



CENTRE FOR PEACE &
CONFLICT STUDIES

ADAPTING PEACEBUILDING WHEN THE WORLD GOES ONLINE.

What happens when peacebuilders go “online”



This has been a really creative and interesting time for us to think through what kind of peacebuilding we can do in the midst of the global pandemic. We've been in touch with all of our partners and stakeholders, and had incredible conversations and reflections, challenging ourselves to think about what does the future bring, and equally what parts of the way we worked in the past we like to leave behind us.

Emma Leslie,
Executive Director, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

In March 2020, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) began transitioning to an online peacebuilding organisation. The increasing travel restrictions and preventive measures linked to the COVID-19 pandemic became a catalyst for CPCS to critically reflect on ways in which we approach peace work and to imagine what could be the benefits and challenges of running an online organisation with staff working remotely. In assessing options for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear that the violent conflicts that CPCS is engaged with would continue to unfold despite the global pandemic, and we would need to rapidly transition our organisation to adapt to continue our efforts to violent conflicts in Asia.

Over twelve weeks, have we tested and adjusted the structure of our work, consulted with our partners, and deeply reflected with our program team to asses new ways of working, and some practices to let go of all together. From this CPCS has identified key lessons and principles for carrying forward our work, beyond the current climate of COVID19 restrictions.

This is the first in a series of articles to share what we are learning about what happens when peacebuilders go “online”.

What we have learned so far:

- **Focus on our strengths and our role.** CPCS cannot and should not try to be all things to all people or to address all issues facing our communities and partners. We have a clear role – as an outsider organisation accompanying peace processes, and the people who work to end violent conflict, to function as resources for transforming violent conflict. We should therefore not try to solve health, economic/livelihoods, or other needs of our partners, but support other organisations that have relevant expertise. Through this we can remain focused on our mission of strategic interventions to violent conflicts, towards sustainable peace in Asia.



- **Knowing how to use the moment.** Like most of the world, many of the contexts and partners we work with have faced travel and meeting restrictions. This has meant that partners and key stakeholders have had increased availability and flexibility in their days. CPCS has been encouraging partners to use this time to reflect critically on work and identify gaps in knowledge and skills. In some cases, that has meant that more senior members of critical stakeholder groups are engaged in activities. In other cases, we have connected partners with resources to strengthen their technical skills, such as public speaking, so that when things shift again, they can be well-positioned to respond.
- **Reformatting activities to get to the “nitty-gritty” details and engage in critical reflection.** Technical assistance to different stakeholders in a peace process has long been a focus of CPCS, often delivered through multi-day workshops with different discussions with resource persons on relevant topics. In the current context, multiple, full day workshops are reformatted to series of 60 – 90-minute sessions, spread over several weeks, with the shared “online” time needed to focus on crucial points and agenda. Participants have space between sessions to reflect on the content and prepare follow up discuss points and questions. In technical aid to non-state actors, this has created the chance for participants to go deeply into technical discussions with other groups who have had successes, and challenges, in peace negotiations, to understand the “how” and the “why.”
- **Greater Inclusivity.** Reformulating meetings and workshops to telecommunications creates the opportunity for greater inclusivity at all levels of work. This shift reduces complications for people living in areas with pre-existing restrictions on movement, reducing security concerns for groups that may be monitored (such as non-state actors), and reducing schedule conflicts by reducing travel time for international actors. This maximized the frequency of contact as well.
- **Quality over Quantity.** For workshops, training, conferences – what activities need to be in person, and what can be accomplished remotely? Going forward, CPCS expects there will be fewer in-person activities, so strive for quality and excellence in how we use the face to face time, as well as quality and excellence in the materials and activities we prepare to deliver remotely.
- **Environmental Benefits.** This new way of working through online communications has already changed CPCS’ carbon footprint, especially from frequent international travel and printing of publications. This period has shown us we can deliver activities with less travel, to be more strategic and smart about how, when and why we travel. We are overhauling our approach to research and analysis to produce more streamlined electronic publications. We are also redesigning our website to make resources more easily accessible online and not return to the practice of printing and shipping publications as our main avenue for sharing research and analysis.
- **Well-established relationships.** Given CPCS’s approach towards the long-term accompaniment of key actors, many of the partners and targets various projects are already comfortable in communicating with us through phone calls and messaging, so facilitating more dialogues and analysis through telecoms has been more feasible and productive than if CPCS was still in the relationship-building phases of work. This also demonstrates the importance of cultivating trusting, transparent, and balanced relationships with partners.



- **Managing expectations:** of ourselves, partners, and of the work. Let us be kind and compassionate while remaining committed. Be mindful that all colleagues, partners, and participants are also balancing the challenges during the COVID19 pandemic – for example, family members and children also working and learning from home, caring for communities affected by the pandemic – in addition to their usual responsibilities. Be mindful of not over-scheduling meetings or having long sessions without breaks.
- **Increased flexibility in the timing of activities:** Many of our partners and beneficiaries in civil society have been called on to address the immediate needs of the COVID19 virus and its impact on their communities. Adapting the programs to telecommunications opens the possibility of evening or other “off work” hours for seminars, so participants can balance the immediate needs of their families and communities while still accessing program resources.
- **Refocusing energy and resources:** Shifting workshops and meetings to telecommunications reduces the associated costs, as well as travel time or the need to be away for several days or longer. This allows the direction of more energy and focuses on the substance of our work in each context. This should translate into a more frequent and timely analysis, which contributes to quicker responses to changing dynamics.

Who is the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

The Centre for Peace and Conflicts Studies (CPCS) is a Cambodia-based, nongovernmental organisation that promotes strategic interventions to violent conflicts, with the aim of sustainable peace in Asia. CPCS emphasises strong partnerships with key people, both in terms of local partners who are working on conflicts in their communities and external partners who have invested in sustainable peace.

Specific interventions are developed in consultation with local partners, grounded in on-going analysis, and are flexible and adaptable to shifting dynamics.

CPCS is a value-driven organisation, and our core values continue to guide us in making decisions and developing interventions. **Our values are:**

Grounded: We are committed to mindful interventions into violent conflicts. We design conflict transformation initiatives rooted in the critical and on-going analysis.

Excellence: We are committed to outstanding work. We strive to be excellent by challenging ourselves to ongoing improvement in our work.

Trust: We create and nurture relationships with our partners and each other. Our relationships are honest, generous, heartfelt, and respectful. We practice humility, empathy, and solidarity. We value diversity.

Courageous: We embrace challenges, innovate, persevere, and push boundaries. We support and encourage others and ourselves to take the initiative and leadership.

Continued learning: We critically reflect, evaluate, and adapt our methods, programmes, and goals. We share our learning and learn from the approaches and experiences of others.