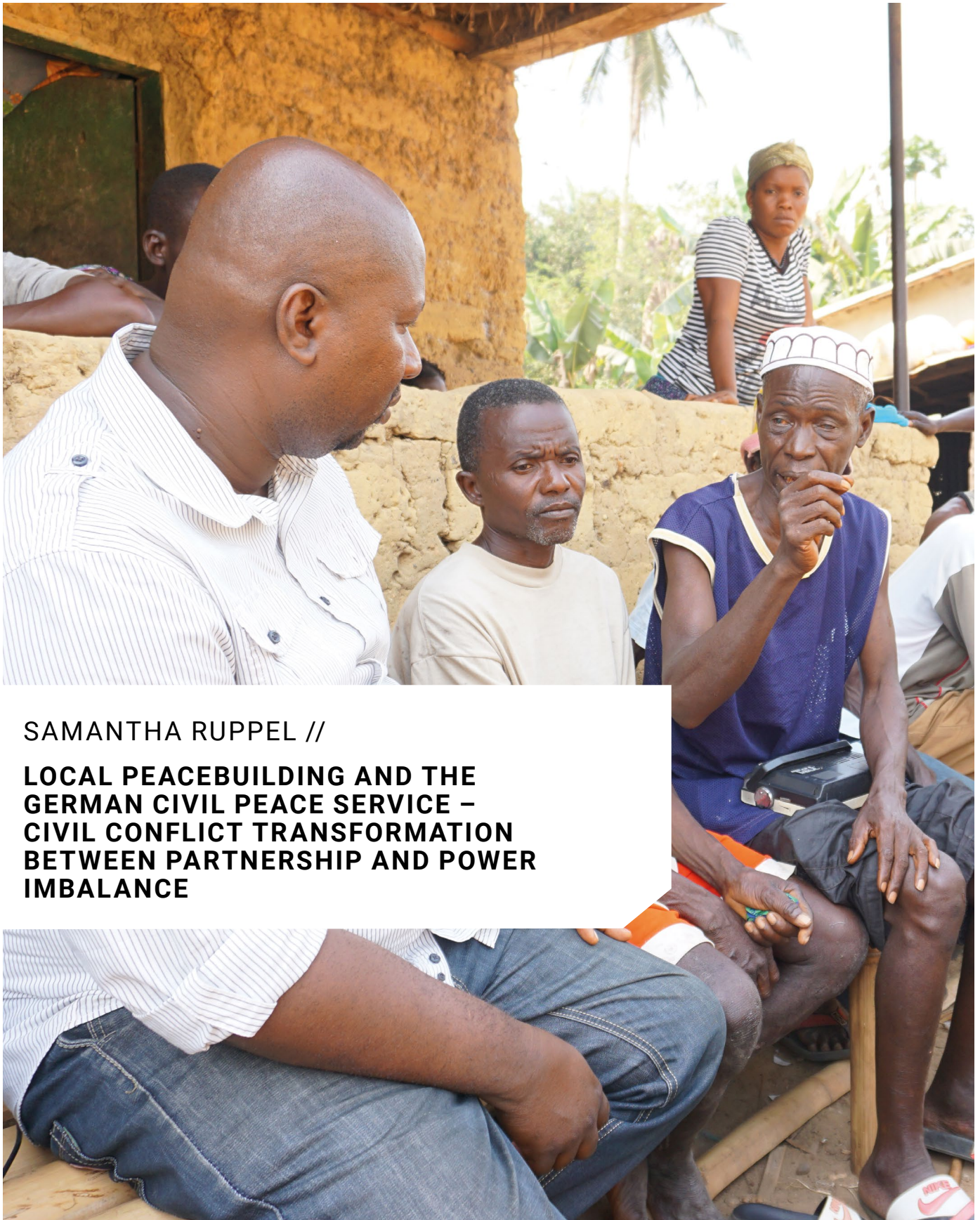


# PRIF REPORT

PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE FRANKFURT / LEIBNIZ-INSTITUT HESSISCHE STIFTUNG FRIEDENS- UND KONFLIKTFORSCHUNG



SAMANTHA RUPPEL //

**LOCAL PEACEBUILDING AND THE  
GERMAN CIVIL PEACE SERVICE –  
CIVIL CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION  
BETWEEN PARTNERSHIP AND POWER  
IMBALANCE**



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## **LOCAL PEACEBUILDING AND THE GERMAN CIVIL PEACE SERVICE**

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LEIBNIZ-INSTITUT HESSISCHE STIFTUNG FRIEDENS- UND KONFLIKTFORSCHUNG (HSFK)  
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**Cover:**

In Mafokie, Sierra Leone, Gerad from the University of Makeni (UNIMAK), a partner institute of the German Civil Peace Service, discusses with Chaindatta and Gbomlimba the challenges they face in their community in connection with mining activities.

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Peacebuilding can only be successful if local actors are actively involved or actually even in the driver's seat of the process. The scientific debate on involving local actors in peacebuilding as well as civil conflict transformation increasingly calls for a comprehensive approach, cooperation with local actors, and for concepts that do not impose Western ideas on local actors but regard them as an active part of the whole process. At a practical level one answer to these calls is provided by actions of civil conflict transformation carried out by civil society organizations (CSOs). They work with local approaches in the context of conflict prevention. Civilian conflict transformation by German CSOs is mainly carried out by the Civil Peace Service (CPS), which focuses on cooperation with local partners and promotes a local people's peace. The CPS has contributed enormously to the professionalization of German civil conflict transformation, with a clear focus on interactions with local partners.

The aim of this report is to analyze the challenges being faced by peacebuilding organizations that are working closely with local actors and to identify the ways in which they are trying to deal with or overcome those challenges. In particular, the report shows that organizations that put local actors in the driver's seat are also facing inherent power structures that systematically hamper their attempts at partnership, local ownership, and horizontal engagement. The discussion in this report is situated in the context of critical approaches to peacebuilding and has a special focus on the cooperative work of local and international peace workers within the CPS. The report takes a closer look at this cooperation and these relationships, power (im)balances and different types of connections between these actors. Consequently, the report starts with a short reflection on local approaches to peacebuilding and conflict transformation from a more theoretical level. It reflects on discussions like the *local turn* and the concepts of *hybridity* and *friction* and gives examples of how this academic discussion can be used in practice and why it is relevant.

Consequently, the German CPS itself is introduced as an example of local peacebuilding. The report gives an overview of the history, structure and concepts of the CPS and reflects especially on the effects and outcomes as well politics beyond the CPS. Furthermore, it reflects on the question "Who are the local partners?" and discusses different viewpoints concerning the CPS.

After the more conceptual and theoretical discussion the report introduces the methodology used in the study and provides information on the data collection. It describes the three methods of data collection: First, interviews were conducted in Germany with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and with the program managers of six organizations that carry out CPS projects, second, participation in five seminars in which new CPS-seconded personnel were trained, and third, field research with participant observation and interviews in CPS projects in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

By analyzing data from the expert interviews in Germany and induction training, the report shows that topics frequently reflected upon include the organizations' self-understanding, the goals of CPS, and the perception of the cooperation and understanding of local partners and the general challenges that occur in project work. To achieve even better understanding of these topics and the interaction of external professionals with local partners, empirical examples from fieldwork in Sierra Leone and Liberia are analyzed. These countries were chosen because the German CPS has a special

focus on the African continent and Sierra Leone and Liberia have a variety of projects and active organizations. During the fieldwork, six main topics that are important for the research question were identified. The first is the self-positioning that CPS is adopting within the whole framework of peace work and within the donor world of NGOs. The second is the role the integrated seconded personnel have in the local organizations, as this defines the working relationship with local organizations and partners and has an impact on the outcome of the work. The third is the role of local partners, which is important because these are seen as the foundation of the work done by the CPS. The fourth is the perceptions, which play a crucial role as they can be challenging and lead to conflict. The fifth, the project work and financing of the CPS, has a direct impact on its work and the sixth, the effect of the CPS, is widely discussed, as measurements are important but also understood in different ways.

Overall, the analysis shows that the CPS is a good example of how local actors are included in peacebuilding. There are numerous examples where local actors are taken seriously in the project design, the implementation or the evaluation. At the same time the report identifies areas of weakness within the CPS, and confirms that the relationship among the different actors is crucial for successfully implementing CPS peace work. Programs such as the CPS that are trying to place local actors in the driver's seat of the peace process still work within and in cooperation with certain structures that reflect power asymmetries. Underlying power asymmetries in particular are a crucial factor when challenges or misunderstandings occur in CPS projects. The report takes a closer look at these relationships, power (im)balances, and different types of connection between actors, and develops ideas on how the CPS can reflect upon them and use them in a positive and constructive way. Finally, the report closes with some recommendations for peacebuilding actors who are working with local actors or want to work with local actors, but also regarding practices used by the CPS and organizations, which can help to use power imbalances in a productive way, strengthen local inclusion in peacebuilding, and challenge these power asymmetries. The recommendations include, for example, a broader network emphasis, tighter feedback mechanisms and consultation among different actors within the CPS, more preparation for local partners, and expansion of evaluation and monitoring. The report addresses a wider audience: people working in and around the CPS in Germany and in countries in which it is active, as well as policy institutions and academic researchers with an interest in local peacebuilding.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

An analysis of peacebuilding shows that it can only be successful if local actors are actively included and if they are put into the driver's seat of the peace process. "A core value, and strategy, of peace programming is enabling and supporting people in building their own peace. Real solutions only grow from and are firmly anchored in the communities affected" (Anderson/Olson 2003: 33). The scholarly debate on involving local actors in peacebuilding<sup>1</sup> and civil conflict transformation is increasingly calling for a comprehensive approach to cooperation with local actors, and for concepts that do not impose Western ideas on local actors but consider them as an active part of the whole process (Reich 2005: 475). Answers to these calls, especially in the area of peacebuilding that deals with international and internationally supported activities, are provided by the practice of civil conflict transformation, which can be defined as "the management of conflicts without the use of direct violence with the aim of finding a settlement or solution that takes into account the interests of all parties to the conflict" (Schweitzer 2004: 512–513). In recent years, the number of civil society organizations (CSOs)<sup>2</sup> working with this widely accepted method in the context of conflict prevention, peacemaking and post-conflict work has increased (Fischer 2011: 288).

Civilian conflict transformation by German CSOs is mainly implemented by the Civil Peace Service (CPS).<sup>3</sup> The CPS focuses on cooperation with local<sup>4</sup> partners and promotes a "local people's peace" (BMZ 2011: 11). The CPS has contributed to an enormous professionalization of German civil conflict transformation, with a clear focus on interactions with local partners, most recently with a comprehensive reform process between 2011 and 2013 (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 2). The aim of this report is to analyze the challenges that peacebuilding organizations working closely with local actors are facing and to identify the ways in which they are trying to deal with or overcome these challenges. In particular, the report shows that organizations that put local actors in the driver's seat are facing inherent power structures that systematically hamper their attempts at partnership, local ownership and horizontal engagement.

The discussion takes place in the perspective of critical approaches, and has a special focus on the cooperative work of local and international peace workers. "More research is necessary to obtain more reliable and convincing results on the interaction of different actors and levels" (Fischer 2011:

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1 For this report a broad definition of peacebuilding is used: "We adopt a broad definition of peacebuilding as the range of efforts – engaging with a variety of actors – aimed at political, institutional, social and economic transformations in post-war societies for the purpose of a sustainable and positive peace" (Björkdahl et al. 2016: 3). With this broad definition the report focusses on peacebuilding activities in civil conflict transformation and international and internationally supported activities.

2 I define CSOs as non-governmental or non-profit organizations that can work on different topics (Keane 2003: 3). Civil society can be defined as a heterogeneous group of actors, CSOs or people acting along different lines of shared interests, beliefs and values, and enjoying autonomy from the state (Adloff 2005: 66).

3 Financed by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Civil Peace Service (CPS), or Ziviler Friedensdienst in German was founded in 1999 and defines its mission as "promoting peace and preventing violence in crisis zones and conflict regions. It aims to build a world in which conflicts are resolved without resorting to violence" (see <https://www.ziviler-friedensdienst.org/en>). In German: Ziviler Friedensdienst (ZFD).

4 "Local" refers to all parties in the conflict region that are not external actors. See also Chapter 2.

306–307). Analyzing the situation at the micro-sociological level with an anthropological perspective and empirical examples from Germany, Sierra Leone and Liberia, the report takes a closer look at these relationships, power (im)balances and different types of connection between these actors.

The report will start with a critical, conceptual debate over local approaches to peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The third section introduces the Civil Peace Service. Starting with its structure, the section provides an overview of the basic ideas of the CPS. Subsequently, the report introduces the reflexive research method applied in this report. The case studies from Germany, Sierra Leone and Liberia provide empirical examples of the inclusion of local actors in conflict transformation. At the same time, areas of weakness in the concept are identified and the empirical study confirms that the relationship among different actors is crucial. The conclusion provides recommendations for the work of the CPS that range from expanding the CPS network character to tighter feedback mechanisms and consultation among different actors within the CPS. It also includes recommendations on improved preparation for the local partners and expansion of evaluation and monitoring.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. LOCAL APPROACHES TO PEACEBUILDING AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**

In recent years there have been many theoretical discussions on how to integrate the local populace into peacebuilding and conflict transformation. This chapter will focus less on the academic debates per se, but will show which elements of these debates are important for practical work and which are important for locally anchored peacebuilding.

It is important to note that the discussion that emerged in academia is built around the criticism of liberal peace. One assumption that needs to be examined critically is that these liberal values (enforcement of human rights, the rule of law, democratization and global stabilization, which are to be achieved through the creation of free markets and (neo)-liberal democratic states) are universal and that local actors accept them. In this regard it is assumed that local actors do not perceive actions of external actors as problematic. Thus, external actors assume they have the knowledge to create peace and restore a state that functions in accordance with the rules of good governance.<sup>6</sup> The critical debate looks into the inclusion of local actors in the processes. In the context of the local turn, scholars have called for a more reflective approach to peacebuilding. It is assumed that local peace requires more than just the implementation of liberal values and the absence of war. It assumes a continuous process that changes relationships, behaviors, attitudes and structures from negative to positive peace. The role of external actors is initially seen as supporting local actors in their actions (Paffenholz 2015: 858). Taking account of post-structuralism and post-colonial theories, the *local turn* assumes that local actors should be the starting point for any peacebuilding measure (Mac

5 This report is a summary of results of a dissertation project. The dissertation includes another case study from Kenya, a quantitative evaluation of local perceptions of peace processes, and a broader overview of positions on and opinions of the CPS.

6 See generally: Curle 1994, Mac Ginty 2011, Mac Ginty/Richmond 2013; Paris 2010; Richmond 2006.

Ginty/Richmond 2013: 772). Consequently, in practice it is important to involve local actors directly from the start of an intervention or a program. Their ideas and viewpoints should be reflected in peacebuilding and local ownership should be the first priority. Something authors working with the concept of *hybrid peace* are trying to consider is the relationships with each other of the actors involved. These authors seek to highlight the scope of action of local actors and to demonstrate the resulting benefits for the whole process of peacebuilding. Still, hybridity must not be understood as two groups of actors merging into a third *hybrid* entity, but as involving their continued existence in a *hybrid* form by themselves. This usually happens slowly in everyday negotiation processes (Mac Ginty 2011: 72), which are never completed but in a state of constant change (Mac Ginty 2011: 8–9). In practice it is thus important to focus on actions and to evaluate every action according to questions like: Who was involved? Whose idea was it? Who is responsible for what? Where can we work together? What parts of a project were implemented individually? Looking at the concrete interactions, the concept of *friction* can help to reflect upon these questions. The focus of the concept lies less on the outcome of peacebuilding measures than on the process itself. *Frictions* are understood as “the unexpected and unstable aspects of global interaction” (Tsing 2005: xi) and therefore as a process that arises through the interaction between global and local. The process should not be seen as inevitably negative, as the concept adds complexity, uncertainty and indeterminacy to the analysis of peacebuilding. In practice *friction* that occurs should be regarded as an analytical tool that facilitates interpretation of the results of interactions in complex post-conflict societies (Björkdahl et al 2016: 1–2). To summarize, it is important that the concept of peacebuilding be redefined and should encompass “an interactive process between different actors” (Bernhard 2013: 10) based on their relations and negotiations.

Among all the concepts, one question remains open: “Who are the locals?” For practitioners, it is important to define this actor category. Very often “the local” is not perceived in its complexity (Paffenholz 2015: 862). Although it is now widely accepted that “the local” is complex, has its own dynamic, and needs to be seen as heterogeneous, local actors are still romanticized or not taken fully into account. This can happen, for example, in a post-conflict situation in which a local actor initiates a certain peacebuilding measure constructed in the present, which, however, is then projected back into a particular past by external actors. As a result, the initiative functions as historical fiction and “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm 2013: 1). If this “invention of tradition” occurs from the inside it can have positive effects such as the development of a collective identity and a social legitimization of certain norms and structures against pressure to change that is currently being applied. However, if the process derives from the outside it must be evaluated negatively and defined as romanticizing. In order to take the local seriously, romanticizing of tradition must be avoided. There is a “need to challenge the notion of the ‘local’ as static and victim of what is being done to it” (Kappler 2015: 876). As a result, in practice it is always important to question processes, actions, and their invention. Furthermore, it is important to give local actors the opportunity for self-identification and development of understanding of whether they define themselves as local, hybrid or in some other way. This can also help to avoid romanticizing the local, as being precise about the term and using new (self-)definitions can widen the scope of what is generally meant by this category.

Discourses about “the local” typically emphasize its importance in conceptual considerations without creating clarity about the actors themselves (Reich 2005: 474). For this report the category of “the local” is used in a simplified way to understand the different actors involved in the CPS. “The local” refers to the dynamics, interactions, processes and structures in the countries in which peacebuilding occurs and the CPS is active. “Local actors” are all those actors who are anchored in the specific context and are not engaged there merely temporarily as outsiders. With this definition the local is “the realm in which everyday activities emerge and unfold” (Richmond/Mitchell 2012: 11) in particular countries. The local is a heterogeneity of actors and forms of influence who can cooperate in a peace process, “some of which are aimed at identifying and creating the necessary processes for peace, perhaps with or without international help, and framed in a way in which legitimacy in local and international terms converges” (Mac Ginty/Richmond 2013: 769). Another problem is that “the local” is often equated with tradition. It appears to exist only as a counter-category to terms such as “modern” “national” or “international”, thus reinforcing global power imbalances (Mac Ginty/Richmond 2013: 770). One reason for this is the construction and weak conceptualization of the two actor categories “local” and “international” as binary opposites. This construction asserts that the two categories may not be compatible or may be at least in conflict with each other, but still have an implicit message that goes beyond power and dominance. Consequently, it’s important to consider who the local actors in a certain peace process are, how they are perceived and by whom, and the question of representation and inherent power relations. The term “power” refers to the potential to shape the behavior of another actor that is derived from the direct relationship of control between actors. Power can be used on purpose, but it can also be used as underlying or inherent power. It can be instrumentalized and also used without evil intention. Furthermore, power can be exercised in the form of coercion (limiting choices), inducement (material or institutional incentives) or persuasion (a social process of interaction where one actor changes his or her behavior without material inducement or coercion) (Howard 2019: 1–2; 35).

Despite the positive assessment of local inclusion, the growing international acceptance and promotion of locally anchored peace processes must also be viewed critically. It is important that local actors are considered reflexively, both internally and externally. At the same time, the ambivalent character of local approaches must be borne in mind, as not all locally initiated projects have to be “good” or “sustainable.” Local approaches to peacebuilding can also lead to power imbalances, exclusion, discrimination, or unfairness among local actors. A perception of the local as solely “good” and as a cure-all method for peace processes is an incorrect romanticization of the local in itself (Mac Ginty/Richmond 2013: 770). In addition, in locally led peace processes a dissolution of power structures and hierarchies is not completely possible (Bräuchler 2015). This indicates that there are two types of power relations. The local turn in general and the emphasis on local ownership in particular aim at reducing the power asymmetries between external peacebuilding actors (“donors”) and their local counterparts (“recipients”) that characterize internationally supported peacebuilding. Power relations and asymmetries, however, also exist at the domestic or local level within the countries in which peacebuilding takes place. For example, top-level individuals often have more power than other local actors and represent their own interests and beliefs rather than those of the broader population. “Any universal peace system is therefore open to being hijacked by hegemonic actors” (Richmond 2006: 390).

### 3. WHO IS WHO IN THE CIVIL PEACE SERVICE?

The term “civil conflict transformation” refers to a social change that aims at structural changes, but also examines attitudes and perspectives (Reich 2005: 485). Its discussions are divided into a theoretical peace debate, one on security policy, and another on development policy (Weller/Kirschner 2005: 13). Civil conflict transformation by German actors is characterized not only by the involvement of state actors, but also by numerous CSO and faith-based organizations (Auer-Frege 2010: 15). A special feature of civil conflict transformation since the 1990s is the CPS<sup>7</sup>, which was institutionalized by the BMZ in 1999 to function as an instrument for civil conflict transformation<sup>8</sup>.

The idea for a Civil Peace Service originated in Germany in religious and civil society circles when the Yugoslav Wars shook Europe in the 1990s. Starting in 1993, a discussion forum “Civil Peace Service” was established and worked on the concept of professional peacebuilding similar to that of the development services, where experienced people from Germany traveled to different countries to support local projects with their knowledge (Erl 2000: 16). They began political advertising in 1995 and in 1997 numerous personalities signed the “Berlin Declaration for a Civil Peace Service in Germany.” At about the same time, a qualification program for peace workers was initiated under the name “Consortium Civil Peace Service” and a regular exchange of experience and ideas between the participating peace groups and the recognized development services took place. But it was not until the change of government in 1998 that concrete implementation began (Evers 2006: 2). A joint effort by German peace and development organizations and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) was started (Bohnet 2004: 134). The consortium then went from being a forum for the exchange of ideas to an operational platform for work among the supporting organizations. Today the CPS can be seen as a joint project of state and non-governmental institutions that acts within the framework of a joint effort as a staff secondment program, aims to contribute effectively to civil conflict transformation and international peace according to its self-conception (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 2). It is one of the most important programs in civil conflict transformation. However, it only had a budget of €55 million in 2019 and €33.3 million in 2014 (ZFD 2019) for 350 people assigned to work in 45 countries around the world (ZFD 2020). Their work is consistent with the government’s mission statement on conflict transformation, which includes topics such as Germany’s responsibility for peace, freedom, development, the rule of law, and safety, and emphasizes partnership work and inclusive peace processes (Die Bundesregierung 2017: 44–45). The idea of the program is, above all, the support of local partner organizations in crisis regions by CPS-seconded personnel. The aim is to lay the foundations for sustainable peace. In general, the goals of the CPS include first, building cooperation and dialogue platforms to create secure meeting places for conflict parties, second, strengthening information and communication structures to support particularly vulnerable groups and to promote social integration of particularly affected people, third, promoting methods and concepts of civil conflict transformation and advising and training peace pedagogy, and

7 Köhler (2005) provides examples of civil conflict transformation before the establishment of CPS.

8 There are other actors in Germany who are involved in peacebuilding/civil conflict transformation or deal with the topic at policy level. For example the Center for International Peace Operations, the Peacebuilding/FriEnt Group, the Zivik project of the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, or the Civil Conflict Transformation Platform.

fourth, strengthening legal security and promoting human rights (BMZ n.d.). This work is carried out by nine organizations with many years of professional experience in peacebuilding.<sup>9</sup>

#### ILLUSTRATION 1: STRUCTURE OF THE CPS

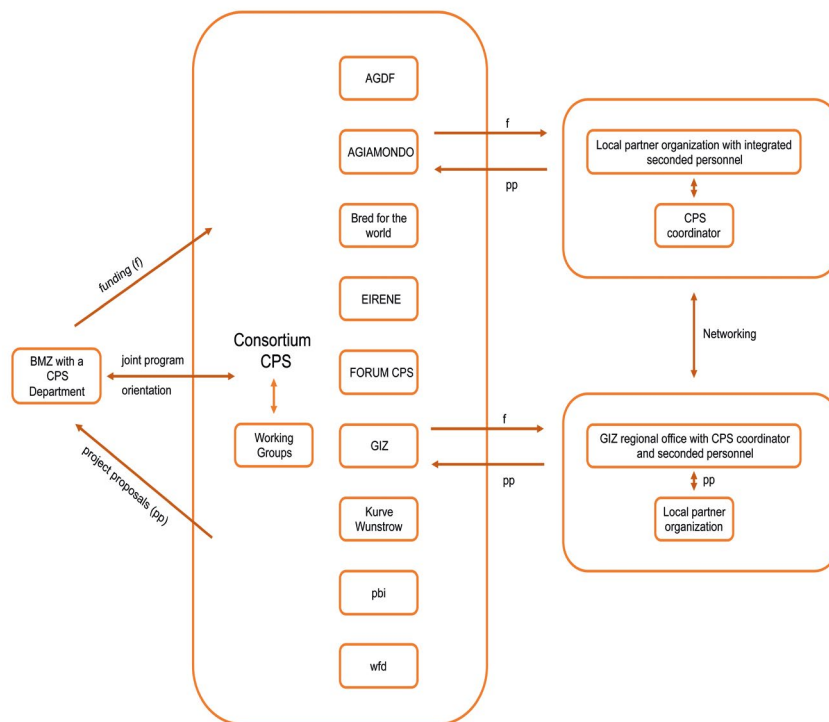


Illustration 1 provides an overview of the structure of the CPS. The CPS is supported by peace and development organizations and financed by the BMZ. In order to ensure professionalism, the work is undertaken by state-approved development services. Nine of these recognized organizations formed the Civil Peace Service Consortium, in which they permanently exchange about relevant CPS topics, make recommendations, and have a political forum. The illustration shows two examples of how the CPS is implemented. All organizations work according to the program guidelines of the CPS, but also according to their own statutes and with differing approaches. All seconded personnel work under the German Development Aid Act. Consequently, their work and cooperation with local partner organizations is organized in different ways in each country. The example of AGIAMONDO (one of the CPS organizations) demonstrates the work and structure for integrated seconded personnel, who

<sup>9</sup> These are: Aktionsgemeinschaft Dienst für den Frieden/Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF), Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Entwicklungshilfe/Association for Development Cooperation) (AGIAMONDO, formerly AGEH), Brot für die Welt/Bread for the World, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit/German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), EIRENE/Internationaler Christlicher Friedensdienst/International Christian Peacework, Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst/Forum Civil Peace Services (forumZFD), KURVE Wustrow, Peace Brigades International (pbi), Weltfriedensdienst/World Peace Service (wfd).

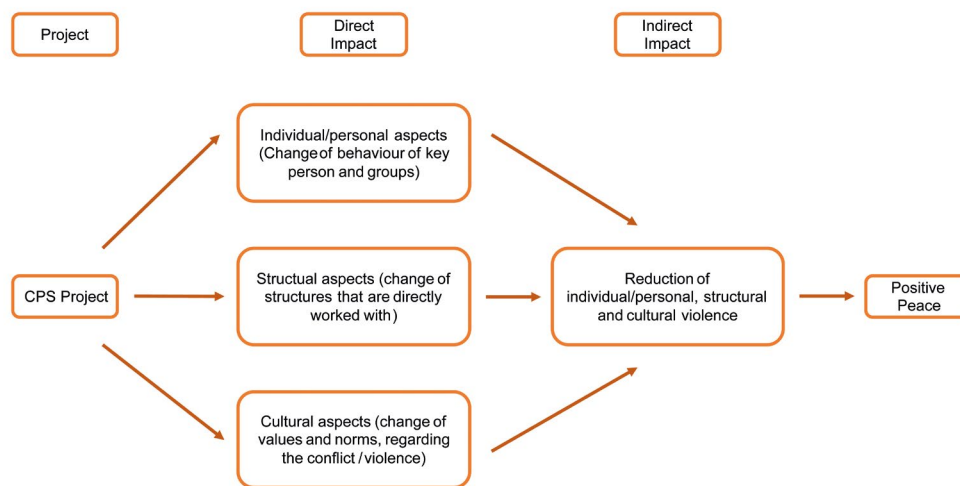
are working directly in a local partner organization. The example of GIZ shows another CPS approach that does not work with integrated seconded personnel but with regional offices collaborating with local partner organizations. Structures differ according to the situation on the ground, and a single organization may work with different approaches even within one country. The main difference is that some organizations primarily work with integrated seconded personnel directly in a partner organization, while others have seconded personnel working in local country offices and support different local partners. The illustration also shows clearly that the structures of the CPS have a donor orientation. The identification of local partners is mainly done by the German organizations and especially in the first years of the CPS long-standing partnerships were often transformed into CPS projects. Recent years have shown a positive trend that has made access easier for new organizations. As soon as a local partner is identified there is a registration process with the German CPS partner that varies slightly for each organization. After registration, the local organizations are part of the CPS network and can take part in activities and workshops. They can also be part of a project proposal and can receive seconded personnel. The project proposal is written by the local organizations in cooperation with the CPS offices (the proposal process itself depends on the organization's structure). Each project involves different partners and sub-projects. The local partners are CSOs as well as state or faith-based institutions in some cases. The work takes place in the context of the overarching agency, CPS Country Strategy Papers, that were recommended in the evaluation of the CPS (BMZ 2011: 7) and have already been prepared for some countries. The CPS organizations work with on-site coordinators, who can include either local people or seconded personnel. They have management and strategic functions, (BMZ 2011: 8) such as further development of the program, on-site operational control, lobbying, or offering training programs (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 4).

The goal of the CPS is to prevent the outbreak of violence in advance (crisis prevention), to reduce violence in conflicts, and to build structures and institutions after violence has ended, in order to secure peace over the long term (conflict resolution and peace consolidation) (Konsortium ZFD 2010: 9). In its work, the CPS applies the concept of constructive conflict transformation, which was promoted by Adam Curle (1994), Johan Galtung (1996), and Jean Paul Lederach (1997). Constructive conflict transformation refers to an ongoing process of achieving change in relationships, behavior, attitudes, and structures from negative to positive. Cooperation with local partners is considered an important part of the projects and the peace process as the CPS strives to achieve such transformation. The work of the CPS is based on the principles of action of the BMZ for shaping cooperation for peace and security. According to these principles, it is important that, first, engagement is contextual and tailored to local needs, second, conflicts about goals are known and dealt with openly, third, reliable goals are formulated for the cooperation to be able to acknowledge small successes, fourth, risks are known and handling them is steadily improved, fifth, the "do no harm" approach is applied, sixth, the strategies are tailored to local structures, and seventh, rapid project success with long-term perspectives is possible (BMZ 2013: 16–17). These principles are used in different ways in CPS's work depending on the organizations and projects. Thus, there is the possibility of working in conflict (minimum requirement of the CPS), working on conflict, the resolution of conflicts and/or the consolidation of peace processes (long-term CPS goal (BMZ 2011: 10), or working around conflict (the seconded CPS personnel can help trigger this process). To classify the tasks of CPS better, it is crucial to look at the outcome mapping of the CPS. Outcomes range from change to a current situa-



tion, to change in structures, behavior, or attitudes (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 6), and are generally defined as changes in behavior (AGEH 2019: 7). A direct effect can only be achieved with specific resources, projects, or activities. To fully understand the impacts of the practice on the ground, it is important to open up the matrix and to look at different kinds of impact. The effects can be illustrated in the form of changes to either setting or values or to perceptions of individuals (individual/personal level) or concerning political processes and economic, legal, and other institutions (at the socio-political level) (Anderson/Olson 2003: 49). Impacts here are understood to be long-term changes.

#### ILLUSTRATION 2: CPS OUTCOME-MAPPING



Compilation of the author, based on GEMEINSCHAFTSWERK ZFD 2014B

Illustration 2 shows concepts for effects, impacts and outcomes that were standardized by the CPS organizations (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014b). Each organization uses its own approaches and methods to actually evaluate the different impacts, but all emphasize the importance of having projects regularly monitored and evaluated. Here the various projects focus on changes at the individual/personal level, on changes of structures that are directly worked with, or on changes regarding values or norms. These direct impacts can then lead to indirect impacts on structure-building, effects at the socio-political level, and thus sustainability. Within this categorization, impacts of the CPS can be planned or unplanned, positive or negative, short- or long-term, conflict-relevant or not (Quack 2009: 100–101). This outcome mapping goes hand-in-hand with theoretical ideas of the *local turn*, stating that the major objective of positive, sustainable peace can only be achieved by working at different levels of conflict, including different actors as well as working towards bringing about process-oriented change.



An evaluation of the CPS has shown that projects that have been implemented, especially at the local level, can lead to a large number of positive changes. It can be stated that projects are more successful if they succeed in reaching more beneficiaries, extending their reach beyond the local context, focusing on key actors for change, and implementing everyday nonviolent approaches (BMZ 2011: 5). The study by Quack (2009) concludes that the impact of the CPS is clearly a positive one and enables key actors as well as people from different parts of society to work at different levels (and with different impacts) (Quack 2009). Generally speaking, involving local, civil society actors in peacebuilding directly and indirectly enhances the legitimacy of consolidation and can provide an open platform for exchange and interaction (Zanker 2018: 207–208).

However, this can only be achieved in a sustainable way if the needs of the local partners have been taken into account effectively and are linked to the capabilities and competencies of the CPS. This sustainable engagement requires embedding activities in an overall concept of constructive conflict transformation in which local partners are recognized as trend-setting agents of social change (Reich 2005: 473). Therefore, the responsibility for implementing the programs of CPS is shared among different actors and relies on its network character in achieving its aims. This network character can link various actors across hierarchical levels of society (vertically) and across perceived conflict lines (horizontally) (Reich 2005: 477). It often turns out that the formation of these networks is very difficult, which is why it is assumed that a third party can be very helpful for initiation and support (Scotto 2002: 228).

The work of CSOs can be looked at more critically. CSOs are not automatically and always completely independent. For example within the CPS they work in accordance with BMZ guidelines and the guidelines from the government. Furthermore the requirements of donor markets do not always influence the work of the CSO in a positive way; in many countries international CSOs with Western backgrounds are dominant and tend to export and impose their concepts (Fischer 2011). This donor problem is also important for the CPS, as the report will show.

#### **4. A REFLEXIVE RESEARCH APPROACH**

First, in order to understand the background, structures and approaches of individual organizations implementing CPS projects, I conducted seven expert interviews with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and with the program managers of six organizations also carrying out such projects. In order to give the interview partners as much leeway as possible for their answers, qualitative interviews with open guiding questions were conducted. To understand the work in the CPS projects better, it is important to understand the perspectives of the seconded personnel<sup>10</sup> working in the projects on the ground. In a second working phase I visited five seminars in which new CPS-seconded personnel were being trained. I participated in some aspects of training offered by the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), training at the Academy for

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10 Some CPS organizations call CPS peace workers from Germany “seconded personnel”. This term will be used in this report.

Conflict Transformation/Forum ZFD and two training activities at the Association for Development Cooperation (AGIAMONDO).

The third and final phase of fieldwork was a research stay in CPS projects in Liberia and Sierra Leone in order to understand the work of the CPS in practice and to come into direct contact with the different actors involved. African countries were selected for the case studies as the work of the BMZ has a special focus on the African continent (BMZ 2017). These priorities are also evident in the CPS. Thus, one third of CPS-seconded personnel work in African countries, or around 120 out of 350 assigned peace workers (ZFD 2020: 1). Sierra Leone and Liberia were chosen, as these countries have three or more ongoing CPS projects, more than two CPS organizations involved, and because they have a different project focus such as: advocacy for gender, management of natural resources, strengthening democratic participation or human rights awareness. Furthermore, Sierra Leone and Liberia are often seen as countries with a similar conflict history that, nonetheless, are still experiencing different challenges and conflicts today.

My research in Sierra Leone and Liberia was conducted from January to the end of April 2019 using the qualitative method of participatory observation. This involves planned fieldwork observation of the behavior of people in their natural environment or observation of the *everyday* by an observer who participates in the interactions and is regarded by the other persons as part of their local setting. To understand the *everyday* better, the research was supplemented by open interviews. For this purpose, I spoke to the CPS-seconded personnel, employees of the local organizations and those affected by the programs that had been implemented. In addition to the observations, 19 interviews were conducted during the research in Liberia and 21 in Sierra Leone. These interviews were conducted with coordinators in the countries, seconded personnel, and various staff members of the local organizations. No formal interviews were carried out with those participating in the CPS activities – instead informal conversations during observation and interaction was noted where relevant.

For the method of participant observation it is important to take a closer look at power relations. Especially in the context of North-South research this topic takes on special importance, as there is need for a reflection of general socially constructed power differentials and ethical and practical challenges. In general there are two power relationships that can be found in the field (Ackerly/Tru 2008: 694), one between the researcher and the actors in the field and the other between the actors in the field itself. The power relationship between me and the actors varies in particular. In the expert interviews in Germany, I would describe the people I interviewed as more powerful, because they controlled content and access. Nonetheless, asymmetry still remains, because as a researcher I had and I still have the authority to interpret and make scientific decisions. I am also quite aware of the asymmetrical distribution of power in the seminars and during the research in the three countries. I identified and defined the field, determined the methodological approaches and evaluated the data. Along with the reflection of power it is also important to reflect my own positionality, as it shapes the nature of the relationship with the actors in the field and the way I analyze the data (Kacén/Chaitin 2006). As I am well aware of this fact, I see it as my responsibility as a researcher to consider and reflect on ethical approaches in research and to use the power structures in the field as an analytical instrument for empirical research. However, I do not see myself in the role of breaking through power

structures, outlining strategies for action, strengthening cooperation among involved parties or being a proponent for certain actors. But rather, through my research, I drew attention to certain topics and problems and initiated dialogues among the actors. These reflections can also be transferred to the power relationship among the actors in the field, which in the case of the CPS is also asymmetrical.

## **5. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES – INSIGHTS FROM GERMANY, SIERRA LEONE AND LIBERIA**

Auer-Frege (2010) conducted a study in which members of more than 40 German organizations engaged in civil conflict transformation were interviewed. These interviews showed that all organizations working with projects in other countries intended to work only with actors in those countries. They see themselves as neutral/independent, supportive institutions, and want to intervene as little as possible in peace processes. They want to create a constructive environment (environment for peace), strengthen positive elements (connectors) in the conflict, and at the same time limit negative factors (dividers/spoilers). However, all organizations were aware that their projects could also have negative effects. Thus, it can be concluded that contacts with the target group on site are necessary for working successfully and that there is need for reflection on the extent the people in the respective countries are or should be actively involved in processes (Auer-Frege 2010: 25). This assumption is also important for the work of the CPS and the following factors can be identified as crucial: first, establishing a dialogue between local and external actors, second, creating structures that allow local society to contribute to planning, management, implementation, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation, third, expanding existing resources in society, such as informal knowledge, and, fourth, promoting community ownership (Erasmus 2001: 249–250), which can be defined as ownership by local actors who are involved.

### **5.1 INSIGHTS FROM GERMANY**

To understand the work of the CPS in practice the report will look at the interviews conducted in Germany first. The results of these interviews can be categorized in terms of the organizations' self-understanding, the goals of CPS, and the perception of the cooperation with local partners and general challenges that occur in the work.

The topic of self-understanding and the goals of *CPS* and the perception of the cooperation with *local partners* is very important for all organizations. Self-understanding is linked to how the CPS officially perceives itself. CPS defines itself as a partner and not as a donor; a partner that takes local approaches and local partners seriously and a partner that supports local initiatives. Even if the CPS does not define itself as a donor but instead as a partner, some local actors nevertheless identify it as a donor. There is a dependency, as local organizations depend on the money from the CPS and the funds play an important role when it comes to both work relations and also relations among the different actors involved in the CPS. Local organizations that are part of that donor business are often quite experienced and know what international organizations want to hear and which current topics

are relevant for successful funding applications. As local staff from an NGO in Sierra Leone pointed out during an informal conversation, they know how to “dance the dance” the internationals want to see.<sup>11</sup> This raises the question of how independent and locally driven the whole process of local projects and applications really is. Moreover, there is a high level of dependency within the CPS, as local organizations depend on the CPS structures and the seconded personnel depend on their work contracts and the CPS structures. Based on these rather conceptual considerations, the following chapter looks more closely at the role of CSOs and local partners in the CPS.

As previously mentioned, the most important points are the close cooperation and partnership with local partners, the motivation to work with civil methods of conflict transformation, the ability to work on conflict, and the role of the seconded personnel as an external, neutral, non-partisan actor in regard to the conflicts and actors involved. Especially the last point is also discussed critically among the CPS organizations and the people working for them. Some define themselves as neutral, non-partisan with an inherent productive impartiality, while others say that they can never be 100 percent neutral or non-partisan, as they take positions during work and have an opinion on the context they work in and making decisions about funding. In general it is open to argument whether productive neutrality or impartiality even exist. As part of CPS the organizations have the freedom to tailor the projects according to the needs of their partners and in order to suit their own organizations’ standards and preferred topics. Consequently, the cooperation always looks different. In general every CPS organization has the freedom to choose local partner organizations. Some are already long-standing partner organizations that have cooperated in previous projects, while others are completely new actors, who learned about the CPS through personal contacts or network meetings. The people interviewed identified a general problem when working with local partners: Project partners on site need a certain formal status, for example as a church institution or an NGO, and have to contribute a certain infrastructure. Thus, for example, local authorities that do not have such a structure are not acceptable as project partners. However, my interview partner at Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF) noted in this context that an overlap of groups of people may occur. For example, people who work in an NGO may also play the role of a local authority in their community at the same time, with the result that they could be trapped in a conflict of interests between the interests of a CSO, their personal interests and the interests of other actors, such as the local government or companies they are dealing with.

As soon as a project is first implemented, the idea of the CPS is that this part of the work is carried out by the local partners in cooperation with the seconded personnel. This gives ownership to the local partners and ideally helps to reduce external impact (as this report has shown show in Chapter 4 this depends substantially on the people involved). In my interview with Bread for the World it became clear why ownership is so important.

It has always been clear to us that we ourselves have no ownership of the development or peace work on site – that is, of the work in the projects. Our work serves to strengthen or

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11 Interviews and informal talks in Sierra Leone and Liberia were not recorded. Statements from observation are only paraphrased in the following sections.

support partner organizations who are responsible for the development and peace work.  
(Bread for the World interview)<sup>12</sup>

With reference to local partners, it is interesting that about half of the interview partners mentioned the Lederach pyramid in their explanations when talking about local partners (Lederach 2001). In this pyramid actors can be divided into different levels: top leadership, medium-range leadership, and grassroots leadership. Most conflicts are not vertical but horizontal inside the pyramid (Lederach 2001: 49). This is because most leaders have contacts at different levels and are connected to “their people.” There are also connections based on identity-forming characteristics such as religion or ethnicity, in which people from all levels are involved. It became clear that the stated goal of all organizations is the strengthening and support of the base of the pyramid, the grassroots level, but also to include the other levels. The strategies for achieving the goals of the CPS are very different. Some organizations work at all levels, some only at particular ones.

I would classify the primary target groups of pbi work in the Lederach pyramid at the bottom. But that is a basic idea of pbi; we try to build a bridge between grassroots activists, whose voice is often overruled by international NGOs, to the national authorities (Interview with pbi).

However, there are special projects that operate at the top of the pyramid (top leadership) such as projects run by GIZ, which cooperates with government representatives. According to CPS standards it is important that local partners are non-profit, civic actors, faith-based organizations, or public institutions, and the exact criteria are specific and defined by each individual organization (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 4). One drawback of the Lederach pyramid is that it is too static. In addition, many CPS projects have shown that there needs to be cohesion among the various levels to reach the intended inputs and outcomes. It is thus important to consider that as a result of everyday interactions the local actors themselves create identity categories in a fluid way. They are transverse, flexible, and fluid and the actors can switch categories and resituate themselves (Kappler 2015: 876).

If I have only one focus, then I lose the other. Consequently, I have to work with the different multipliers and levels and align the work accordingly. Thus, the local turn is not really a new insight that is not already applied in practice. However, being limited as an actor, I am not constantly active at all levels. (Interview with AGDF)

All interviews showed how the CPS leadership in Germany appreciates and values the partners and how important they are for the CPS. They are aware that without local partners the CPS would not be possible and some of the interviews reflected on different roles and practices.

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12 The interviews with the organizations in Germany were conducted in German. For this report all quotations have been translated into English by the author.

Solutions can only come from the local context. Whether the demand for these solutions comes directly from the local context or whether we stimulate them by making offers, that is another question. (Interview with GIZ)

The interview partner added that

[...] at some point, however, the ideas need to be genuine, and sometimes that will only happen at a later point and sometimes such attempts can be misleading. You have to acknowledge that and nullify it. If an impulse comes from the outside, which initially leads to the fact that local demand arises and is articulated, I do not find that problematic. I find it problematic to act as if there were genuine local interest, but still to do your own thing in practice. (GIZ interview)

It is obvious that challenges can also differ as a result of these different approaches. Challenges that organizations face in partner countries can depend on the topic the organization is working on, or on the role and status of the seconded personnel. Still, a small number of topics were mentioned quite often. In areas where local partners live under difficult conditions, the CPS work may sometimes not be the main priority of the local partners. There can be other donor-driven projects they are involved in, or the local partners may need to have another job in order to make a living. In addition, logistical and bureaucratic challenges were mentioned; but the interviewee partners concluded that people working in countries and local partners can handle these questions more effectively. Another challenge that was identified that also affects CPS work in Germany is project management and evaluation (PM&E). It was often mentioned that under the new CPS guidelines PM&E is quite new to some actors, and it can be difficult to implement in a straightforward, bottom-up manner. Every CPS organization has its own methods for PM&E, which are designed in a way that they can be used all over the world. The idea of the PM&E is that it supports the projects in planning, setting goals and evaluating the work. The process should always involve all actors working on a project. In Sierra Leone as well as in Liberia seconded personnel and their colleagues from the local organizations reported to me that the process is often too time-consuming and does not fit in with their needs on the ground. It also seems to be a challenge to include the PM&E results in subsequent work processes. Furthermore, the interview partners stated that the coordination of the CPS work in the countries is working quite well, but the coordination of the CSOs in Germany could be improved. In general, Consortium CPS is supposed to be the ideal platform for discussing and coordinating activities. However, due to a lack of capacity and high workloads it cannot be implemented to the extent that most of the organizations would like. In general, the high workload, bureaucracies, and the devolvement of new project ideas that need to be implemented without additional human capacity in the organizations in Germany were identified as a serious dilemma.

Seconded personnel are chosen according to the standards of each organization but in line with the German Development Aid Act (EhFG). The local partners write the job offer together with the CPS office so that it can be designed according to their needs. In the direct application phase, not all CPS

organizations involve the local actors in the same way and there are even differences within the organizations. Some take part in the viewing of CVs, while others are just informed about the candidate.

After CPS-seconded personnel have been selected, they take part in a training program. Each organization pursues its own education and training strategy, which, however, is carried out according to certain common understandings. The training covers a variety of topics and all organizations offer adapted courses according to the respective context preparations for the seconded personnel. They take place partly in-house, but sometimes also externally. The duration depends on the organization and on the prior knowledge and experience of the seconded personnel and can last up to six months. It is not only important for the people in training to have good intercultural preparation, but is also crucial for them to understand the mechanisms of domination in the context of their work and the country they are going to (Reich 2005: 482). This will help them to acquire an understanding of the broader social or economic context in which they will be working (Fischer 2011: 297). It is more about a process of knowledge development (Reich 2005: 484), reflection and ambiguity tolerance than about teaching skills.

The training programs I participated in had a special focus on cooperation with local partners, mediation and conflict. In general, the observation of Karl Ernst Nipkow (2013: 54–55) about training seminars is important for the CPS. He concluded that both practical skills such as conflict analysis, project monitoring, or methods of mediation (knowledge in the form of skills for project work) as well as reflection about areas such as values and meanings the work is based on (orientation knowledge) are important. The following topics, which are relevant for this research, were identified through participatory observation and informal discussions with trainers and also participants: Different understandings of local partners and preparation for working with local partners.

First of all, in all training seminars different understandings of local partners played a very important and central role. The self-conception of the CPS and the respective organizations in relation to partners was discussed among the participants. The discussions showed that the perceptions of local partners are very open and to some extent reflexive. However, the relationship with the local partners depends on the exact context and, in particular, the status of integration of the seconded personnel. The seconded personnel can work directly in the local organization as integrated personnel. As a result, responsibility for personnel no longer lies with the German organization but with the local partners. Or, alternatively, seconded personnel can work as non-integrated personnel and be assigned to the local offices of the German organization and work together with the local organizations as partners.

There are very good reasons for both approaches. On one hand, it can be argued that the partner organization must clearly take the lead in carrying out work and the seconded personnel are seen as part of the local organization. On the other hand, if seconded personnel are not part of an organization, they can exert themselves in their role as an outsider differently. (AGDF interview)

Second, this distinction can be clearly seen in the preparation for working with local partners. In two seminars, for instance, the seconded personnel carried out an actor mapping for their project, where the most important actors in Germany and the project country as well as the most important actors for the project were presented. In addition, their personal contacts and possible new contacts were added. The contacts were not necessarily directly related to the project (according to the application), but could nevertheless play an important role. Further possible conflict lines were added. In this way the multiplicity of actors became clear and especially the different tasks and distributions of the work with and around local partners could be seen. This mapping is not only important for redefining individual actors and their own role but also serves as preparation for the work itself. How civil conflict transformation is defined and applied depends on the existing (social) structures, the subject of the conflict, the existing levels of escalation and the conflict parties (Weller/Kirschner 2005: 14).

Summarizing the interviews with BMZ and members of the CSOs as well as observations during the workshops, it can be said that the local setting is taken seriously and plays an important role in the CPS. It became clear that the CPS is familiar with theoretical concepts such as the actors' pyramid of Lederach and that it is used in their work. All the same, the people interviewed were aware of the fact that there are misunderstandings and challenges in their work and room for improvement. It is interesting to note that the debate concerning the *local turn* itself was addressed in the workshops on a theoretical level and specifically discussed, for example together with the topic of ownership. Furthermore, the *local turn* was implicitly present in numerous discussions, without the term itself being directly referred to. For example, it came up as an aid to understanding local partners' roles and concepts, work preparations, and personal positioning. It can be concluded that concepts and ideas emphasized in the *local turn* are used, but not the theoretical concept itself.

## 5.2 INSIGHTS FROM SIERRA LEONE AND LIBERIA

During the field research in Sierra Leone and Liberia the following key topics were identified: (1) each person's own position in the CPS; (2) the role of the integrated seconded personnel in local organizations; (3) the role of local partners; (4) understanding of different roles; (5) the project work and financing of the CPS; (6) the effects of the CPS. All these topics are reflected in power relationships among the actors.

First of all, every organization, every local actor, and all members of the seconded personnel have to find their *own position in the CPS*. This occurs in different ways and depends on how much experience the respective actor already has. It should be noted that local organizations not only see themselves as implementing agents of the CPS but place great value on the CPS's network character. Thus, there are regular partner workshops or thematic meetings (also superregional) in which the partners can network on site and engage in a substantial degree of exchange. This was highly appreciated by all local actors. For example, a relatively new partner from a local NGO in Sierra Leone noted that the networking meetings enabled more engagement with other CSO in his own country. Furthermore, a degree of identification with German actors developed, in the case of Liberia and Sierra Leone AGIAMONDO and Bread for the World. The identification also depends on how long the cooperation



has already existed and whether it operates only within the framework of the CPS or whether there are other cooperations for example due to development-aid (as Bread for the World has with some partners). The identification of seconded personnel with organizations in Germany as well as with local organizations is comparable. In the case of the seconded personnel the personal variables have an influence, too. I got to know people working as seconded personnel who only wanted to work with Bread for the World, because they like their working approach more than those of other CPS organizations. The coordinators in the countries are often at the crossroads of meeting expectations of the offices in Germany, the local partners and the seconded personnel. In Sierra Leone and Liberia seconded personnel and the local partners have very different viewpoints on the coordinators. Some people really like and value their work, while others feel that there could be more support. One coordinator was even accused of being corrupt. As these viewpoints are very different, it should be noted that the personal connections seem to play a very important role.

Second, *the role of the integrated seconded personnel in local organizations* plays an important part as they work together closely with local partners and have a certain responsibility that varies from one organization to the other. In general, the contract used by CPS defines the role and task of the seconded personnel. CPS-seconded personnel are meant to live in the country and thus have the opportunity to build stable social relationships within the local society (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 4). It is the task of the seconded personnel to train, accompany and advise, but also to strengthen the local staff and structures on the ground. This can be successful, since it works on a solution “from within” (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 5). It is assumed that the seconded personnel bring with them a view from the outside and provide benefits locally due to the newness and “productive strangeness” (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 5) of their perspective. In discussions with seconded personnel, this “productive strangeness” has always been a topic. For example, some (not all) seconded personnel have questioned it after being abroad for a longer time or because of the effects of living and working as integrated seconded personnel. It may be true that seconded personnel gain special access on the basis of being mostly White and/or the fact that they come from Germany. For example, it has been reported on several occasions that seconded personnel were taken more seriously at meetings with official government representatives than their colleagues, often simply because of the color of their skin or educational background. One colleague from a local partner organization in Liberia even said that he sometimes brings the seconded personnel to certain meetings just to make his organization look more important and to impress certain people in the room. Renate Wanie and Hans Hartmann (2000: 92) point out that, in these cases, a reflection of the actor’s own role is very important. It would be wrong to assume that despite the image of a nonviolent intervention no power imbalance occurs. Rather, this imbalance needs to be discussed to get to the bottom of it and to transform it into a political conversation about solidarity, reciprocity, and respect. In addition, the tasks assigned to the seconded personnel in the organizations have been sometimes questioned, both by the seconded personnel and the local partners. For example, it has often been reported that the actual tasks the seconded personnel should work on cannot be carried out because of a lack of basic knowledge in the organizations or a lack of infrastructure. One person in Liberia, who worked as an integrated seconded personnel, said that local staff lack basic knowledge in computer and administrative tasks and that is why it is difficult to carry out projects. The handling of this perceived problem is highly individual and depends on the seconded personnel. Even

though the seconded personnel were prepared for challenges like this in training courses, and even though many emphasized the helpfulness of the training, they state that many topics covered in the courses are not applicable in practice or take a long time to implement due to the messiness they are confronted with in the field. I talked to seconded personnel who work with these challenges and use the flexibility of CPS project applications to continue the project in another direction. For example, in the case of seconded personnel working in a local organization in Sierra Leone, instead of doing project work with local employees they first teach them the fundamentals of using a computer. The seconded personnel said that they<sup>13</sup> are flexible with work tasks, as long as there is an impact, even if the impact is not the one indicated in the project proposal. At the same time, there are also seconded personnel who work on such challenges differently. For instance, the preparation of a manual, which should be done in a mutual way, was actually written by them alone, justified by the impression that this was faster and more efficient. In addition, there are seconded personnel who try to stick to the predefined tasks and try to implement them in the intended way, despite the challenges. There are different ways of dealing with challenges and at the same time different ways of either avoiding unproductive *friction* or of using it productively. I also contacted local partner organizations in Sierra Leone that are supposed to work with seconded personnel and found that, even though the personnel are in the country, they have not been in touch with each other for months and basically work on their own projects. That is not in accordance with the CPS guidelines but seemed to be the best way for the people involved. These different ways of approaching a situation are also mentioned by the local CPS partners, especially the ones that have worked with CPS and different seconded personnel for a number of years. The local partners mentioned that personal characteristics of the seconded personnel are as important as their factual knowledge. In general, it is important that seconded personnel are able to “deal productively with the tension between empathy, intimacy and personal commitment on the one hand and appropriate distance and professionalism on the other” (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 5). According to the understanding of the sending organizations, especially in the first month of work, the seconded personnel should understand themselves as learners and should use the start as a “reality-check” (Burba/Stanzel 2015: 219). Consequently, an attitude that consists of willingness to learn something from the local partners can establish a process of sustainable, constructive conflict transformation (Reich 2005: 485). The differing actions and approaches give rise to very different reflections and opinions from various perspectives about the work of the seconded personnel as well as about their own role. The seconded personnel have the opportunity to reflect on their own position with an external coach on a regular basis. Most of the seconded personnel were quite happy with this possibility, but there were still complaints that they do not have the opportunity of coaching sessions frequently enough, and that the coach is often not aware of the situation on the ground, so that obtaining helpful feedback can be a challenge.

Third, *the role of local partners* is less clearly defined than the role of seconded personnel and depends even more on the organization. As already described, it is important for all organizations to take their local partners seriously and to put them at the center of their work.

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13 No gender is indicated in order to keep those interviewed anonymous.

I think the involvement of local actors has come to the CPS very much through faith-based organizations, but it became a foundation of the CPS program that peace must grow from within. So we have to ask, where are the local partners, what are their topics, what do they want, and how can work go on? – We cannot just come from the outside with a message that we know all of that and will tell it to you. (AGIAMONDO interview)

Local partners often have different roles to play. In a field organization, there is one person who is the supervisor for the seconded personnel. Most of the time, this person is also the head of the organization and responsible for contacts with the organizations in Germany. In addition, there is a person who should act as a counterpart for seconded personnel. Often this person is not the supervisor, but another employee. According to their own statements, these persons want to help the seconded personnel to integrate into the organization but also to benefit from them at the same time, as a direct transfer of knowledge is possible. In general, the local employees in the CPS partner organizations are not paid by CPS but have to finance themselves (or only receive a small salary), often with the help of other international funding. In many discussions with seconded personnel and local employees, they said they expected to be paid from CPS funding. Depending on the context, however, this is only possible as a complementary, supplementary resource, for example in the context of quality management or during project identification processes (Gemeinschaftswerk ZFD 2014a: 6). Another demand from the local partners and almost without exception from the seconded personnel was for preparation for the people working in the local organizations. The seconded personnel receive several months of training, but local employees do not. As a counterpart in a Liberian organization said, it is not fair that they all work together but do not get the same preparation. Local employees can also experience a culture shock when they commence work with somebody from Germany. The coordinators on the ground have the task of preparing them for this, but this is comparatively superficial and often done in a short time or only for the head of the organization. Because local partners are not prepared or trained, power imbalances persist. This preparation could help to make CPS more efficient. Being informed about other people's culture and identity but also having the ability to reflect on one's own specific training and workshops can help to facilitate that process. Still, it would be important to take into account that if only certain people from the local organization are trained such preparation could also foster power imbalances at the local level. Consequently, it is important to choose the people who will receive training carefully, and offer ongoing training as well.

Fourth, the fact that local employees in the organizations and the seconded personnel are prepared differently and have different expectations of the CPS lead to *different understanding of roles*. The CPS tries to overcome hegemonic structures and eliminate them through work on relationships. This happens in a learning field as mentioned by Reich (2005) and Ropers (2000), or rather a dialogue-based context that "implies that there is space for direct encounter, exchange, mutual empathy, interest, openness, understanding, flexibility, transformation and joint activities" (Bernhard 2013: 12). For all actors involved, preparation creates a space to reflect, modify, extend and reframe or transform familiar concepts. This can lead to an expansion of factual as well as structural knowledge. What is important here is the attitude and willingness of the various actors to question their own worldview and to be ready to learn and reflect, as well as providing sufficient time for this process to

have an effect. An important point in this process is to forget what has already been learned so that *unlearning* can take place (Nystrom/Starbuck 1984). In practice, however, it turns out that these processes are not easy to implement and depend a great deal on the context of the organization, the topic of work, but most importantly on the respective individuals. Power imbalances are revealed again and again in the CPS. This is particularly true when external specialists try to enforce their methods, concepts, and objectives and in doing so marginalize the partners and thus the local experts. This leads to artificial solutions and the absence of a unifying concept. This can be aggravated by additional uncertainty resulting from unclear understanding of roles.

This is illustrated by an ongoing problem that certain measures, norms, and processes are brought in from the outside. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, for example, the CSO were asked to implement new formats for monitoring and evaluating projects. Some of the local organizations told me that they understand that this is necessary and that they want to use those formats to improve their work, but they questioned the specific methods they were expected to use. One project on literacy of adults had to ask participants in classes to evaluate their learning outcomes by using a questionnaire and reporting statistics back to CPS and BMZ. However, the participants were unable to write and fill out the questionnaire in a proper manner, so that the CPS workers filled them out together with them. As a result, the questionnaires were not anonymous. This is an example of how bureaucracy bypasses the realities of the CPS and thus something that has been conceptualized in the Global North is forced upon the specific participating countries. This practice was even described as patronizing. I did not witness an example where it became clear how the expertise of the seconded personnel was forced upon the local ideas and viewpoints, but in the interviews with the local partners it became clear that they had experienced certain situations where this had happened. This seemed to be the case especially when it came to project design. This forced implementation is sometimes rejected by the local partners. For example in two projects in Liberia, the seconded personnel had ideas on how to apply their expertise in a certain way and start a small project within the bigger project. Both times, the local partner, who is mainly responsible, disliked the idea. I am not in a position to discuss whether the ideas would have helped to improve the projects or not, as this was up to the local organizations. However, such rejection of ideas is very frustrating to seconded personnel and makes them feel that they and their work and ideas are not needed or wanted. This also shows that it can be difficult for the seconded personnel to adapt to local ideas.

Quite often I had the experience that the task and project ideas are a negotiation process between the local partners and the seconded personnel. This negotiation constitutes a situation where the *frictions* that arise can be used in a productive way. I took part in a number of planning meetings and experienced open discussions about ideas, experiences and project plans. On one occasion the ideas for a project in Sierra Leone were quite different. The partner organization wanted to design and implement advocacy programs and speak to people in rural areas. The seconded personnel liked the idea, but felt that they could not really help, due to language barriers. In the end they came up with a compromise and a project in which the different actors in the local organization could bring in their expertise and work together on the project.

Thus, in practice, power asymmetries still often favor international organizations and funders and are often reflected in agenda setting underlining the dependent role of local actors. One organization in Liberia said that they were flexible with the topics they were working on, as long as CPS helped them to work. It must be assumed that this power relationship is not always apparent at first glance, but can be hidden in symbolic actions (Bourdieu 1992) and does not always have to be accompanied by hierarchies (Bourdieu 1993). The power relationship between the actors in the context of peacebuilding and conflict transformation is asymmetrical and discursive. In the case of the CPS the financial power is held by the German organizations, which bring with them money and expertise, on which the local actors to some extent depend. Even though the CPS seeks to break down this power gap, to a certain extent it is still woven into a larger power structure. This involves not only setting priorities and directions in the work, but also influencing organizations in certain directions and placing more weight on the donors' votes in potential debates and disagreements. To counteract this, special care must be taken to ensure that the distribution of power and tasks is not just virtual, pro-forma or superficial (Mac Ginty 2011: 59). Returning to *local ownership*, the topic does not call for the withdrawal of international actors and complete autonomy of local actors, but rather a transfer of responsibility (Donais 2012: 7), and thus a shift in power. *Local ownership* means "the degree of control that domestic actors wield over domestic political processes" (Donais 2012: 1). Thus, *local ownership* does not mean that local actors are consulted, information is gathered, and they participate in activities or programs, but that a redistribution of power takes place and structural problems are resolved or at least reduced.

The power gap extended even beyond the work in the CPS as the seconded personnel are always *outsiders*,<sup>14</sup> even if they work in an integrated way. They cannot and should not (as impartiality would be lost) become real *insiders*, as they do not come from the conflict region and cannot understand and know the country like a person who grew up there. Power gaps are demonstrated, for example, by the fact that the seconded personnel protect themselves and their houses with high fences, implying that security can only be achieved through demarcation. Evacuation plans are available for them, but not for local partners, and outsiders are paid far more money for the same work. A member of a partner organization in Sierra Leone mentioned that it is important to have these security measures, because even if peace workers live in the country for a long time they are still more vulnerable and need some sort of protection. These examples show "in what subtle way the relationship between local and external structurally solidified perspectives are reflected and how easily power asymmetries and cultural dominance are consolidated" (translated from: Reich 2005: 479–480). This power gap can only be resolved by the external CPS workers, since external actions often reveal a contradiction between what is verbally propagated and what is actually done. However, the local partners usually experience these contradictions over a long period of time and usually integrate them into their worldview or at least their actions (Reich 2005: 480). However, if all those involved become aware of this tension and power imbalance, they can work together on a transformation. This can succeed if reflection takes place together, people are open to broadening their horizons, and mutual knowl-

14 Here, the term "outsiders" stands for actors who provide financial resources, expertise or international connections, while the term "insiders" stands for actors who are directly affected by the conflict and live in the conflict region. In addition, "outsiders" refers to actors that are in the conflict-affected area by choice, while the term "insider" refers to actors that have no other choice than to be part of it (CDA 2004: 22).

edge transfer is not limited to facts, but also includes ideological categories (Reich 2005: 480). The evidence shows that successful peace partnerships are the result of the way agencies interact rather than being derived from some intrinsic “rightness.” This idea of interactions goes along with the theoretical idea of *friction* and emphasizes that even if there are challenges and problems, they can be used in a productive way if they are reflected upon. “The best partnerships occur when insiders and outsiders work as a team in a coordinated program that includes both perspectives as valuable. Some roles need to overlap” (Anderson/Olson 2003: 42). The reflection of one’s own and other’s actions and open discussion of expectations, self-perception, and the perception of others play an important role. One possible approach to reflection is, for example, the approach of “becoming aware” as introduced by Paulo Freire. The aim of this approach is to classify and understand one’s own situation better and create possibilities for expression and scope for action (Freire 1990: 25). Within the CPS project there are mandatory reflections in line with the PM&E reporting, but day-to-day reflection or reflection of critical situations as they arise does not take place sufficiently in many CPS projects.

Fifth, these power differences are also reflected in *the project work and financing of the CPS*. The support structures also create and reinforce power structures because they do not concern the flow of money alone, but also involve hegemonic dominance and cultural hegemony (Carl 2003: 3). Although the CPS partners reported that this only occurs to a very small extent in the CPS compared to other Western projects, it still happens. Often, the application process was mentioned as a positive example, even though it was considered too long and too bureaucratic. Local organizations apply to particular partners in Germany to become a partner in the CPS or to receive seconded personnel. During interviews various partners pointed out that the procedure seemed very elaborate. Applications require a lot of work and the gathering of information that was difficult to obtain. The support from Germany, however, was considered to be very good and joint work on the application document took place. Nevertheless, the partners identified points where they felt patronized. During evaluation or project visits they got the impression that the people in Germany knew and understood their country better than they did. In order to reach a common denominator in the projects, it is important that the goals for the three years in which the seconded personnel work on site are initially worked out with all stakeholders. Only then can a common network of meanings with culturally different systems of interpretation (Reich 2005: 482) be established. If joint work takes place, this can contribute to understanding of the fact that no system is universally valid. If different actors, but also structures, open up in a mutual way, detachment from power structures can occur slowly and a discussion of interests, perspectives and needs can take place.

Sixth, different *effects of the CPS* can be observed. People working as seconded personnel often wonder to what extent their work is effective and if it truly contributes to peace. This question was rarely posed by local partners. This is mirrored in Richmond’s statement, which points out that there is “need for a pluralist reflection on who peace is for, and what it means” (Richmond 2009: 558).

In the CPS we are interested in the perspective of ‘local people’s peace’. The question is whether people who live in conflict areas and are affected by conflict find a difference in their everyday lives. Has life become safer than before? Do people at the local level talk to

each other again if they did not before? Such observable changes show effects that we like to reflect on together with our partners. (Bread for the World interview)

It should be noted that civil conflict transformation always has goals on different levels. A long-term goal could be the ending of a conflict and the establishment of sustainable structures, but these can usually never be achieved completely by one project alone. Consequently, there are many smaller milestones in each project (Anderson/Olson 2003: 13). Civil conflict transformation relies on slow changes and the long-term overcoming of conflict causes, so that it is important that the seconded personnel and local partners do not expect quick results. Rather, the work is time-consuming, and activities such as the example of communicating computer skills to office colleagues mentioned above can also contribute to this overall goal. Thus, it is important to identify small-scale effects and acknowledge that “change is a complex process undergoing several stages that are not necessarily linear” (AGEH 2019: 3). The evaluation of effectiveness can be helpful in this regard. This is done in every project by means of constant monitoring and evaluation processes. In addition, the CPS program as a whole is evaluated on a regular basis and results show that it is actually effective and has an impact not only in partner organizations but also in the populations with which they work (Quack 2009: 391–393)<sup>15</sup>. From another point of view, it should also be critically noted that the real purpose of a peace-promoting CSO is to make itself redundant (Anderson 1999: 206). However, with growing competition in the peacebuilding market and organizational dependencies this goal is becoming more remote. There is a veritable “peace industry” consisting of work in practice, scientific background work, administrative and financial, mostly external, support, and media coverage, which together lead to constant self-reproduction and maintenance of their own needs (Moltmann 2004: 242–243). The CPS is also confronted with this “peace industry.” To put it bluntly, seconded personnel earn their money with problems in other countries, and local employees can also ensure their own safety and livelihood with the help of external compassion and funding, which leads to a highly competitive market among local organizations.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this paper, I showed how the German CPS works with local, participatory peacebuilding and what challenges, tensions and problems arise in this process. This also leads to further conclusions and recommendations. The empirical results show that there is a strong turn towards the local and that local actors are taken seriously in the work of the CPS. Nonetheless, existing power structures and imbalances are present and play a crucial role in the implementation of the CPS. As one local partner in Liberia pointed out, the CPS continues to be a quite paternalistic system. There are often underlying and inherent problems, and only the tip of the iceberg is visible. These power asymmetries stem from the design of the CPS itself and the fact that personal relationships and cooperation play a crucial role in the implementation of the CPS.

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15 An example of guiding questions during evaluation at different levels of a project can be found in the Managing Outcomes publication by the AGIAMONDO (AGEH 2019).



According to the data, most of the challenges, including those in regard to power relations in CPS, involve role definitions, cooperation in everyday work, finance, and the impact of the projects. These are issues that appear when *friction* occurs. A simple example of *friction* that occurs in CPS projects is seen, for example, when local and international peace workers facilitate workshops, use different approaches and critically discuss them together before implementing them. Friction does not refer to day-to-day disagreements, which commonly occur in collaborative projects, but instead refers to ambivalent and asymmetric relationships and hierarchies which leads to opinions having unintended effects. In the context of ambivalent relationships between global and local actors (with inherent power asymmetries), this may bring about unintended results during peacebuilding interventions. For effective implementation of the *local turn*, it is important for actors to consider these frictions, understand their causes and potential for harm, and ultimately deal with them in a productive way. This proactive approach to frictions is not only relevant for actors in each individual project but also a central element and ongoing challenge in each individual actors' work philosophy. The way frictions are solved in a specific intervention is strongly dependent on the habits, ideals, and behaviors of individual actors and puts them at the center of the peacebuilding process. "The quality of the relations and interactions between the different actors and stakeholders is central to the effectiveness and sustainability of the peacebuilding process" (Bernard 2013:10). This means it is important that report as well as feedback mechanisms be used and consequences drawn from the experiences, feedback and conclusions of the experts. These consequences need to be crosschecked with feedback collected from local partners, as they also need to be taken seriously in the whole process. The CPS seeks to apply standards different from traditional donor agencies by providing local actors with active and influential roles. There are a lot of positive examples within the CPS on how local actors can actively participate in the peacebuilding process: involvement of local actors in project design and evaluation, the network character as a means of local cooperation, and creation of ownership for local actors in the peacebuilding process. Further changes are needed in order to challenge existing power structures. These changes can only be carried out step by step and on a small scale and would require a change of the entire architecture of peacebuilding and development cooperation (Mannitz 2014). Consequently, the conclusions offer recommendations for certain areas of the work of the CPS but also for other organizations that wish to apply local, participatory approaches that can start to tackle the iceberg of power asymmetries.

#### Administrative recommendations:

- There is a great deal of bureaucracy involved in communications between the CPS offices in Germany and the local partners. Local partners sometimes feel patronized and not taken seriously. It would be helpful to evaluate these processes in a PM&E circle in order to understand them better and to establish mechanisms against them.
- Measurements of the effects of the CPS can be challenging for seconded personnel as well as local actors, as they often take place on a small scale. The PM&E process needs to look into these small-scale changes in a more detailed and precise way. The topic of small-scale changes that can nonetheless have a larger effect needs to be discussed before projects start. More detailed information on the expectations of the project is especially needed by seconded personnel during the preparation period.



- The CPS works locally and does not define itself as a donor. Nevertheless, some partners regard the CPS as a donor and as contributing to the “peace industry.” Simply rephrasing an owner relationship as a partner relationship does not help, as structures remain the same. This major conflict cannot be resolved, as it is part of a general structure. Nonetheless, it is important, that the CPS reflects on its role and the implications of this and includes this critical reflection to a greater extent in its programs and strategies.
- To include more local voices in the whole process of the CPS projects and programs, representatives from certain regions of the world should be present in the CPS Consortium. This will give the CPS the chance to involve local partners in political processes and project design.
- The network character of the CPS is evaluated especially positively at the local level and should be expanded. This should also involve a focus on South-South cooperation, for example with the formation of more thematic working groups across various countries.

Recommendations regarding different positions and understanding of roles in the CPS:

- Quite often, the roles of seconded personnel as well as local partners are defined very broadly in the project proposals. On a positive note, this gives all actors involved a high level of flexibility. At the same time, however, it can be confusing, as research has often shown that roles and tasks are not very clear. Consequently, there is a need for a clearer definition of the roles and tasks of local partners as well as of seconded personnel. This should already be considered as a topic for the preparation training sessions. There needs to be more time for participants to define their own role according to project needs.
- There are different understandings of roles, but these are not always used in a productive way and thus lead to frustration and misunderstandings. More guidance, more reflection, and the introduction of concepts such as *friction* or *unlearning* can help to use different role understandings in a more productive way. Tighter feedback mechanisms in the project, especially at the beginning, that also include role definitions and descriptions, are needed. Additionally, power (im)balances should be addressed in induction training and should also be part of subsequent project reflections.
- As *friction* occurs, the CPS should reflect more deeply on frictional processes in its work and understand how friction can be used in a productive way. Some local and international peace workers are already using that potential for productivity, but others are struggling. Consequently, it would be helpful to formulate guidelines or include this topic in preparation training, as well as to discuss best practice with people from the various CPS countries.
- Local partners are not fully included in the process of selection of seconded personnel. Some only see the CVs after selection by the organizations in Germany, while only a few participate in interviews. There is need for tighter inclusion of all partners in the selection process, as they are the ones who will work with the seconded personnel.
- Local partners are crucial for CPS, but are not always treated accordingly. For example, the seconded personnel are described in a far more detailed way in CPS policy and administrative papers than local partners. To really take local partners into account, they should be treated as more important, or even as equally important as the seconded personnel in policy and administrative papers.

- The desire of local partners for more preparation and education about CPS and CPS-related topics should be taken into account. Preparation training for local actors should be mandatory and needs to be conceptualized.

Local peacebuilding and the German Civil Peace Service are at the crossroads between partnership and power imbalance. Some of their actions are influenced by the overarching architecture of peacebuilding and development cooperation of which they are part. At the same time, a substantial number of activities can be influenced by the actors themselves. To actively involve local actors or even actually put them in the driver's seat of the peace process, it is necessary to tackle the iceberg of power asymmetries, to think outside the box, and to use the concept of productive *friction*.

|            |                                                                                                       |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GDF:       | Action Committee Service for Peace                                                                    |
| AGEH:      | Association for Development Cooperation                                                               |
| AGIAMONDO: | Association for Development Cooperation                                                               |
| BMZ:       | Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development                                             |
| CSO:       | Civil Society Organizations                                                                           |
| CPS:       | Civil Peace Service                                                                                   |
| GIZ:       | German Society for International Cooperation/ Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| IR:        | International Relations                                                                               |
| PBI:       | Peace Brigade International                                                                           |
| PM&E:      | Project Monitoring and Evaluation                                                                     |
| ZFD:       | Ziviler Friedensdienst                                                                                |

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SAMANTHA RUPPEL //

**LOCAL PEACEBUILDING AND THE  
GERMAN CIVIL PEACE SERVICE –  
CIVIL CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION  
BETWEEN PARTNERSHIP AND POWER  
IMBALANCE**

An essential prerequisite for successful peacebuilding is the involvement of local actors. This is why the German Civil Peace Service (CPS) focuses on cooperation with local partners. However, the interaction between local and international peace workers is often conflict-ridden. Using empirical examples from Germany, Sierra Leone and Liberia, the author analyzes the challenges faced by peacebuilding organizations when working closely with local actors. To address the major problem of power asymmetries, she recommends thinking outside the box and using the concept of productive friction.

Samantha Ruppel is a doctoral candidate working in PRIF's "Glocal Junctions" research department. Her research interests include civil conflict management, peacebuilding, local peace processes, and Africa, with a special focus on West and East Africa.