

LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE
SOUTH ASIA NETWORK

Our Collective Journey *for Just Peace*

2005 – 2026

Twenty-one years across Bangladesh · India · Nepal · Pakistan · Sri Lanka



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1. How did the network members come together?

South Asia is a region where the post-colonial nation building project has come along with severe violence, playing the diverse communities of this closely related subcontinent against each other on ethnic, gender and religious lines. Attempts by the powerful to question and destroy the huge composite heritage of this region can be witnessed till today, several borders are contested with detrimental impact on community life. The attacks on USA by Al Qaida in the year 2001 and their aftermath in South Asia aggravated violence in the region even further. This is when several development organisations from South Asia came together to improve their response to conflict in their working regions.

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), Synodical Board of Social Services (SBSS), and the social wing of Church of South India, CSI-SEVA, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), United Mission to Nepal (UMN) and Community World Service Pakistan (CWS-P) as large faith-based organisations joined hands with local organisations already engaged in working in or on conflict, i.e. Institute for Democracy (ISD) and United NGO Mission to Manipur (UNMM) from India and Maleya Foundation (MF) from Bangladesh to form the Local Capacities for Peace (LCP) South Asia Network.

All faith-based organisations had engaged in rights-based work and felt challenged by having had to respond to violent conflict in a sensitive manner. UNMM had already started training activists from different communities in conflict sensitivity (LCP) in order to overcome ethnic divides in a tense conflict situation in Manipur, Northeast India (NEI). Maleya Foundation had just witnessed the end of a violent civil war in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh through the CHT accord and felt strongly in need for approaches to address their situation. ISD had developed the approach of Strengthening Composite Heritage. This approach resonated well with the LCP approach. Due to the civil war in Nepal, UMN in Nepal was one of the first organisations among these to put conflict sensitivity into practice.

"The network was anchored by the German Church-based development organisation EED, later merged into Brot für die Welt, and has ever since worked on creating an ecosystem of just peace."

The network was anchored then by the German Church-based development organisation EED (Church Development Service), later merged into *Brot fuer die Welt* (BfdW) as its long-standing partner, and has ever since worked on creating an ecosystem of just peace. As EED at the time of formation did not engage with partners in Sri Lanka, an organization from Sri Lanka, National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), only joined much later, in 2025.

Over the years, the scope has expanded. Working on conflict sensitivity motivated the network members to address and transform conflict directly. Therefore, they moved into conflict transformation, human rights advocacy, and inclusive social change. A crucial moment came in 2015, when LCP deliberately shifted to investing in youth leadership. This

gave rise to the Collective Youth Programme, through which young peacebuilders were trained in conflict analysis, human rights, Reflective Peace Practice (RPP), nonviolent communication, leadership, and advocacy. They engage in local communities and contexts and network at South Asian level.

Today, the strategy has further evolved, moving beyond training alone, towards advocacy, alliance-building, and regional platforms for collective action. The network is consciously shaping a Critical Mass of actors (youth, faith leaders, gender justice advocates, environmental defenders, legal experts, and media professionals), who can influence public discourse and policy change at local, national, and regional levels.

FOUNDATIONS

2. What made the network successful?

When LCP started, the context was already perceived as very difficult. But today, challenges are many more. The network cherishes the learning of the Do No Harm (DNH) approach, developed by Collaborative for Development Action (CDA), Boston, USA, which it based its conflict sensitive work on: There are always options. It has continuously adapted its strategies. Originally the focus was on capacity building for conflict sensitivity and transformation. It moved on to collective learning on working on conflict and has further widened its scope. The current basis for the network is rooted in its key values and principles, theory of change and strategic pillars. These are not static, but are being revisited in order to maintain relevance of the network:



A. KEY VALUES & PRINCIPLES

- ✓ We will maintain an adherence to non-violence.
- ✓ Learning from each other and sharing amongst ourselves will be at the core of all our work
- ✓ We will strive to treat everybody equally
- ✓ We will be conflict and gender sensitive in all areas of our programming work and internally
- ✓ We will take ownership of our work and stay committed to collective decision-making
- ✓ We will be accountable and transparent at all times – to the communities we work with, amongst ourselves and with our partners.
- ✓ We will respect the rights and dignity of others



B. Theory of Change

IF WE

strengthen our network by building strategic alliances with likeminded organisations and networks while **empowering and accompanying youth** to engage in peacebuilding initiatives;

engage in collective advocacy and lobbying at the local, national and regional level that draws attention to escalating religious, ethnic and caste-based conflict in the region;

and continually **update our knowledge and learning** on emerging trends and themes affecting the region, including on strategic and creative approaches to advocacy that take into account the diversity of the network;

IT WILL

build the resilience of communities and reduce the levels of inter-personal, systemic and structural violence

RESULTING IN

a more **peaceful and inclusive society** in which the values of equality, non-violence, integrity and respect for the rights of others are nurtured and upheld.





3. What has kept the network going for so long?

Throughout the 20+ years, trust has developed and understanding and interaction has grown. The network consists of very diverse partners from four countries, since November 2025 even five. It has sustained since 2005 and been able to be relevant throughout challenging times. The way of working of the network changed in the course of the process of cooperation, it has always been growing. Quite early on, it took the decision not to open up for new membership and not to become a training institution. This may have been disappointing for other interested organisations who were keen to join, but helped building deep trustful relationships and friendships, one of the prerequisites for its success.

The work of this network has been supported by project funding, but is understood as a long-term change process both by the members and the donor. Changing peace writ large is about a long-term engagement in social change and this network was founded to make a difference at that level. The network is kept together by:

Commitment to local ownership

Commitment for shaping the future

Building bridges across identities and regions,

Learning and working collectively

Being a community of peace builders rooted in hope and communities.

Strong partnership based on resources, collective commitment.

Collective ownership and leadership, respect and trust as hallmarks of partnership

Grassroot activists having strong convictions and beliefs and devote their life to fight for their issues.

Strong societal analysis including social categories such as caste, ethnic affiliation, gender and class and their intersections.

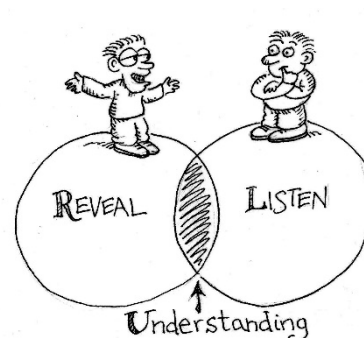
Not being afraid of high-risk armed conflict contexts, but taking these as learning opportunities.

Providing a space for learning from each other.

Nurturing a space for continuous reflection and learning which is never ending.

4. Conflict Sensitivity

In all working areas of the member organisations involved, conflict sensitive approaches have changed the way of working within the communities. There are many incidences where strategies to address injustices have been diversified. Instead of only applying confrontational approaches, communities have become strategic. They use a variety of social action techniques, including strategic engagement with decision makers, non-violent mass-movements, involvement of women and youth groups and marginalized community members rather than just village leaders.



“In some regions where violence is very high, organisations initially thought they needed to stay away from engaging, but found options for intervention based on their Do No Harm analysis.”

There have also been significant changes in the attitudes of the staff and in project design, increased community ownership and diverse leadership, changing the power relations between the organisations and communities.

YOUTH & JUSTICE

5. Mobilising youth for peace and justice



Since 2015, the engagement on working on conflict by all network members is focusing on youth engagement. It was decided to focus the action-learning process of this network on conflict transformation on youth and include local and collective elements (such as trainings and conventions) into the LCP project. Several strategies were adopted by the different partner organisations.

All members are faced with societal environments where youth are mobilized as violent actors by different forces. The network members therefore have focused on disengaging youth from such violent paths and involve them in non-violent action for the rights of their communities. This has happened at different levels, with grassroot activists in poor rural communities as well as with university students and regional youth movements, with Dalit or Adivasi youth networks, depending on the focus of the respective network member. Youth Mentors have been trained in conflict transformation and conflict sensitivity by the network. They play a key role in organizing local youth. Key youth activists and mentors regularly come together at South Asian level for exchange and learning.

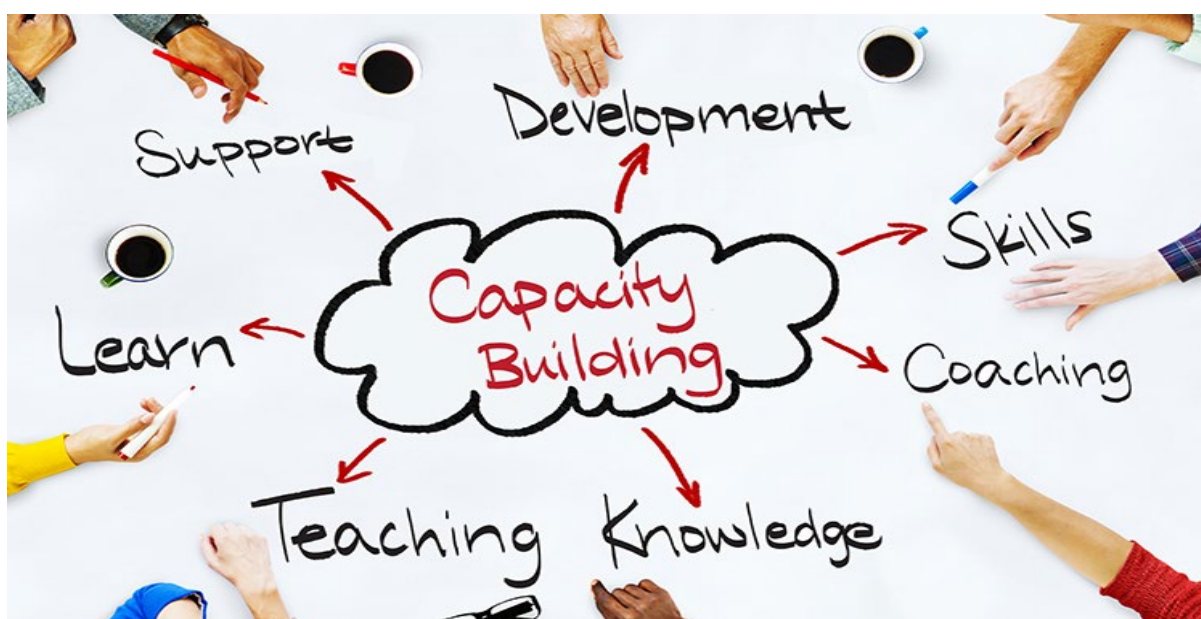
It was always clear that youth would not stay in the network forever as they would move on to their respective lives and careers. The objective has been to transfer peace values to youth

who would create impact in their communities, and even when moving on, spreading these values in society.

Through the youth programme, youth peace activists have been able to contain the violence by interfering and involving police and community leaders in several communities. Non-violent movements against illegal land grabbing and displacement, campaigns for gender justice and against religious extremism have been led by youth organized by members of this network in several instances. Strong local youth leaders have emerged who take their activism forward even without external support. In many rural communities, youth volunteers are coordinating development issues in rural marginalized communities ensuring just access for all. A big challenge is to counter the politically motivated movements that mobilize youth today on ethnic and religious lines to instigate hate and violence in South Asian societies.

6. Capacity building

Initially, capacity building of the network members started with training of trainers, firstly based on the DNH approach developed by CDA, later including several tools of conflict analysis and transformation. The network was depending on external trainers mostly from Europe, who have contributed tremendously. Today, there are many internal resource persons from member organisations in each country who can conduct capacity building activities themselves. A lot of expertise has been built over the years. Many are local level grassroots activists acting and training in their own languages, some are well conversant in important South Asian languages and English. They reach out to different audiences in the region and even internationally. The network also realized that training of trainers does not directly bring the desired changes in project implementation. Over the years, the network has consciously shifted from training trainers to training practitioners. These are directly involved in action on the ground or in the management. They can translate newly learnt concepts into action and are therefore much more effective. New methods introduced were mentoring and action-reflection sessions which would directly address the praxis level.



7. Research and Analysis

Several leaders of the network joined the Masters' Programme in Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) jointly offered by Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) and Pannasastra University of Cambodia and earned MA degrees, based on research topics that were directly taken from their practice. Their research theses informed the work of the network. Through the ACTS programme, Through CPCS, the network connected to a wider group of peace builders in South and Southeast Asia, benefitting from their experience and research. This also strengthened the analytical capacities of the network. It has developed a systemic conflict analysis of South Asia, guided by tools developed by CDA Collaborative in Boston, USA, which is regularly being updated and used as a basis for identifying entry points for collective action.



REACH

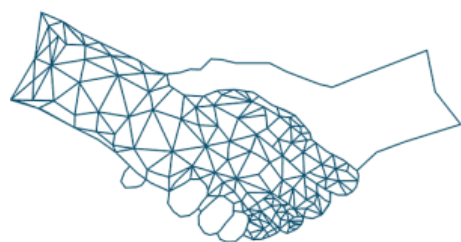
8. Outreach within and beyond the network

The network has added some bricks in the peace writ large community beyond the own network. Many partners in the network have taken initiative to train others in Conflict Sensitivity and Conflict Transformation. While the network has not expanded in membership, there has been training to other organisations also beyond South Asia, in South East Asia and Europe.

Besides this, network-based members of this network have taken the concept to more than 100 of their network partners. In Bangladesh, MF on request of BfdW is currently accompanying a peace practitioner's process for 27 organisations, among them NGO umbrella organisations with 3000 members. UMN has trained all the BfdW partners in Nepal.

9. Network Dynamics

While this network strongly believes in the concept of South Asia as a common space of diverse and interrelated identities, technically managing a network across its internal borders is an uphill task. Severe restrictions regarding visa regimes and finance transfers pose big challenges that require both donors and members to go an extra mile and adjust to complex circumstances while maintaining compliance. The donor originally requested for one organization from among the network functioning as project holder who would host the



regional secretariat. Originally, the secretariat had power of fund distribution, of course based on a commonly agreed upon budget. This role had to be given up later due to increased restrictions. The power of the secretariat also created tensions. Power relations needed a lot of negotiation, also regarding the relationship between the network and the donor which

at times seemed unequal. The network decided to establish internal monitoring institutions such as a coordination committee, meeting half-yearly, and other subgroups assisting and advising the secretariat during its regular work. These structures and long years of trust building helped the secretariat-network relationship to grow. Since several years, the role of the secretariat, which has recently rotated to another project holder among the members, is much appreciated due to its transparency and commitment as well as accountability towards the network members. The secretariat has contributed to strengthen many internal capacities, making member staff grow as resource persons. It has played a good role in managing the diversity of members. Managing network relationships requires special personal and organizational skills.

10. Mainstreaming

The network members have gathered substantial experience in mainstreaming DNH, conflict transformation and gender justice in the organisations and networks. Here are important lessons learnt from these processes:

- Mainstreaming requires changes in the minds, structures and practices of an organisation and its staff.
 - Organisations need to understand DNH first before getting into action.
 - Mainstreaming happens when all staff, including finance and admin, in the member organisations consider conflict sensitivity when planning, implementing and reflecting on their activities
 - Without support and understanding from top management, mainstreaming does not work. Building the ownership of heads of organisation take time. Bottom-up initiatives may convince the management
 - It is crucial to embed the issue into the organisation's systems, policies and practices with documentation support, so that it is also sustained when concerned staff leaves the organisation.
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11. Peace Building, Conflict Transformation and Human Rights

The network has explored many approaches towards just peace, linking peace and human rights. This requires conflict sensitive approaches to Human Rights advocacy.

Some strategies are:

- Not acting as Human Rights activists directly, but providing support and capacity building to people's organisations and -movements
- Engagement and dialogue with policy makers on national development issues and SDG principles, not using the Human Rights terminology
- Issue based advocacy on policy formulation with likeminded bureaucrats
- Engage confidentially with international HR institutions



- Engage media responsibility, train media
- Support to Human Rights Defenders
- Local resource mobilization
- Engagement of non-traditional allies like the private sector, artists, local influencers
- Promote voluntarism

A handbook on conflict Sensitive Human Rights Advocacy will be published soon by the network.

SOLIDARITY

12. Partnership between donor and network

The partnership of the South Asia LCP network with its donor has lasted for more than 20 years, since its inception. The donor is a partner; its responsible staff has maintained a deep and trustful relationship to the network and its members and has invested time to come to know the conflict context of South Asia well. Such partnership is not just about project funding, but about engaging in a process of global solidarity towards a common vision and goal. Even when bureaucratic ever- increasing financial compliance requirements were imposed on the network management by the donor, it was possible to maintain and cherish this relationship.



“The more an organisation or network becomes conflict sensitive and value-based, the more it is exposed to violent conflict, the more conflict dynamics occur with compliance. It is of utmost importance to maintain flexible in compliance regimes while safeguarding accountability in conflict contexts. This requires conflict sensitive donors at programme and finance level.”

EQUALITY

13. Gender Justice

Women’s leadership requires space. This is a crucial element of peace building as women carry the main burden of conflict and war. Therefore, women leadership needs to be strengthened at all levels, also within the leadership of the LCP network.

During the gender workshops, it was realized that structural and cultural violence needs to be unpacked or unmasked for effective intervention. Many activists are addressing direct cases of violence and get very busy with these, (legal aid, personal support, trauma healing) but are not discussing root causes which can be found in structure and culture. They do not take the spaces to reflect more strategically about their approaches. This limits them to short term intervention. Symptoms are addressed rather than causes.

14. Strategic approaches to deal with changing context

As a network working in and on conflict, all members have been accustomed to a certain degree of uncertainty and contextual changes. Additional to these, COVID and the climate change crisis are large disruptions that the network successfully responds to. It found ways of working online during the COVID crisis and started to work on climate change-induced and man-made disasters as sources of conflict.

Throughout the journey of the network, but increasingly in the last 5-10 years, state regimes in South Asia have restricted the space of civil society organisations. The network and the donor had to go out of their way in order to maintain its work and allow all members to be part of the process also in times when their legal situation provided serious restrictions. Avenues for fund transfers were found that did not violate any compliance regulations on national or international level and allowed for the work to continue. Often part of the activities of some members had to be shifted to other project holders and in 2023, even the network project holder had to change. There was always openness by all actors to make such changes possible.



REFLECTION

15. Learning from failures

In the early years of the network, mutual learning was intended to be practiced by mutual assessment visits of network members to each other. However, this at times produced offensive behaviour and power struggles.



When in 2010, it was decided to move from conflict sensitivity to conflict transformation, each member initiated a peace building pilot project. It was supposed to be a decentralized experimentation space with every half annual meeting of the coordination committee serving as a collective space to learn from each other. But in reality, each organisation came forward with a beautiful power point presentations with narrations of successes. There was no openness to share challenges and failures. The network still had to go a long way to create an environment for real learning. Today, learning from failures is possible. Here are some factors that shifted the culture towards self-criticism:

- The network needs to be mature enough
- Confidence has to grow and trust needs to be strong

- Focus on application

First, the network was just about training, only when application set in, there were real practical field experiences to share. It is crucial to involve practitioners.

- Challenging South Asian cultural patterns

In South Asia, self-criticism is not part of the culture. Usually others are blamed, the context or the boss. The network had to encourage the staff to see the potential and value in the concept of critical self-reflection

- Knowledge of tools and approaches of conflict transformation

During the implementation of pilot projects, network members lacked knowledge of tools of conflict transformation. These were only provided from 2013 onwards. Then confidence grew and the network opened up to sharing experiences

- Provide critical learning spaces

The action-learning workshops with mentors and youth become a key space for self-criticism.

LOOKING AHEAD

16. Conclusion

The LCP South Asia Network has travelled a unique path of mutual support and trust towards contributing to conflict sensitivity and peace building in South Asia. It has set an example of how regional networking can sustain and flourish. It will continue to strive and to continue to be relevant in future. While the work with key change agents in communities for just peace will continue, on network level, there will be focus on:



→ Increasing visibility in conflict-sensitive ways	→ Practising and learning from conflict-sensitive advocacy
→ Institutional strengthening, including welcoming Sri Lanka	→ Strengthening gender justice in peacebuilding
→ Resource diversification to reduce donor dependency	→ Strengthening the community basis across the region
→ Strategizing conflict-sensitive use of digital tools	

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LCP South Asia Network

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