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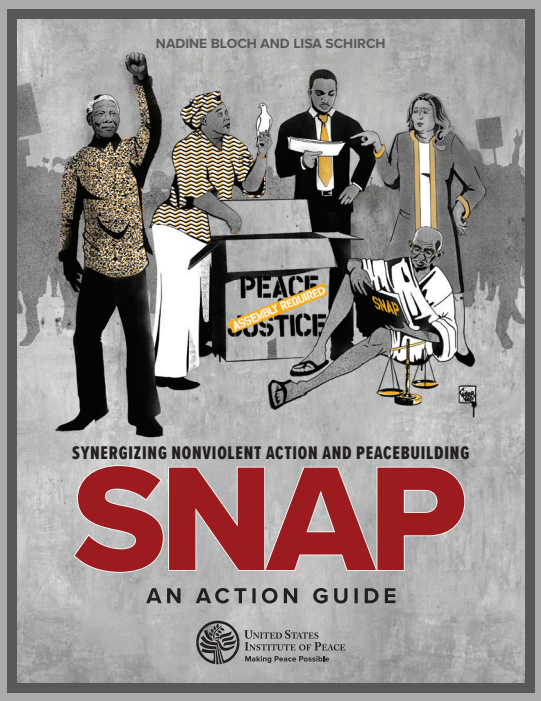

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SNAP: Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding

BY NADINE BLOCH AND LISA SCHIRCH

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UNIT 1

Synergize for Success

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

Identify how nonviolent action is both distinct from and complementary to negotiation or other peacebuilding processes to achieve political, economic, and social changes or reforms

Identify how peacebuilding processes are helpful to build relationships both within a nonviolent movement and between diverse stakeholders in the wider conflict

Construct a diagram that includes peacebuilding and nonviolent methods that could increase awareness of key issues and shift power in ways necessary for effective negotiation

UNIT

1

Synergize for Success

Conflict transformation requires a wide variety of tasks, such as taking action in the streets, building relationships and recruiting new members to the movement, analyzing information and developing strategies for effective action, and sitting down with adversaries to brainstorm ways to satisfy each other's interests. Yet most movements and peacebuilding processes either de-emphasize or lack these complementary skill sets. Nonviolent activists know how to engage in nonviolent conflict and motivate people to take joint public action, but they may have less experience in facilitating a delicate meeting featuring diverse groups and opinions. Peacebuilders may excel at dialogue or negotiation strategies to solve complex problems, but they may get stuck when one group has far more power than another group, making "getting to yes" that results in a fair and just resolution difficult or impossible.

This unit describes how a synergy between nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes improves the chances of success. The Curle Diagram illustrates this synergy to translate nonviolent tactics into effective pressure to bring groups to the negotiation table. And a case study illustrates what synergy between nonviolent action and peacebuilding looks like in practice.

FRONT LINE STORY

Liberia Mass Action for Peace

Social change in Liberia would not have taken place without a combination of nonviolent action, dialogue, and negotiations in a peace process.

A series of civil wars in Liberia between the government and armed rebel groups fighting for control of the country brought devastation to the civilian population. During the Second Liberian Civil War, community organizers went door-to-door recruiting women to join a group that would become known as Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace (WLMAP) in 2003. The group brought together Muslim and Christian women who mobilized their efforts and used various nonviolent tactics to call for an end to the violence.

The women dressed in white clothing during weekly protests, implemented a sex strike, and held a public candlelight vigil. They eventually secured meetings with President Charles Taylor and rebels from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia, getting both sides to agree to attend peace talks in Ghana.

The Liberian women raised money and sent a delegation to Accra to continue applying nonviolent pressure on the warring parties during the negotiations. They staged a sit-in at the building where the negotiations were taking place, blocking the doors to prevent anyone from leaving until a settlement was reached. The leader of WLMAP, Leymah Gbowee, even threatened to take off her clothes, an act that would bring shame to the men and prevented guards from removing the women.

The Liberian women became a widely recognized political force against violence and Taylor's regime. Their persistent actions led to the government and the rebels signing a ceasefire agreement and Taylor's resignation, signaling an end to a fourteen-year civil war. The women remained active throughout the peace process, working to register people in different parts of the country to vote. In 2006, Liberians elected Africa's first female head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who served two terms as president. The combination of nonviolent action and negotiation effectively brought an end to the civil war in Liberia.

Adapted from the Global Nonviolent Action Database.

Key Concepts

No single process or tactic on its own is likely to bring about sustainable change. A combination of nonviolent actions (strikes, vigils, boycotts) and peacebuilding processes (dialogue, negotiation, mediation) is more likely to transform conflict, create social change, and build a more just and sustainable peace.

HOW CAN NONVIOLENT ACTION HELP PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

Nonviolent action is often essential where power asymmetries between the conflict parties make successful negotiation or dialogue less likely. Silent vigils, petitions, sit-ins, and symbolic protests can increase awareness of issues, shift incentives, and help "ripen" conflicts for resolution. Nonviolent action can help:

- *Increase awareness of the key issues*, beginning with community organizing to raise awareness within a group, then raising awareness of larger numbers of people until there is broad recognition of the need for social change
- *Shift power between groups* so that the needs and interests of all groups can be met
- *Raise the urgency* of ending violent conflict and *integrate the voices of the marginalized or those excluded* from formal or informal peace processes

HOW CAN PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES HELP NONVIOLENT ACTION BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

Peacebuilding methods like negotiation, mediation, and dialogue are critical for helping establish next steps and translate movement goals into sustainable change. Peacebuilding approaches can help:

- *Build diverse coalitions and alliances* necessary for successful movements, including communicating with key people who may be opposed to an issue to change sides
- *Negotiate with power holders to achieve concrete gains* and translate mass action into specific policy, legal, and other needed changes or reforms
- *Prepare movements and political activists* to appropriately communicate and effectively govern with diverse constituents

The Curle Diagram

How Do Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding Fit Together?

It is possible for nonviolent action or peacebuilding processes to bring about changes on their own. But often it is the synergy of both processes that addresses the roots of conflict and builds inclusive, just societies.

Conflict transformation is an art, not a science, and the specific steps are dependent on a deep understanding of the particular context. Sometimes groups start by negotiating and then realize that power is unbalanced, and a powerful government is not negotiating in good faith. Nonviolent action may follow such an unproductive negotiation.

This guide uses adaptations of what is known as the "Curle Diagram," which originates from Quaker nonviolent activist and peacebuilder Adam Curle. As illustrated in figure 2, conflict transformation often passes through a variety of phases.

The Curle Diagram includes four blocks of activity. The diagram may look linear, but conflict transformation is not a step-by-step process. It might be helpful to imagine the arrow here as a helix moving forward but visiting a variety of phases. The four stages of the Curle Diagram refer to the following:

Latent or "hidden" conflict: Conflict transformation often begins with addressing a situation where there is latent conflict. For example, some groups may be experiencing marginalization or discrimination, preventing their advancement in society. In these cases, there may be a low public awareness of conflict and some groups have more power than others. Conflict transformation in this stage starts with community organizing, coalition building, and capacity building to inform people about the issues at stake and empower people to become agents of change.

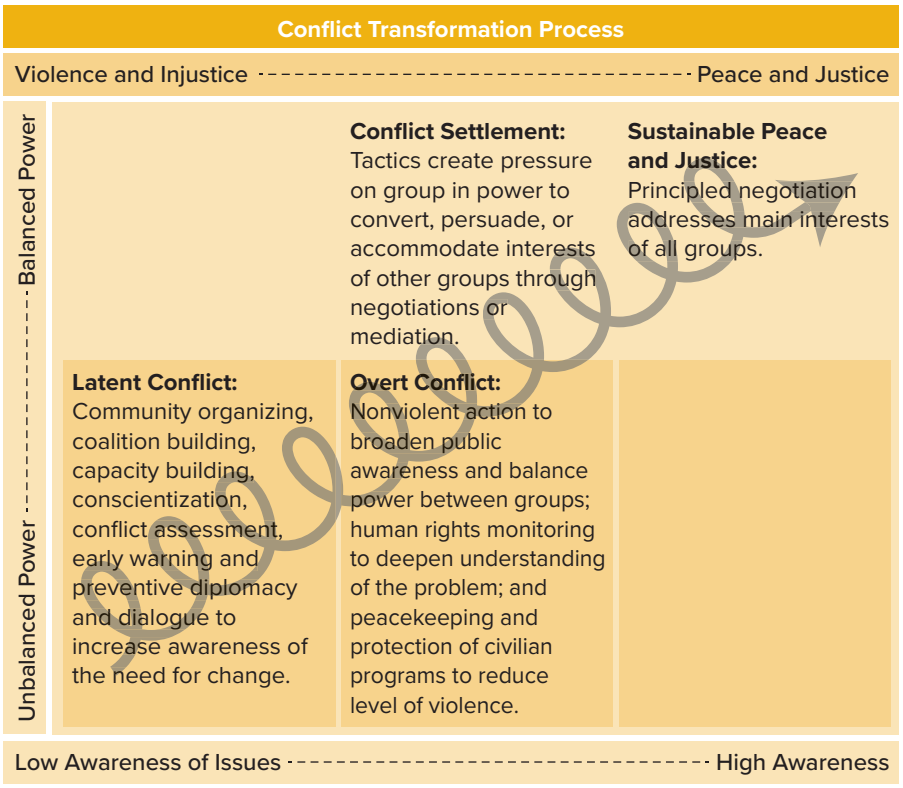
Overt or "open" conflict: In this stage, there is greater public awareness of conflict. Nonviolent action can bring conflict into the open and increase public awareness to persuade or pressure other groups to bring about social change by helping to shine a light on group grievances and changing the incentive structures of other groups.

Conflict settlement: Nonviolent movements also shift power. Once power is more balanced, and awareness of the conflict is widespread, conflict settlement becomes more likely. Sometimes balanced power between groups may simply *persuade a group* to change a policy or practice, or a group may be *forced* to yield power, allowing other groups to achieve their goals. More often, change happens as the group with more power *accommodates* the interests of other groups in society. Most of the time, conflict settlement happens through the use of peacebuilding techniques such as dialogue, mediation, or negotiation to create a detailed agreement on how the conflict will end and how new policies, structures, and leadership will be put in place.

Sustainable peace and justice: Conflict transformation processes strive to achieve a sustainable peace and justice, illustrated in the upper left-hand corner of the diagram. **Sustainable peace** is possible when the negotiations address the root causes of a conflict and policies and institutions are in place that protect basic human rights and promote inclusive governance.

FIGURE 2.

Curle Diagram



How Does the Curle Diagram Illustrate the Roles of Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding?

The Curle Diagram illustrates two basic forces: increasing awareness of the issues and balancing power between groups. Both are necessary for sustainable peace and justice.

Nonviolent action's primary focus is on *shifting and balancing power* between groups. While some nonviolent movements also practice peacebuilding skills of dialogue, facilitation, and negotiation, these tend to receive less emphasis in nonviolent action training.

Peacebuilding's primary focus is on *building relationships and raising awareness* of the interests and needs of all groups, the structural root causes, the interdependence between groups, and potential solutions. While some peacebuilding processes also pay attention to power dynamics, in general the field of peacebuilding places less emphasis on power than on building awareness and relationships.

WHY DO PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES NEED NONVIOLENT ACTION?

Negotiation and peace processes are rarely successful if there is a large imbalance of power. If one group has far more power than another, the group with more power may not feel it is necessary to change and may not negotiate in good faith. Nonviolent action can reinforce successful peace processes in three main ways:

1. **Nonviolent action shifts power:** Nonviolent action mobilizes people to take joint action to increase their power and public legitimacy and to put pressure on conflict actors. When power shifts, negotiation can be fruitful as all groups recognize the costs of the status quo and are more likely to participate in negotiation processes in good faith.

2. **Nonviolent action raises public awareness and legitimacy:** Nonviolent action brings hidden or latent conflicts into the open and increases public awareness of the legitimacy of the problems. Peacebuilding processes are more likely to succeed when there is wide acknowledgment of the problem and public commitment to address it.

3. **Nonviolent action can include creative interventions:** Nonviolent interventions can promote self-organizing and alternative structures to help the public imagine and build a more peaceful and just future. The interventions can also offer protection for peacebuilders, negotiators, human rights activists, journalists, and others to safely do their work.

WHY DOES NONVIOLENT ACTION NEED PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES?

Nonviolent movements require skills in building relationships and developing solutions. Peacebuilding processes can reinforce successful nonviolent movements in three main ways:

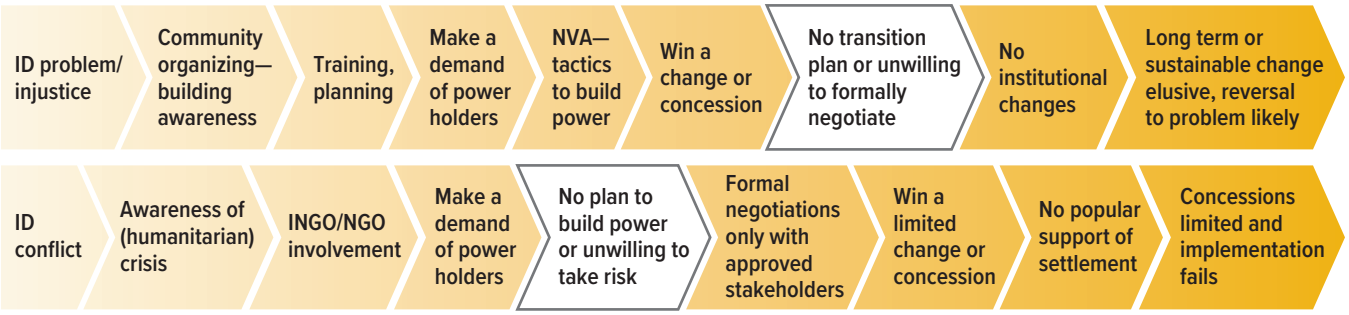
1. **Peacebuilding skills help build stronger nonviolent movements and coalitions:** Internal conflict within a nonviolent movement and ethnic, religious, class, and gender divisions within society are significant reasons why movements fail. Successful nonviolent movements build wide and diverse coalitions. The use of dialogue, facilitation, and negotiation skills to address internal conflicts, facilitate inclusive decision making, and build coalitions increases the likelihood of a successful nonviolent movement.

2. **Peacebuilding processes use negotiation to find sustainable outcomes:** Nonviolent movements that end where one group “wins” and the other “loses” create the conditions where the losing group may restart the conflict. Successful peace processes address the interests of all stakeholders through principled negotiation. Peacebuilding skills can help nonviolent movement leaders link the power of their movements to detailed policy proposals and high-level negotiations that determine long-term implementation and sustainable outcomes.

3. **Peacebuilding processes can develop new institutions and inclusive political processes:** Peacebuilding processes offer the opportunity for re-creating how social groups relate to each other over the long term.

FIGURE 3.

The Gaps in Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding Approaches



What Happens When There Is No Synergy between Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding Skills?

Nonviolent movements that do not use dialogue and negotiation may achieve short-term wins, but they may be unable to reach a settlement that delivers long-term change. Some activists may assume the path to success looks something like this: a group identifies an injustice, organizes the community to respond, decides on a few tactics to build their power, and hopefully "wins" over their adversary. What is not shown in this narrative is that all too often there is no sustainable "win" because there is no negotiated solution that satisfies all stakeholders.

Peacebuilding narratives also map the path to success. Peacebuilders identify a conflict and often attempt to address that conflict first through dialogue, often facilitated by an NGO (nongovernment organization), and then through an official negotiation process between the adversaries. This narrative is also deficient. Many times, negotiation processes are unsuccessful because one side holds more power than the other side and does not want to give it up. Negotiation also tends to fail when it excludes key stakeholders like women, youth, and other parts of civil society, and when there is not sufficient public support for a negotiated outcome.

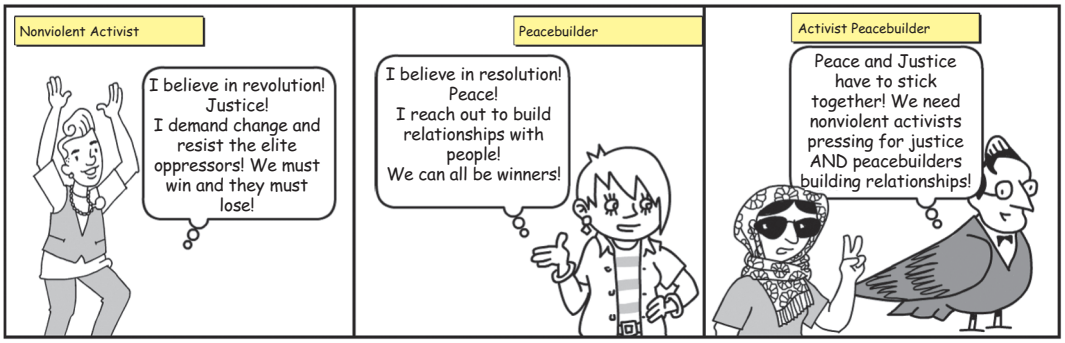
Figure 3 provides an example of the gaps in nonviolent action and peacebuilding approaches.

FIGURE 4.

Revolution Meets Resolution

Revolution Meets Resolution

Created By Lisa Schirch



This comic strip was created at MakeBeliefsComix.com. Go there and make one yourself!

What Are Obstacles to Greater Synergy between Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding Today?

In short, there is often a lack of strategic planning. Different moments in the conflict transformation process call for different tactics and methods. However, not everyone is aware of the full range of tactics and strategies they can employ, and they may not have the time, the skill set, or both to integrate them. There is also a human tendency to stereotype and seek comfort with the individuals and approaches we are most familiar with, creating further hurdles to working together. Figure 4 provides an example of what an "activist peacebuilder" would look like to illustrate the coming together of nonviolent action and peacebuilding perspectives.

Table 3 illustrates some of the common ground, differences, and even tensions between the fields of nonviolent action and peacebuilding. While many people use both nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes and recognize the need for these different approaches, there are real differences as illustrated in table 3.

TABLE 3.

A Comparison of Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding Approaches

	NONVIOLENT ACTION	PEACEBUILDING
Shared goal	*Achieving a just, peaceful society* with an absence of structural and direct violence	
Shared means to achieve goal	Working toward change without using violence because of a pragmatic belief that peacebuilding and nonviolent action methods are more strategic and/or moral than violent methods	
Ethical orientation	Emphasis on *empowerment of marginalized groups* to promote justice and speak truth to power	Emphasis on *engaging all stakeholders* in a conflict to hear their interests and needs
Methods	*Extra-institutional* methods including (a) nonviolent protest and persuasion, (b) noncooperation, (c) intervention and nonviolent protection, and (d) developing new parallel nonviolent institutions and systems	Both *institutional and extra-institutional* methods including (a) official high-level diplomacy, negotiation, and mediation in political processes and structural reforms; (b) midlevel "Track II" unofficial dialogue and development processes; and (c) local level, grassroots dialogue and development
Agents of change	*Grassroots communities* and their allies and global networks, as well as an increasing number of the mainstream or initially unallied groups and individuals who join in movement activities	*Multitrack* including grassroots communities and religious, business, government, military, and other sectors
Theory of change	Involve *more* people in working for change by demonstrating their collective power to demand change, to withdraw their support from unjust systems, or to protect others from violence	Involve *key people* or influencers working for change by solving problems together to develop mutually satisfying solutions to address root causes of violence
Terminology	Identifies *allies* or *opponents* or *adversaries* based on their affiliation with the movement and uses language of *shifting power* and *winning campaigns*	Identifies *stakeholders* based on whether they have a stake in the relevant issues and uses language of *win-win solutions* and *transforming relationships*

Adapted from Veronique Dudouet, Powering to Peace: Integrated Strategies of Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding Strategies*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: International Center on Nonviolent Conflict Special Report, April 2017).*

Who Needs to Be Involved?

As illustrated in the Curle Diagram, conflict transformation requires a combination of "insiders," who work inside the systems and institutions that should be changed, and "outsiders," or those who do not have close ties to the systems and institutions that should be changed. In other words, we need "key people" with the power to make official policy changes and "more people" in the public or "civil society" who are willing to dialogue, organize, advocate, and press for changes from the outside. More often than not, insiders have

TABLE 4.

Stakeholder Involvement

	ESSENTIAL INVOLVEMENT			
SITUATION	KEY PEOPLE	MORE PEOPLE	INSIDER/ OFFICIAL INSTITUTION	OUTSIDER/ UNOFFICIAL/ MOVEMENT
Nonviolent action to shift power balance in order to bring authorities to the negotiation table		✔		✔
Negotiation and diplomatic peacebuilding processes in order to develop creative options for sustainable solutions to the conflict	✔		✔	
A comprehensive campaign that uses the synergy of both institutional and extra-institutional processes (e.g., securing voting rights for marginalized group through protest and legal implementation)	✔	✔	✔	✔

access to institutionalized forums for problem solving and policy making. Outsiders have access to communities and can organize social groups to influence those on the inside, as demonstrated in the case of the Liberian women. Table 4 illustrates the emphasis for involvement in the sectors of "key people" versus "more people" and "insiders" versus "outsiders."

Can We Energize the Synergy?

Instead of seeing nonviolent action and peacebuilding approaches to conflict transformation as being opposed, or somehow better or worse, it might be more helpful to see them as existing *on a strategic spectrum* of conflict transformation methods. Each method is appropriate and useful at certain phases of a campaign, movement, or peace process. The methods have *comparative advantages*.

In Liberia, both nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes brought about conflict transformation that led to a more just and sustainable peace agreement. Peacebuilding processes helped build a wider coalition of groups, including Muslim and Christian women. This made it possible for women to exert a powerful influence on male leaders in both government and the armed rebel groups to reach a ceasefire in their negotiations.

In many or most cases, it is beneficial to understand both nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes, to have both sets of skills or "tools in your toolbox" so that you can use the right tool at the right time. That way—whether you are challenging exclusionary policies, addressing corruption that is fueling violence, or implementing a peace agreement to end a violent conflict—you can use both approaches synergistically to achieve maximum impact.

Beyond the Page #1

Sequencing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding Methods

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Reflect on and identify the elements of nonviolent action and peacebuilding processes that contributed to the end of the Liberian civil war and a democratic transition.

SETUP:

- Copy the chart on the following page (use a larger font for groups of more than six). Cut apart the different stages of the Liberia story.

- Use string or strips of tape on the floor, table, or wall to create the POWER and AWARENESS lines in the diagram.

HOW IT IS DONE:

1. Give one piece of the story to different people or subgroups in the training session.

2. For the facilitator: Color code or note on each paper where you think each piece belongs in the diagram in a nonobvious way so you can rearrange later if needed.

3. Ask each person or subgroup to place their piece of the story on the diagram to sequence the story as they think it might have happened.

4. In a large group, discuss the following questions:

   A. How and why did each nonviolent tactic play a role in social change? How did the women sequence their tactics? What did each tactic achieve for the group? What impact, if any, did each tactic have on the balance of power between groups?

   B. At what points did negotiation take place internal and external to the campaign?

   C. What else could have happened? Were there alternative sequences or activities that may have made sense or delivered alternative outcomes? What was the role of culture in the campaign?

   D. If not already addressed: Did the group's sequencing differ from what happened in Liberia? What might have been the impact these differences had on the process or outcome?

Representatives of Women's Mass Action for Peace meet with Liberian president Charles Taylor and pressure him to join peace talks in Ghana.	Muslim and Christian women take off their jewelry, dress in plain white clothes, and demonstrate in the streets of the capital city Monrovia.
Liberian women hold a sit-in to surround the peace talks between the rebels and the government.	Liberian president Charles Taylor resigns, and the peace process sets a timetable for free democratic elections.
Liberian women use a sex strike to pressure their partners to support peace.	Liberian women hold a candlelight vigil in Monrovia.
Liberian women register people, especially women and young people, to vote throughout Liberia.	Muslim and Christian women decide to work together for peace, despite a history of interreligious tension.
Community organizers in Liberia go door-to-door recruiting women to join a group that would come to be known as Women's Mass Action for Peace.	When police come to arrest the women blocking the doors to the negotiations in Ghana, Liberian women's leader Leymah Gbowee threatens to remove her clothing, an act that would bring shame to the men involved.
Liberians elect the first female president in Africa.	The rebels and the government negotiate a ceasefire in Ghana.

ANSWERS

1. Community organizers in Liberia go door-to-door recruiting women to join a group that would come to be known as Women's Mass Action for Peace.

2. Muslim and Christian women decide to work together for peace, despite a history of interreligious tension.

3. Muslim and Christian women take off their jewelry, dress in plain white clothes, and demonstrate in the streets of the capital city of Monrovia.

4. Liberian women use a sex strike to pressure their partners to support peace.

5. Liberian women hold a candlelight vigil in Monrovia.

6. Representatives of Women's Mass Action for Peace meet with Liberian president Charles Taylor and pressure him to join peace talks in Ghana.

7. Liberian women hold a sit-in to surround the peace talks between the rebels and the government.

8. Liberian president Charles Taylor resigns, and the peace process sets a timetable for free democratic elections.

9. When police come to arrest the women blocking the doors to the negotiations in Ghana, Liberian women's leader Leymah Gbowee threatens to remove her clothing, an act that would bring shame to the men involved.

10. The rebels and the government negotiate a ceasefire in Ghana.

11. Liberian women register people, especially women and young people, to vote throughout Liberia.

12. Liberian women hold another candlelight vigil in Monrovia.

13. Liberians elect the first female president in Africa.

Beyond the Page #2

Ideal Community/Village Exercise

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- For groups not as familiar with nonviolent actions or peacebuilding, this exercise will offer a first taste and provide a framework for the discussion of nonviolent action and conflict transformation through shared experiences.

SETUP:

- **You will need** crayons, markers, and large sheets of paper; props such as a hat, tie, or jacket; name tags; and two or more facilitators, if possible, or recruit participant(s) depending on the size of group.

HOW IT IS DONE:

1. Divide up into small groups (four to six people) and give each group large sheets of paper and crayons or markers. Ask them, "What would you like to see in an ideal community or village?" Encourage them to draw their ideas about food, school, recreation—the sky's the limit!

2. When communities have taken shape on the paper, the facilitators transform into CEOs of a multinational corporation interested in extracting something from the community (water, fossil fuels, land, etc.). The facilitators will be making several visits to each community. They should be upbeat and offer whatever they think the groups want to hear—money, jobs, future—regardless of what would actually be happening (i.e., taking away their land).

   - Visit #1: The facilitator introduces him/herself and says how happy they are to have found the perfect location for their next expansion. The facilitator should not stay too long or say too much.

   - Visit #2: The facilitator either points to or draws right on the community map the location they want, which could be the nicest spot in town. The facilitator keeps their talk positive as they engage the community. Again, this should be a quick visit.

   - Visit #3: At this point, the facilitator may escalate and take some of the community by actually tearing off some of the community map for your factory, plant, mall, or whatever. They can also continue to mark

up the community if they are not ready to escalate to tearing off a piece of the map.

- The facilitator continues tearing away paper in small amounts and talking about the advantages of development. They should try to pace their paper snatching so that it allows the community time to organize and fight back. Groups with more activists will be able to tolerate faster snatching, whereas "beginners" will need the facilitator to go slowly. The facilitator should try not to create despair or "win" too quickly.

- The facilitator continues to draw/take away paper until the group has organized sufficiently against them and has experienced resistance or some type of nonviolent action.

3. End the game and debrief:

   - **Feelings:** How did it feel when the business person visited your communities? In the beginning, later?

   - **Facts:** What happened—did communities win or lose? What did they try—tactics? Was there a strategy? Did the communities interact in any way or just manage on their own? What could have been different? Were there identifiable phases of the resistance work? Did you get to any kind of dialogue or negotiation?

   - **Future:** What lessons or experience can you take away from this game? Strategic learnings?

4. The exercise can be replayed if groups want to try their hand at resisting again.

(Adapted from a Ruckus Society/Training for Change tool adapted by Karen Ridd in Thailand, 1995, from a game led by Pom, Thai student and grassroots environmental activist, 1994)

Resources

- "Can Integrating Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding Strategies Improve Movement Effectiveness?" International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (webinar). October 27, 2017. https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/can-integrating-civil-resistance-peacebuilding-strategies-improve-movement-effectiveness/.

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