Collaborative Learning Projects

REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT

Advancing Practice in Conflict Analysis and Strategy Development

Interim Progress Report

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Summary

This article reviews the status of RPP efforts in relation to conflict analysis, one of the key areas for focused collaborative learning. RPP has been working with groups of peace practitioners in the Balkans and Central Africa, trying out a variety of methods for joint conflict analysis and moving from there into program strategies. The goal of these activities, as with all of RPP's efforts, has been to increase the effectiveness of peace programs. Preliminary results show promise for incorporating systems thinking into more traditional methods of conflict analysis. RPP is continuing to work with groups on making the link between good analysis and effective program strategies.

Original findings of RPP about Conflict Analysis and Key Questions

During the first phase of RPP, as reported in *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*, we identified several interesting findings about conflict analysis. First, there was universal agreement that practitioners must perform some kind of conflict analysis, as the basis for appropriate program design. At the same time, we also found that there was no agreement about whether any particular kind of conflict analysis was superior to any other. And, we discovered that there was no clear link between conflict analysis and the effectiveness of programs: among RPP cases, there were good programs that did very little analysis, and less effective programs that did extensive analysis. Clearly, in the current phase of the project, we have a lot to learn about what makes for effective conflict analysis. With that in mind, project staff determined to explore this programming element in each of the areas we are working. We are interested in:

1. Of the many conflict analysis tools and models available, are any more helpful than others?
2. Is it possible to perform *joint* conflict analysis across organizations (and possibly across sectors, including international and local NGOs, government entities, and UN/international agencies, and donors)?
3. While many conflict analysis models strive to be *comprehensive*, is there any way to provide greater focus on what is most important—on key driving factors?
4. What is the connection between analysis and *strategy* development, and how can we encourage greater attention to making choices among many options for program focus?
5. Will systems thinking provide a helpful addition to conflict analysis—and permit greater attention to strategy?

The earlier phase of RPP also identified several key questions that seemed to be the minimum analysis that might be performed in order to obtain a correct focus for peace programming. Those questions were:

1. What needs to be stopped? This usually refers to one or more key driving factors of the conflict, usually identified through some kind of conflict analysis!
2. What is the conflict NOT about? These can be positive factors, similar to "connectors" in the Do No Harm framework, elements that can be built upon in peace efforts. But it is also

important to avoid the simplistic assertions about a conflict, such as "this is a religious conflict" or "that is an ethnic conflict," without a deeper exploration of what is truly driving the struggle and violence.
3. What are the international and regional dimensions of the conflict? Working locally or even nationally, your efforts may be overwhelmed by those larger external factors.
4. What has already been tried? Avoid duplication and repeating failed efforts.

In our work with groups in the field, we have been focusing in various ways on the first three questions—since all of them become implicated in a conflict analysis process. The fourth issue has been addressed more indirectly, as participants from multiple agencies learn more about the program efforts of others through the networking process in joint workshops.

Evolution of an Approach

With the questions outlined above in mind, RPP staff began to work with peacebuilding organizations in the field. Introductory RPP workshops included sections on conflict analysis and reported the findings from the first phase, as noted above. In those short workshops, it was not possible to explore different methods of analysis in depth, but participants discussed the topic and performed initial joint conflict analyses. In several cases, participants indicated an interest in further work on conflict analysis, as a follow-up to the introductory workshop.

Meanwhile, David Peter Stroh, a consultant based in the Boston area, had been experimenting with translating his extensive experience with systems thinking in organizational development to the larger societal level of conflict. In the fall of 2003, Diana Chigas and I (RPP project co-directors) participated in a workshop he provided for international conflict resolution professionals, under the auspices of the Alliance for International Conflict Prevention and Resolution.[1] Later, Diana and I consulted further with David about how the systems thinking concepts might be incorporated into RPP's efforts with conflict analysis. As a result, we have been experimenting with forms of conflict analysis that incorporate systems thinking elements, emphasizing exercises that are doable and replicable by field workers. These are reported below.

Systems Thinking and Traditional Conflict Analysis

"Traditional" models of conflict analysis focus on understanding the conflict context (history, economics, political movements, etc.), identifying the causes or root causes of the conflict, and categorizing the various stakeholders/conflict actors and their interests. Most models lay out a series of questions to focus the analysis, some of them quite comprehensive and touching on almost all aspects of society.[2] Most of these conflict analysis methods are probably quite good as far as they go (we haven't tried them all!), but we find two problems. First, these traditional methods tend to present a static snapshot showing a wide range of factors without much sense of

[1] AICPR is a network of over thirty US-based organizations dedicated to international peace and reconciliation. See **www.aicpr.org**.

[2] A consortium of NGOs put together "Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: a resource pack" which outlines fifteen different models for conflict analysis, some of them quite exhaustive. See **www.conflictsensitivity.org**.

how they work together. The dynamics of conflict are missing, in other words. Second, people seem to have a great deal of difficulty moving from any sort of analysis to an effective strategy for change—since in a situation of war or chronic violence, establishing peace is a change process. Somehow the analysis processes do not enable people to identify what to do about the situation. Organizations tend to fall back on what they know/do best, their favorite methodology (dialogues, trauma healing…) or sector (women, youth…), without much sense of whether these approaches are the most effective or the best use of scarce funding resources for peacebuilding. In fact, we are finding in some areas, such as Kosovo, that donors are funding NGOs to focus resources to address highly visible and politically sensitive symptoms that are far removed from the important driving factors of the conflict.

While we would not want to suggest that systems thinking is a panacea for these problems, we do think that this approach shows promise. So what is systems thinking?

> Systems thinking is a way of understanding reality that emphasizes the relationships among a system's parts, rather than the parts themselves. Based on a field of study known as system dynamics, systems thinking has a practical value that rests on a solid theoretical foundation….A system is a group of interacting, interrelated, and interdependent components that form a complex and unified whole. Systems are everywhere—for example, … the circuatory system in your body, the predator/prey relationships in nature, the ignition system in your car, and so on. Ecological systems and human social systems are living systems; human-made systems such as cars and washing machines are nonliving systems. Most systems thinkers focus their attention on living systems, especially human social systems. However, many systems thinkers are also interested in how human social systems affect the larger ecological systems in our planet.[3]

Systems thinking helps people to understand why they do not achieve the results they want, despite their best intentions and considerable effort. Systems analysis also helps people to reflect on the changes in intention, thinking and behavior that *they* can initiate, without depending on others to change first. By providing a clear "map" of the conflict it helps people anticipate the potential unintended negative consequences of proposed actions.

Fairly recently, scholars and practitioners have been working on treating *conflicts* as systems—in other words, seeing conflicts as a series of interrelated factors, each with its role in maintaining unhealthy interactions. One of the principles of systems dynamics asserts that a change in one part of the system will cause changes in other parts—although not always the change intended! However, those of us intent on changing from destructive to constructive conflict can take heart: if conflicts conform to the same principles as other types of systems, we should be able to figure out how to induce positive change, by developing a systems understanding of the conflict, identifying key leverage points for change, and undertaking appropriate intervention strategies.

Field Experiences in Serbia, Burundi, Kosovo, and Congo

Serbia

In the spring of 2004, Diana Chigas and I worked with an NGO in southern Serbia that was implementing a large infrastructure project, which had, as one objective, the reduction of ethnic

[3] "What is Systems Thinking?" www.thesystemsthinker.com/systemsthinkinglearn.html

conflict in the area. In the course of the workshop with the local and international staff of the NGO, we undertook conflict analysis. This turned out to be difficult—partly as this area does not see itself as in active conflict, although there are certainly many latent issues and fairly high tensions, some with ethnic twists. After several attempts at an analysis, we finally identified the central concern of the program (and donor) as "reducing extremism." With this problem definition, the group completed an analysis, using a "web chart" method, which proved useful for exposing multiple causes of extremism in this context. The resulting chart is presented in Figure 1: Causal Analysis of Extremism in Southern Serbia.

This web chart was not yet a systems map—as it showed various layers of causality, but did not demonstrate how the factors interrelate in a dynamic fashion. In other words, they showed links among factors, without explaining how these factors interact to amplify or balance each other over time. Although the chart appears complex at first glance, the group did identify eight central driving factors (those in grey), to which the other elements were contributing. This analysis did permit the organization to think about its strategy. With this web chart posted, staff identified the places where they might be having an effect on the conflict. *They discovered that their programs were not, by and large, addressing the key driving factors of conflict in the area.* At best, they were helping to strengthen some forms of citizen participation—which had some potential for addressing citizen dissatisfaction with government. In addition, their large infrastructure projects could, potentially, tackle issues of youth unemployment.

This experience in Serbia, while partially successful (it did prompt the NGO to reflect on its overall program strategy), sharpened our interest in introducing systems thinking elements. Shortly thereafter, we had an opportunity to do just that in Burundi.

Burundi

After an introductory RPP workshop there in April 2004, the participants indicated an interest in further work on conflict analysis. One of RPP's donors, the Department for International Development (UK), expressed an interest in providing supplemental support for experimenting with joint analysis, a cross-sectoral process (including donors), and the inclusion of systems thinking.

We held two workshops in Burundi during July 2004, one four-day session at the beginning of the month and a three-day session at the end of the month. In the first session, we started with a force-field exercise to brainstorm the many factors working towards and against peace in Burundi. Participants then grouped and prioritized the factors impeding peace to identify six that they felt were the key driving factors of the conflict. These six elements became the basis for further analysis, using the "conflict tree" tool from Responding to Conflict, which specifies causes (roots of the tree) and effects (branches, leaves) of each central issue. The participants worked in small groups to perform these analyses and also had an opportunity to comment on the work of the other groups.

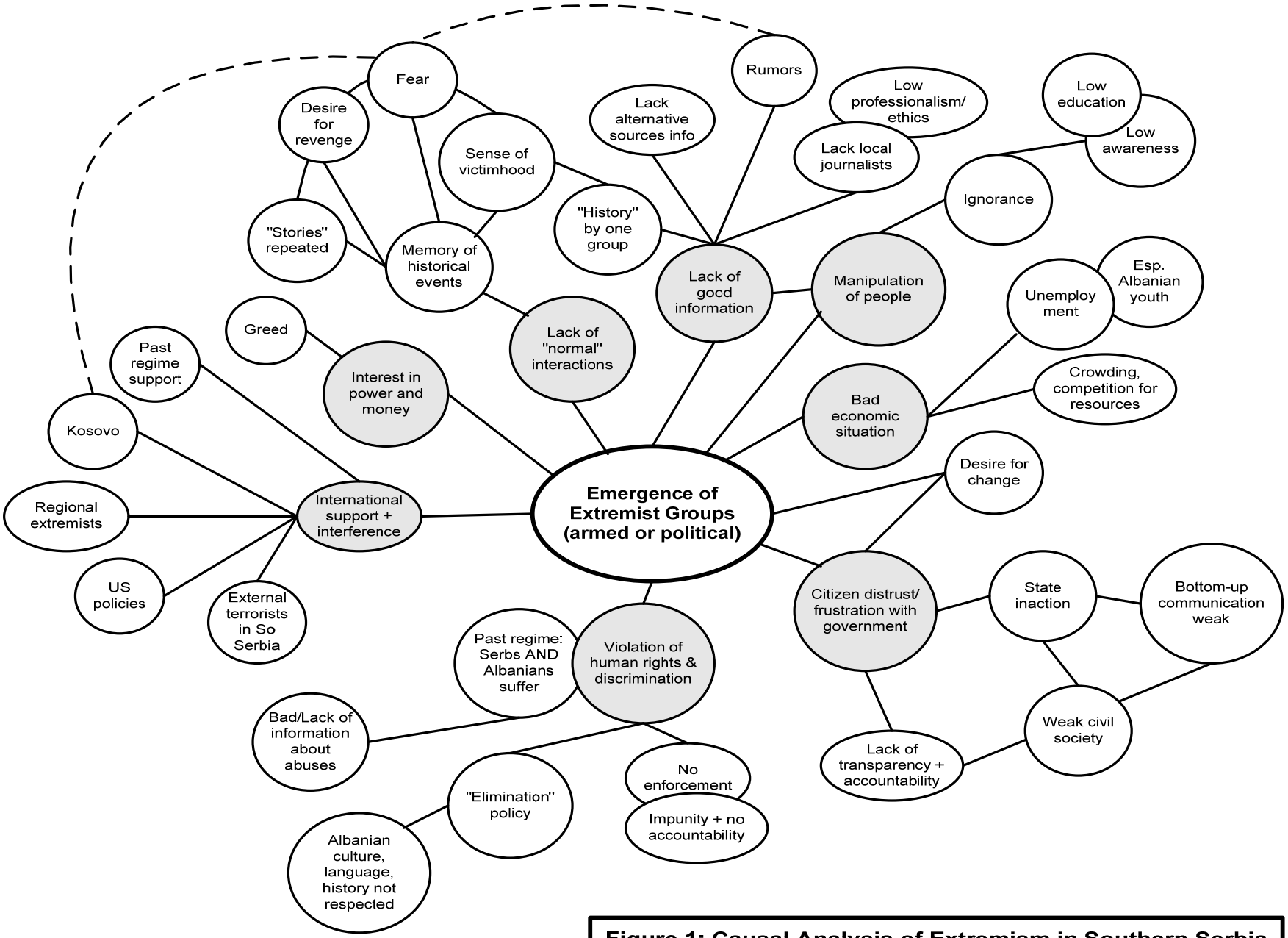


Figure 1: Causal Analysis of Extremism in Southern Serbia

During the fist workshop, participants also identified potential "triggers" of violence—events or actions that might precipitate violence. They then began to describe ways to prevent such triggers from undermining the peace process. The product of this workshop was a rich body of material regarding the six key factors and trigger. However, this material did not show how the major factors interact—which was the focus of the second workshop.

We invited David Stroh to work with us as a resource person in the second workshop—which focused on systems thinking and strategy development. David introduced participants to the basic concepts of systems thinking and presented several preliminary systems maps of the conflict in Burundi. These maps were drawn from the information generated in the first workshop, incorporating the six major factors participants had identified and analyzed, and additional materials documenting the history of the conflict.[4] Participants were asked to discuss these tentative maps and then select from, combine and modify them to arrive at a rich and compelling explanation of the dynamics underlying the conflict. This process shifted some elements of the map fundamentally, while confirming others.

The resulting systems map of the Burundi conflict in 2004 (considered 90% accurate by the participants at the time, and is still a "work in progress") is presented in Figure 2. The map shows the original six driving factors in bold and illustrates the interrelations among them. It is important to note that the terms "elite" and "majority" in Burundi have several meanings. On the one hand, members of both major ethnic groups are found among the elite classes who hold economic, military and political power, although one ethnic group dominates. On the other hand, the poor and disenfranchised, who comprise the majority, also include members of both ethnic groups, although one group predominates. People outside of Burundi tend to characterize the conflict simply as an interethnic struggle. This analysis shows that the picture is more complex than that, although the ethnic dimension is certainly important. The separation between those with power and resources and those without—of whatever ethnic group—is seen as fundamental to the conflict. (Note: On a systems map, arrows can show an amplifying or countervailing effect.) For instance, on Figure 2, "peace accord" would reduce "violence," while other factors augment it.)

In the course of the workshop, participants also worked with common patterns of how people fail to achieve the results they want—patterns that recur frequently across living systems. These are called "archetypes" in systems dynamics lingo. Several archetypes appear to be especially relevant in explaining the underlying causes of chronic conflicts. Participants were able to identify some interesting ways that such patterns undermine their best intentions to improve life in Burundi.

The original intent was to spend considerable time in this workshop working with the systems map to explore program strategies. In fact, time ran out, and this task was not completed. In subsequent workshops, we have provided more time for strategy questions.

[4] This was somewhat of a "fast forward" of the process, since participants did not generate the initial map themselves. In subsequent workshops, we have found ways to get participants to develop a draft map themselves.

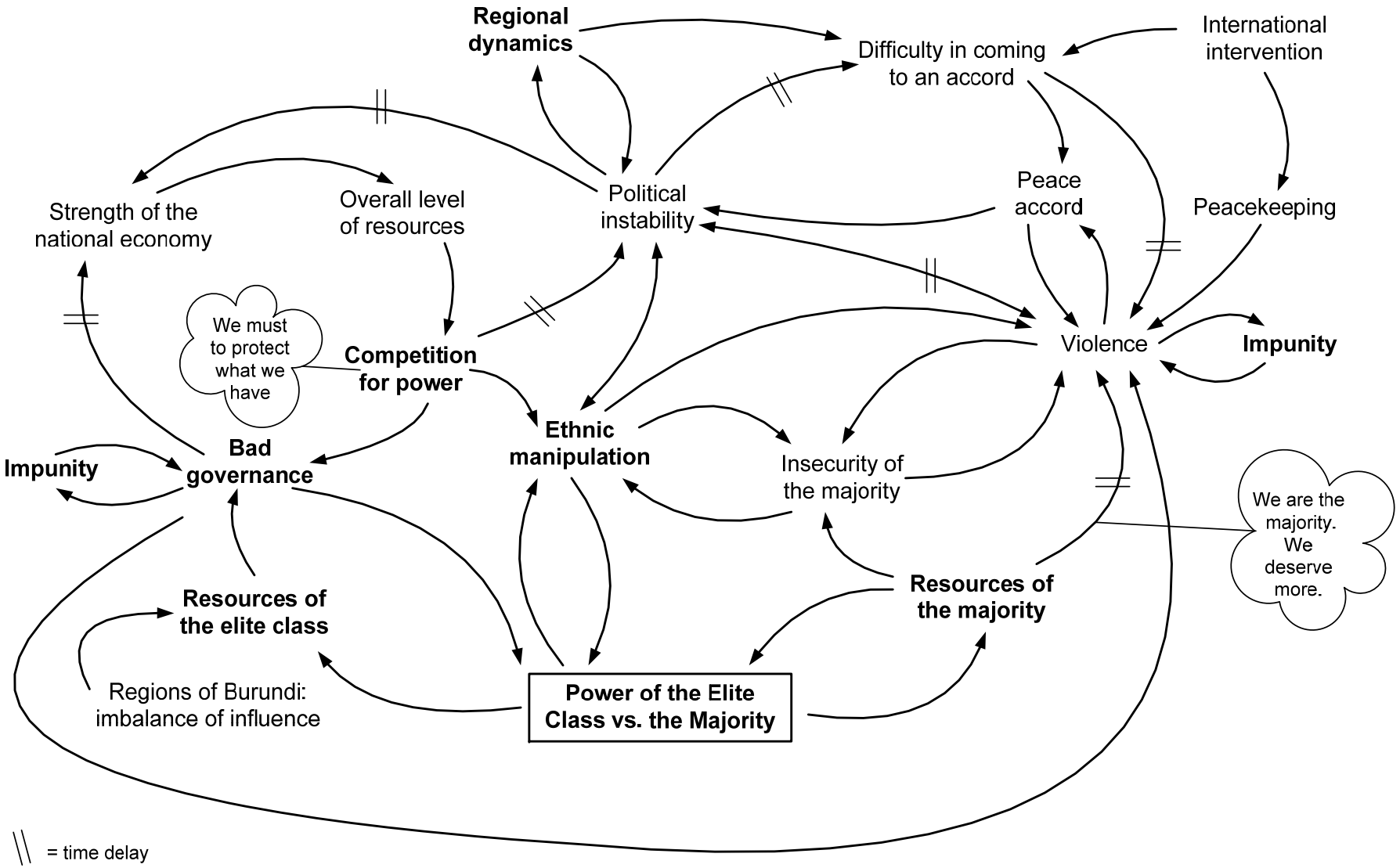


Figure 2: Understanding the Burundi Conflict: A Systems Perspective (2004)

Our report to donor regarding these two workshops in Burundi, presented the following lessons:

1. Traditional modes of conflict analysis are useful—but are most helpful when focused on key factors, rather than all possible factors.
2. Cross-organizational joint analysis is possible, and can result in beneficial sharing of different perspectives and experiences.
3. Participants in analysis should be encouraged to move beyond analysis to strategy as quickly as possible.
4. Systems thinking can be incorporated earlier in the process, rather than waiting until other forms of analysis have been completed, and then introducing systems dynamics.
5. We need simple, non-technical exercises for engaging in systems analysis and for exploring common conflict patterns.
6. Participant program strategies will benefit from exposure to lessons regarding how to intervene in a system, drawing on the previous experience of systems thinkers.
7. NGOs and donors (and, when possible and appropriate, governmental and intergovernmental entities) would benefit from discussion of a shared analysis—but have few opportunities to do so.

These lessons informed our subsequent work in Kosovo and Congo—and in Burundi.

One additional note: We found that once participants have identified key points of intervention, in order to develop a plan for intervention, they need to return to a more detailed analysis *of that intervention point*. For instance, working with the Burundi map, participants decided that work on "ethnic manipulation" was an important point of intervention, and one in which NGO participants might be able to make a difference. However, the larger systems map of the Burundi conflict, while it is effective for showing the broad conflict dynamics, does not provide enough detail about the ethnic manipulation factor to permit strategy development in that specific area. Working with the detailed information generated by participants in the earlier work in Burundi (the first, early July workshop), the facilitation team was able to produce a "sub-analysis" map specific to the ethnic manipulation factor—which would provide the basis for a strategy discussion about how to induce change in those particular dynamics.

Figure 3: Understanding Conflict in Burundi: Dynamics of Elite Power & Ethnic Manipulation presents the resulting map, which includes some, but not all of the other factors on the larger systems map, plus other details from the participants' cause and effect analysis of this factor. This map also posits an alternative to the current situation (marked with a "B" for balancing loop): "peaceful coexistence," and shows how factors interact to encourage or impede that goal. We have not had an opportunity to work with participants on this detailed analysis. Later, we completed a series of consultations with individual organizations in Burundi, in order to enable a deeper exploration of their program strategies, applying the RPP matrix, the criteria of effectiveness, and using the conflict map to discuss the location of the program work in the conflict system. Most recently (January 2006), a group of participants has started to update the basic analysis, to incorporate changes following the 2005 elections and formation of a new government.

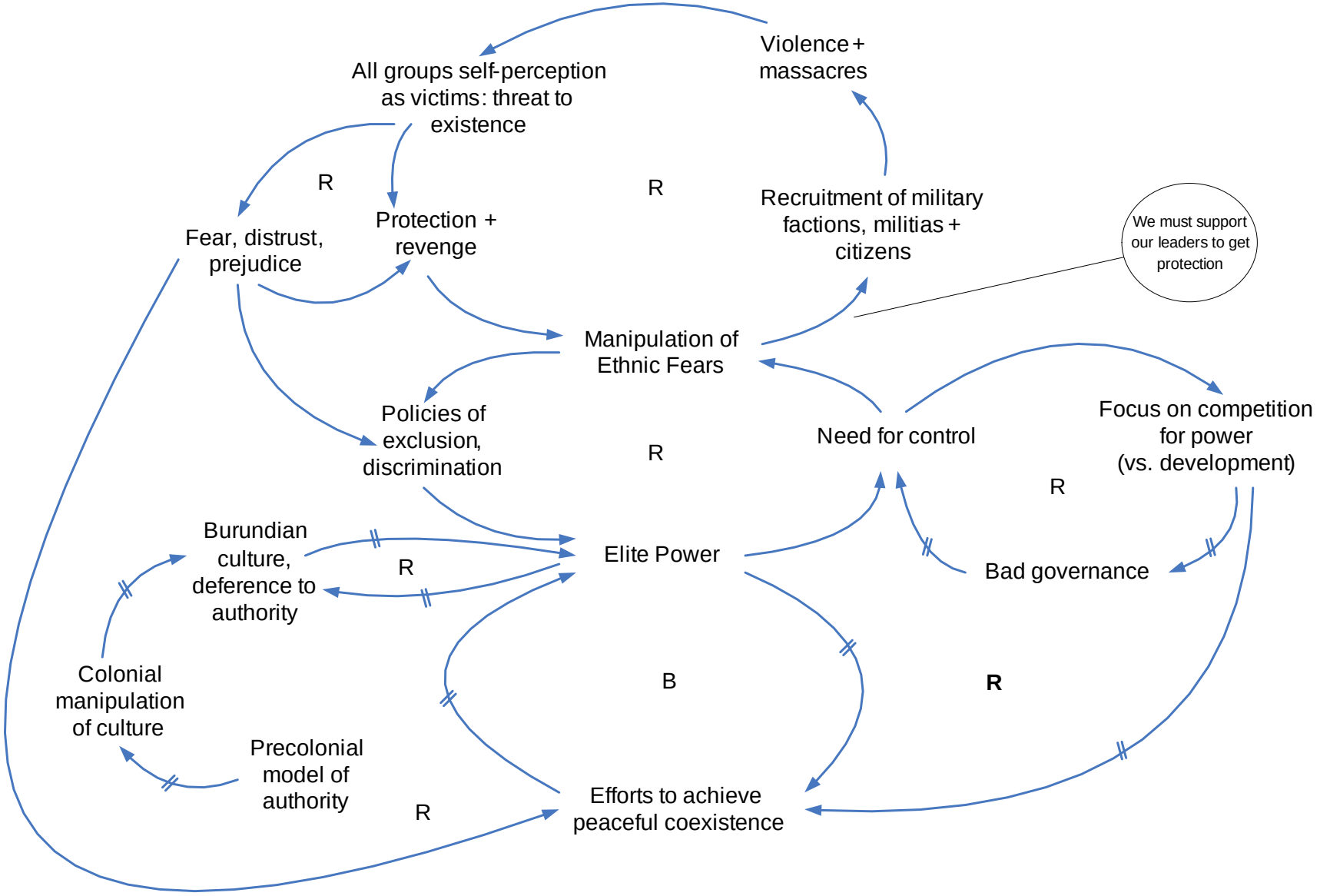


Figure 3: Understanding Conflict in Burundi :
Dynamics of Elite Power & Ethnic Manipulation

Kosovo

RPP staff provided an introductory workshop for NGOs in Kosovo in the spring of 2004. As in other locations, participants expressed interest in conflict analysis as a follow-up. The follow-up workshop was held in December 2004. Although this workshop was short, we were able to make further progress regarding conflict analysis.

In this case, we started the analytical process by completing a "do no harm" dividers and connectors analysis—partly in order to introduce this framework to participants. We worked with the dividers side of the analysis to identify those factors that the group felt were the "driving forces" in this context. In small groups, they then developed a set of causes and effects of those—in a brainstormed fashion, which they grouped and prioritized further. The facilitators then worked with this information to develop a draft systems map of the conflict for presentation back to the participants the next day for correction and refinement. Figure 4: Conflict Dynamics in Kosovo, presents the resulting map, after several rounds of refinement and discussion.

The conflict map suggests that the lack of a resolution of "final status" for Kosovo (independence or reintegration with Serbia…) is central to the conflict. The group had identified a whole range of issues that were serving to exacerbate the conflict. These were grouped at the left hand side as "grievances" that contribute to "perceived injustice and resentment."

In the Kosovo case, we were able to take the process another step. All of the participants were asked to write the name of their organization on small yellow "stickies" (Post-It Notes) and place them on the large conflict map on the wall to indicate where they are working. This provided a vivid picture, not only of the conflict dynamics, but also where various organizations were trying to work on peacebuilding. This exercise revealed that the vast majority of the programs were concentrated on the issues of "isolation and communication" and "IDP return," with only a scattering working in other areas—and almost no one was addressing any of the factors that the group had identified as key driving factors. In discussion, it became clear that this was partly due to the funding priorities of the donors, as well as the emphasis of the international community on encouraging the return of IDPs/refugees to their homes. The group began a discussion of the implications for program strategies, but neither the group nor the facilitators felt that this discussion was complete.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

RPP had provided two introductory workshops in the eastern Congo in September 2004—in Bukavu and Goma. The Bukavu group asked for a follow-up workshop, focused primarily on conflict analysis and program strategies, and a 2.5-day workshop was organized in February 2005. Similar to other workshops, we started the analysis process by completing a dividers and connectors analysis, and then identifying, among the "divider" elements, those considered key driving factors.

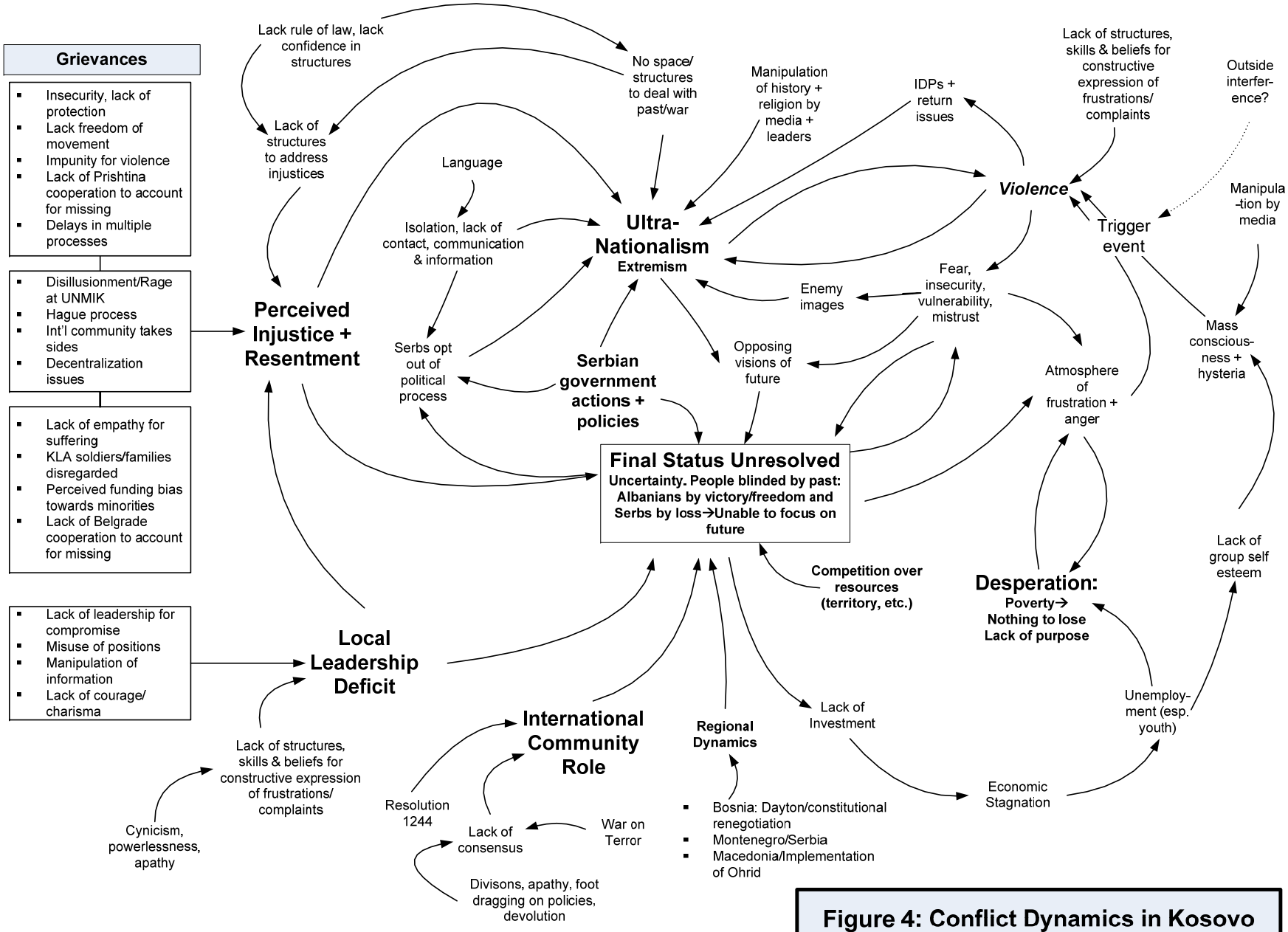


Figure 4: Conflict Dynamics in Kosovo

At the end of the first day, small groups were invited to organize the elements and factors in a way that showed the dynamic connections among them, how one factor leads to another, and so forth. One group found a way to illustrate four essential loops of factors—which then served as the basis for building a comprehensive systems map. The facilitators worked overnight to produce that draft, drawing on additional analytical information generated by participants in the September workshop, which had been captured in detail. An important element drawn from the earlier workshop was the centrality of the "absence of a strong and legitimate state."

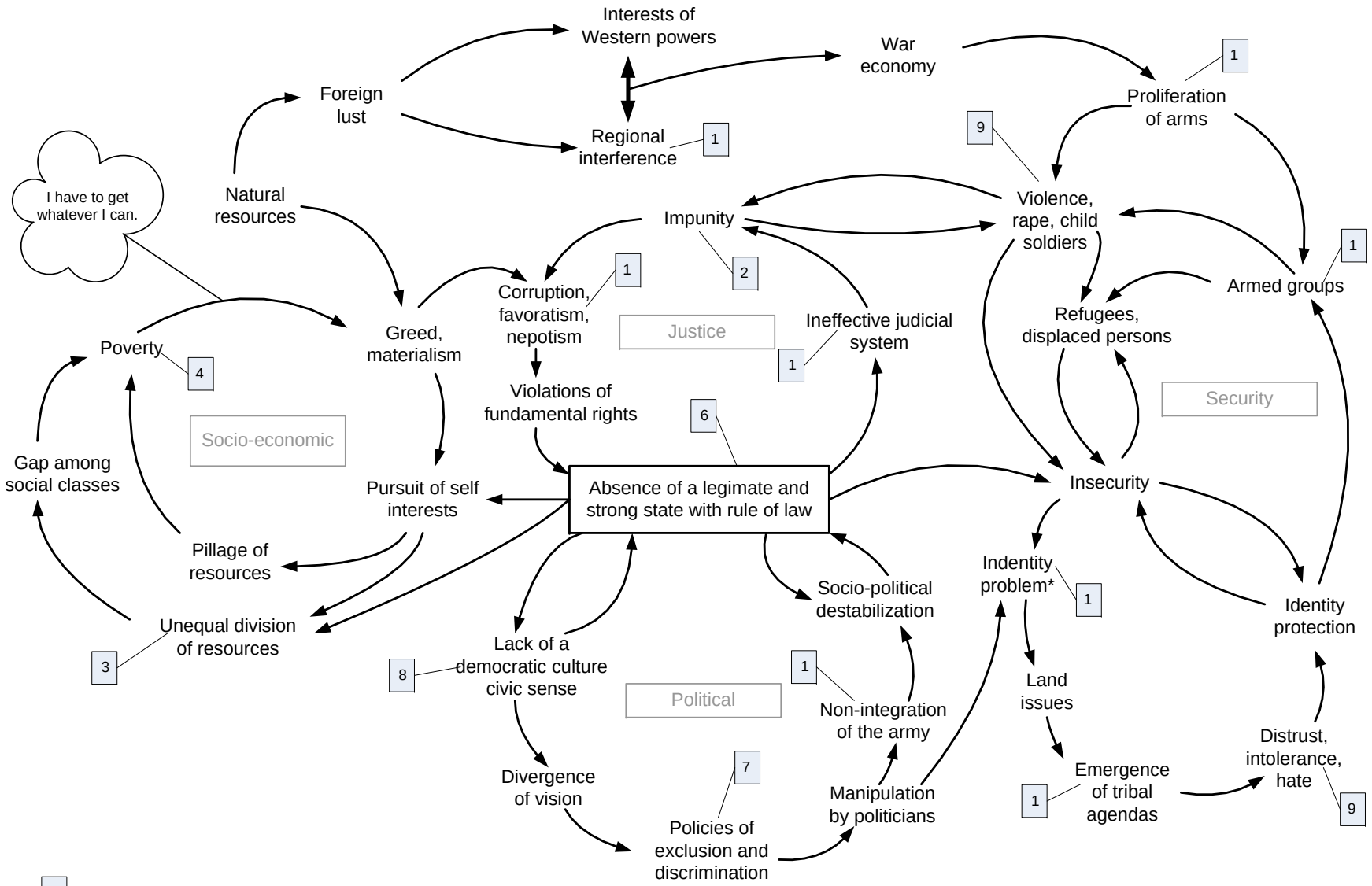
On the second day of the workshop, participants worked with the draft conflict systems map, making suggestions for changes and additions. The most important addition concerned the role of the struggle over natural resources, and the apparatus of corruption, smuggling, territorial control and armed groups associated with it.

Once the group had basic agreement on the overall conflict map, we then turned to discussion of where organizations are working. Similar to the process in Kosovo, we asked participants to write the names of their organizations on yellow "stickies" and place them on the large systems map on the wall. The result resembled the systems map in Figure 5: Understanding the Conflict in the Kivus (DRC): A Systems Perspective. The numbers marked in the small boxes show the number of organizations working in each area (the original had the organizational names, which are left out here). Five areas of concentration emerged: 1) violence, rape and child soldiers (most focused on rape victims) [9]; 2) mistrust, intolerance, and hate [9]; 3) lack of a civic and democratic culture [8]; 4) policies of exclusion and discrimination [7]; and 5) absence of a strong and legitimate state [6]. The group discussed the implications of these areas of concentration: Was this an appropriate distribution of effort? Were these strategic places to try to make change?

We then took the process a further step. We looked at two of the areas of concentration in more detail: violence/rape and policies of exclusion/discrimination. We asked the groups working in those areas to use the RPP matrix to describe their work, and to identify the changes they were trying to effect. This resulted in a discussion regarding the cumulative effects of the strategies of the several groups working on one issue area. For instance, we found that many of the groups working on the issue of rape and violence focused initially on serving rape victims, dealing with their trauma, reintegration in their communities, and addressing their urgent medical and financial needs. Over time, however, they started to address the issue of impunity for soldiers (the main perpetrators) who commit these acts, approaching people in authority to bring the accused rapists to court and otherwise punish them. In a further step, some groups were working on prevention strategies, by addressing legislation, and institutionalizing rape-prevention efforts among the military. While these efforts had focused primarily on government forces, efforts were also underway to extend the programs to informal militias and their leadership.

In terms of the RPP matrix, then, the initial efforts were concentrated with rape victims on individual change in the "more people" area. Subsequent strategies approached "key people" regarding the issue of impunity, and later additional "key people" up to the national level regarding policies and regulations that begin to reach into the social-political realm.

Figure 5: Understanding the Conflict in South Kivu (DRC): A Systems Perspective



This experience in the DRC represented an additional step towards engagement regarding program strategies, using the conflict systems map as a tool, along with the RPP matrix. While this discussion went farther than in other places, we still felt that we had not yet reached the full potential for discussion of alternative points of intervention on the map, and their relative potentials for inducing change. We also encountered, again, the issue of the need for detailed analysis. For instance, some participants asserted that the key point of intervention on the map was the "lack of a democratic and civic culture." However, in order to fully explore the potential for promoting change in that factor, we needed a more detailed analysis of the dynamics of that factor, beyond the generalities on the large systems map. This was similar to the discussion of the "ethnic manipulation" factor in Burundi, discussed above.

Back to Kosovo

In April, 2005, a follow-up meeting was held among more than twenty people representing local and international NGOs working on peace issues in Kosovo. Some of these people had participated in the previous workshop (December 2004) and had helped develop the systems map of the conflict, while others had not. The group spent some time reviewing the December draft map, and made suggestions for changes (which are reflected in Figure 4).

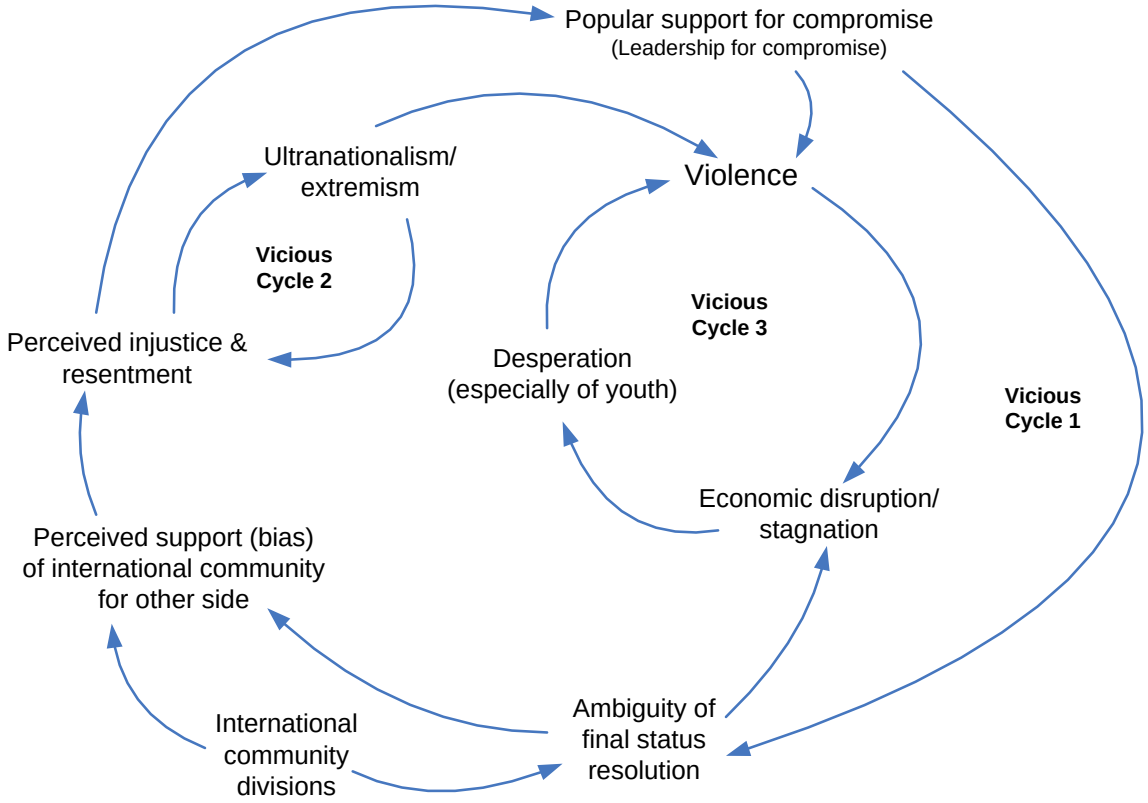


Figure 6: System Dynamics in Kosovo: Vicious Cycles

The group also considered a simplified map (see Figure 6), which was an attempt to capture the main dynamics of the conflict, without all of the detail. The main purpose of this discussion was to focus on identifying "weak links" in the system, places where an intervention could interrupt the negative dynamics (vicious cycles). For instance, they felt that the link between desperation and violence could be changed, through involving the military, veterans groups, and universities and schools. The group then discussed potential programs, flowing from the consideration of weak links. A number of ideas were generated, but there was not time to explore them fully. This will be the basis for a follow-up workshop.

Another Strategy Session in Bukavu (DRC)

The experience in Kosovo inspired us to take the process further in Bukavu later in the spring 2005. This was a short workshop that focused entirely on program strategies, building on the earlier conflict analysis workshop. At the beginning of the workshop we briefly reviewed the analysis performed earlier (see above). This brought new participants up to speed and emphasized the need for continual review and updating of the analysis. We then presented a simplified version of the analysis, which attempted to capture the essence of the conflict, without all of the distracting detail (see Figure 7, which is similar to the simplified Kosovo map above).

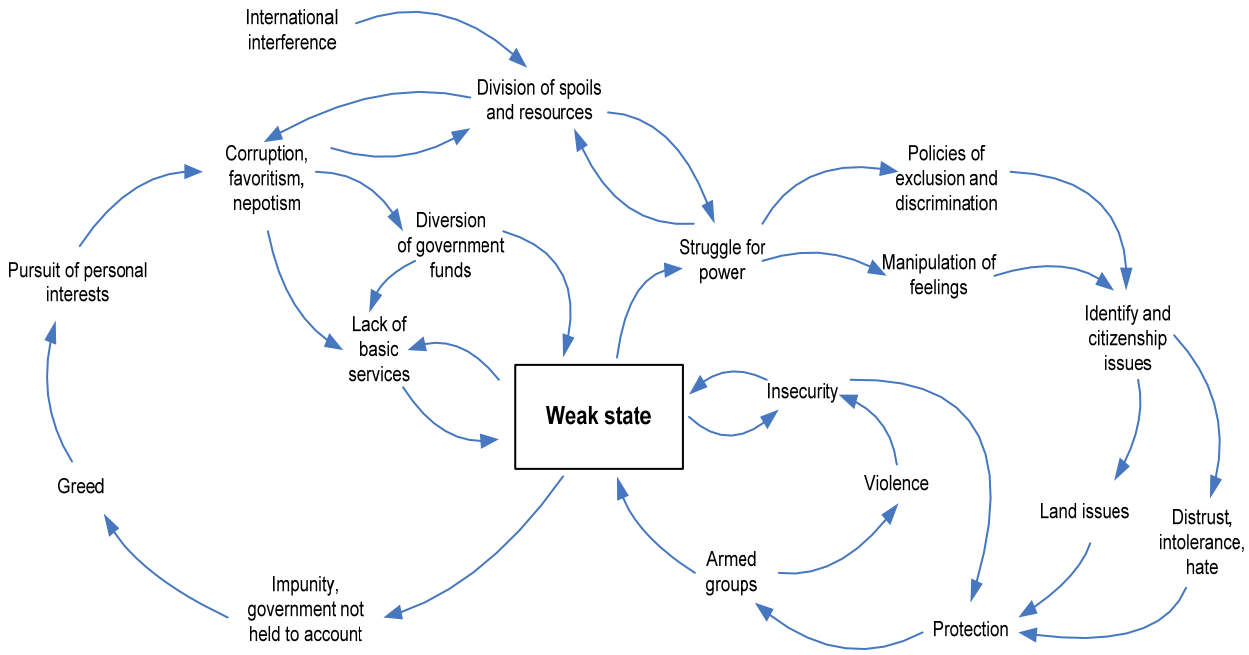


Figure 7: Conflict in South Kivu, DRC (simplified)

The group agreed that this captured the main points, and then identified, in discussion, the priority points of intervention, within their capacities and limitations as civil society groups. Participants then proceeded to work in small groups on program strategies. The groups reported on their program approaches at these key intervention points. This engendered lively discussion. However, at the end of the day, one group member challenged his colleagues to be more

creative, noting that participants were tending to emphasize the same few program strategies as always: civic education, consciousness raising, and training.

The following day we turned back to the program strategy issue, hoping to generate more interesting and strategic ideas. We chose one issue that had been addressed by several small groups the previous day: the "struggle for power." We first conducted a sub-analysis of that issue, developing a cause-and-effect systems dynamics map of that specific issue (see Figure 8), as well as a simple actor analysis (who are the main groups or individuals involved and what are their interests). Using this sub-analysis, the group generated a series of possible program approaches, emphasizing that no one strategy would bring success:

- The group considered civic education efforts aimed at reducing the ideology of dictatorship and self-interest, but acknowledged that such efforts would be long-term and would have to work against almost fifty years of reinforcement (on top of many years of colonial rule).
- They then discussed how to break the link between "manipulation by politicians" and the "identity issue." They explored how to make communities less vulnerable to the self-interested actions by people seeking political support by playing on fear and the reality of threats from other communities. This approach could include efforts to directly challenge politicians found to be manipulating populations.
- A legal strategy would involve lobbying for laws clarifying the citizenship status of some groups that have been challenged, helping to dispel uncertainty and suspicion, particularly with regard to ethnic Tutsis who migrated to the Congo many years ago.
- A direct conflict resolution approach would deal with the contentious relationships between communities, thereby reducing the perceived and actual threats and the resulting need for protection.

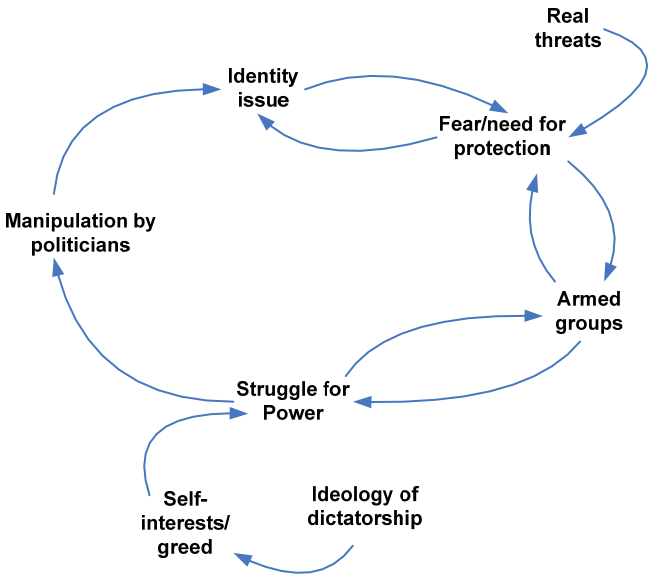


Figure 8: Analysis of "Struggle for Power" Factor

This process produced more varied and creative approaches, as well as appreciation for the need for multiple different efforts aimed at changing different parts of the sub-system. It also appeared that working with sub-system analyses encouraged more creative and strategic thinking.

Conclusions & Issues for Ongoing Learning

The RPP process of working with conflict analysis and its links to strategy development is not finished—we have more to learn. However, we can point to some preliminary conclusions, as well as ongoing questions for further collaborative exploration.

Preliminary Conclusions

1. Groups are able to produce joint analysis across organizations and perspectives. It has proven useful, in multiple locations, to engage people from multiple organizations in the analysis process. The exercise itself helps to build relationships and understanding among those trying to make a difference in the peace process. The analysis can be performed relatively quickly (a day and a half), using the information that participants bring, assuming they are from the situation.

2. Systems analysis of conflicts appears to add a useful and dynamic dimension to conflict analysis. A broad analysis of an entire conflict system also helps identify priority areas for work—mainly through selecting key driving factors and showing how they interact with each other. Early experience suggests that systems maps can assist the bridge between analysis and program strategies, by focusing on leverage points, such as "weak links" that can interrupt conflict dynamics.

3. Conflict analysis can also be used to map where different groups are working on the conflict—to see the patterns of who is working on what issues. This, in itself, encourages a conversation about whether this is an appropriate spread of programming—or whether there are significant gaps that should be filled. (Note: this can also be coupled with a different kind of mapping, using the RPP Matrix. Use of the matrix reveals whether the program approaches favor "more people" or "key people" approaches, and whether they are promoting change at the individual/personal or socio-political levels.)

4. In order to encourage strategic thinking, groups must first identify either key points of intervention (areas where efforts could have widespread effects) or priority areas needing urgent attention. These specific issues, then, become the focus for another level of analysis of those specific issues. This sub-analysis permits a strategic discussion focused on how to break the links between the factors in the map—how to change the dynamics through strategic program interventions.

Ongoing Questions for Additional Collaborative Learning

1. While we have begun to link analysis to strategy development, we need to figure out better ways to engage in this discussion more quickly. Also, we will be interested to see, over time, whether a) engaging in joint analysis leads to more effective programming, and b) whether working on joint analysis leads to joint strategies.

2. Analysis should also aid in the identification and cultivation of important "linkages" that will improve the effectiveness of programming efforts working on related issues, with different approaches, with different actors ("key people" or "more people"), and at different levels (local, national, regional, international).

3. We need to explore additional elements of systems thinking, to see whether they prove beneficial. For example, we have only just begun to explore the usefulness of the archetypes (common patterns of interaction) posited by systems thinking. Most existing classical archetypes were derived from work in organizational development, not societal level conflict. As we develop systems "maps" from multiple places, we can start to identify new archetypes at this level—and the most likely leverage points for change.

4. We need to develop exercises that participants can do on their own, without the aid of outside facilitators, and in relatively little time. There is a tension between creating detailed and comprehensive analyses versus more schematic analyses that capture major dynamics. We have also noted that an outside facilitator performs a needed function by pushing groups (gently!) to explore beyond their familiar and comfortable program approaches—in other words, to truly think strategically, instead of figuring out how their favorite methods can be applied.

5. We are struggling with a "unit of analysis" question: the difference between an analysis of a community or province versus an analysis of the whole nation (or subregion of a continent). If a group is are working in a particular community, is it sufficient to understand the conflict dynamics at a local level, or must they understand the conflict at "higher" levels—and how those dynamics might influence or undermine their local efforts?

6. We are noticing that the analyses produced in the field, by people familiar with these conflicts, are stated in terms that do not necessarily conform to the typical programming categories of major development donors—in the areas of "rule of law, democratization, civil society development" and so forth. We may need to work not only on the bridge from analysis to strategy, but also a translation into terms recognized by the most likely donors.

7. We are also interested to see if there will be significant contrasts when different people perform the analysis. We may have opportunities for performing a context analysis exercise with government officials, using the approaches described here. It will be interesting to see if their analysis is similar to or wildly different from the analysis performed by a largely civil society group.