuilding efforts

Peacebuilding methods highlight the importance of relationship building and creative problem solving.

include dialogue programs and other community-based efforts to reduce conflict and improve relationships and the quality of life.

A peacebuilding approach does not back away from conflict or tension. It is “hard on the problems, but soft on the people,” meaning that it encourages individuals to distinguish between a person’s beliefs and actions and the human dignity of the person. People can criticize ideas and behaviors while maintaining respect for the person. Such an attitude is the prerequisite for building strong and sustainable relationships and trust.

Formal peacebuilding processes require structures for wide participation and deep discussion of the underlying interests and grievances that fuel conflict. Public participation is an essential component for achieving a sustainable outcome.

Half of all peace agreements fail. Elite-led state-to-state or high-level peace processes that limit or exclude public participation and interests are more likely to fail than those that put the people—or society—at the center of the process. Research on all peace agreements reached in the post–Cold War period found that the involvement of civil society actors, including religious groups, women’s groups, and human rights organizations, reduced the risk of failure by 64 percent.⁶

A comprehensive peace process requires a careful look at *who* participates, *what* issues are on the table, and *how* to structure the process. In short, a comprehensive peace process requires creating structures for wide participation and deep discussion of underlying interests and grievances that fuel conflict. Only a *wide* and

deep multileveled, sequential process using principled negotiation techniques will enable a community to build a broad consensus on the way forward. The Colombia peace process, which culminated in a landmark peace accord last year, featured the active involvement of victims’ groups, women’s groups, and other civic actors.

The strength of peacebuilding is that it uses inclusive processes to develop solutions that satisfy the interests of all groups. Peacebuilding processes like community-led dialogue can be helpful within a nonviolent campaign or movement to help build strong coalitions. Dialogue and negotiation are also helpful to develop creative solutions and negotiate a sustainable outcome between a nonviolent movement and external stakeholders. The weakness of peacebuilding processes is that dialogue and negotiation are often ineffective if there is a significant power imbalance between groups.

WHAT ARE THE METHODS OF PEACEBUILDING?

The UN and many scholars and practitioners use the term *peacebuilding* to refer to a wide spectrum of activities to transform conflict, including community and economic development, participatory governance, and programs to bring groups together across the lines of conflict to find sustainable solutions.

In this action guide, we focus mostly on dialogue and negotiation peacebuilding processes. *Negotiation* is a process where two or more people or groups pursue their self-interests. In principled negotiation, stakeholders communicate with each other to address interests that may be incompatible, and they identify underlying needs and interests to develop creative solutions that meet the fundamental needs of all groups.

Negotiation begins with dialogue. *Dialogue* is a way of talking that encourages active listening and honest but respectful speaking. The goal of dialogue is to improve understanding and relationships between people or groups. Dialogue and negotiation tend to be most productive when groups recognize their interdependence and desire to maintain a relationship in the long run.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SUCCESSFUL PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES?

Comprehensive peacebuilding processes have at least three interrelated benefits:

Broad buy-in: Peacebuilding processes are more likely to succeed if there is public support for them. Lack of public support is a key characteristic of failed peace agreements.

Legitimacy: Dialogue and negotiation are more effective if stakeholders hold roughly equal power

and are seen as legitimate by key groups. Peace negotiations that include only armed actors may be seen as legitimizing the use of violent struggle to achieve political power. A peace process that includes empowered and legitimate civil society representatives is more likely to succeed.

Sustainability: Peace processes that involve active public participation are more likely to address a range of factors fueling conflict. Addressing root causes and finding a political solution can prevent the recurrence of violent conflict.

In conclusion, this unit provides foundational knowledge of nonviolent action and peacebuilding so that we can better understand how they can work synergistically together to transform violent conflict and build just and peaceful societies. The Circle of Principles (figure 1) below helps visualize how the principles of effective nonviolent action and peacebuilding reinforce one another.

FIGURE 1.

Circle of Principles



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Notes

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