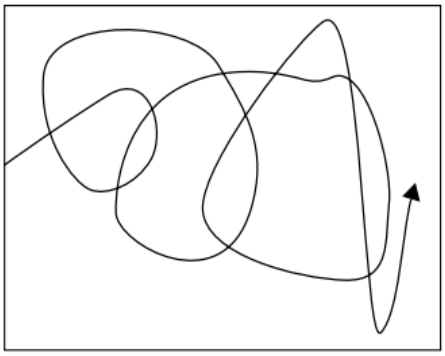
SKILLS FOR THE PEACEBUILDER, CONFLICT AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Defining Conflict

Conflict is sometimes caused by miscommunication, but more often it is about other issues, like values or beliefs. A common definition of conflict comes from Lewis Coser, a sociologist, who defines social conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources" (Coser, 1956, p.8). This definition highlights possible causes of conflict (values, beliefs, power, scarce status or resources). Another definition of conflict (Mitchell, 1981, p.17) refers to "any situation in which two or more social entities or 'parties' … perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals." This definition emphasises the existence of incompatible or contradictory goals and the element of perception that leads to conflict. Would you define conflict differently?

Most people associate negative words or ideas with conflict – war, violence, anger, or hurt feelings. *Peacebuilding assumes that conflict is a natural part of human existence, and that the goal is to transform the destructive ways we deal with conflict to lead to more constructive outcomes.* Associating conflict with constructive outcomes generally changes our perspective to a more positive one when thinking about conflict.

Conflict Levels and Dynamics



One reason that social conflicts are hard to deal with is that they are very complex. Conflicts involve many actors in processes that are usually not very straightforward. Sometimes conflicts escalate in intensity and violence, sometimes they de-escalate and we seem to make progress towards peace, and then often we fall back into violence before making a bit more progress towards peace. The box to the right visually depicts these confusing dynamics over time. However, there are still some patterns within the messy conflict dynamics and understanding them can help us identify when and how to focus our peacebuilding efforts

To begin with, we can understand conflicts at a number of *levels.* Four levels are identified below and depicted visually in Figure 3.1.

1) **Intra-personal conflict** refers to conflicts occurring within a person. Usually people need to work on their own inner struggles and issues in order to be constructive in social conflicts. For example, in South Africa, Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk experienced personal transformations before they successfully negotiated political change (Mandela, 1994, Sparks, 1995). Interestingly, Nelson Mandela went through his personal transformation 30 years before de Klerk. What other stories of personal transformation do you know?

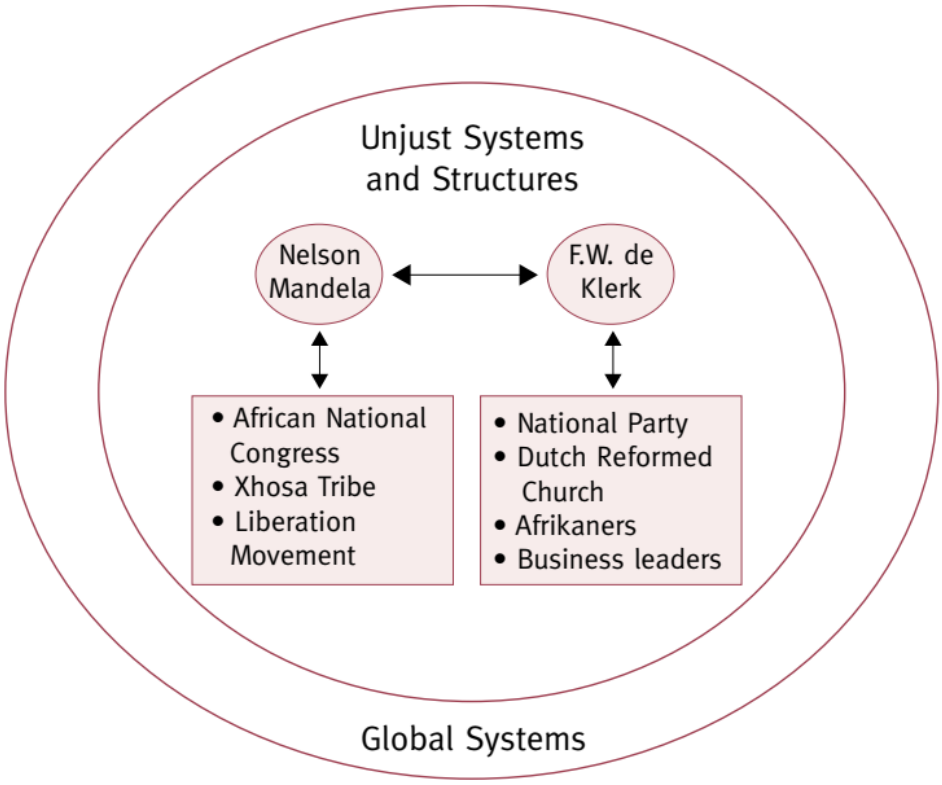
2) **Interpersonal conflict** refers to conflicts occurring between individuals or small groups of people. Returning to our example from South Africa, Mandela and de Klerk had to engage with each other and overcome any conflicts between themselves before negotiating broader social change.

3) **Intra-group conflict** refers to those conflicts that happen within a particular group, whether it is a religious, ethnic, political or other type of identity group. It is important to be able to manage the conflicts within your own group, and be able to communicate with others within your group in order to build support for long-term peace processes. Mandela had to work with multiple groups including the African National Congress, the Xhosa tribe, and the Liberation Movement in order to build up support amongst black South Africans for the new political system and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Similarly, de Klerk needed to work with members of the National Party, Dutch Reformed Church, and Afrikaners more generally to build support amongst white South Africans for political change.

4) **Inter-group conflict** refers to conflicts occurring between large organised social or identity groups. For example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a public forum designed to expose injustice and record events in order to achieve social reconciliation. To be successful peacebuilders we need to have the skills to work both within our own groups as well as between groups.

There are many challenges in working at conflict transformation across these different levels of conflict. One of the biggest challenges is communicating with "the enemy" without being viewed as a spy or traitor. In societies divided by long-standing hatreds it is very difficult to move out of your own group or act as an intermediary between groups.

Fig 3.1 - Examples of Levels of Conflict in South Africa



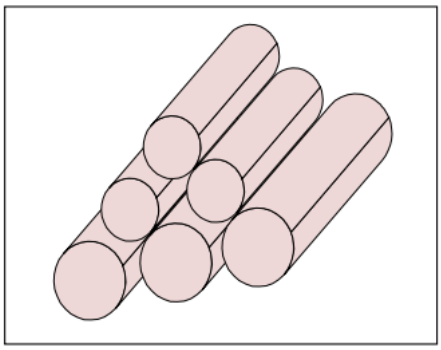
A second very daunting challenge is to change *national structures*. Social, political and economic systems often need to change in order to achieve peace that is grounded in justice. Social transformation requires changes in attitudes and changes in structures. Achieving these changes takes years – South Africa continues to work on this challenge.

A third challenge is that national institutions and structures do not operate in vacuums but are also influenced by *global economic and political systems*. Successful change at the national level may require the involvement of other countries and actors, like the United States, the European Union (EU), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations (UN), or the World Bank. Advocating change within these and other organisations is one role for peacebuilders

Conflicts are not static, they change over time, sometimes increasing in intensity and sometimes decreasing. There are several ways to capture these various *stages and dynamics of conflict*. *Working for Reconciliation* identifies 5 stages of conflict, moving from peaceful situations to political tension, serious political conflict, low intensity conflict and then high intensity conflict

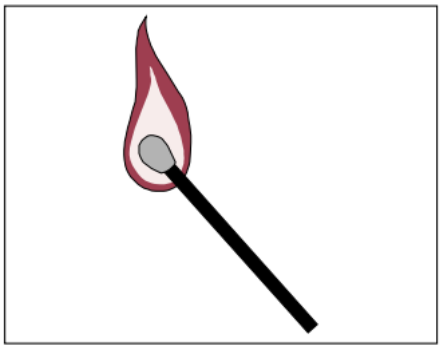
To build on this idea of stages, we can compare conflict to a *fire* (e.g. Ayindo *et al.*, 1995; Macbeth and Fine, 1995). Conflict, like fire, goes through a number of stages that have particular elements that make it unique. These stages are:

1) **Gathering materials / Potential conflict.** In the early stage, materials for the fire are collected. Some of these materials are drier than others, but there is no fire yet. However, there is movement towards fire and the materials are readily available.



During this stage of conflict, which is sometimes referred to as latent conflict (Curle, 1971), people usually experience *structural violence* (Galtung, 1969). Structural violence refers to situations of injustice where people are not allowed to experience their rights and responsibilities equally. People are treated unequally within social structures, systems and institutions, and the disparities are unbearable. The apartheid system in South Africa was an example of a social system of control that oppressed people without necessarily engaging in physical violence.

2) **Fire begins burning / Confrontation.** In the second stage, a match is lit and the fire begins to burn. Usually a confrontation between parties, like a large public demonstration, serves as the match and quickly ignites the dry, waiting materials.



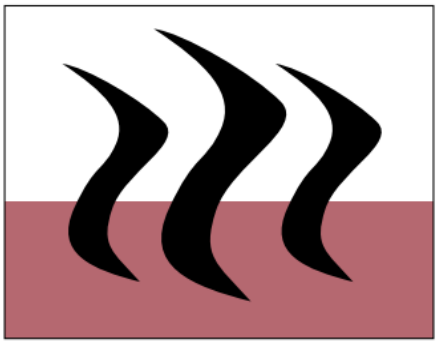
Confrontation usually means that the covert or structural forms of violence are being rejected publicly. For example, when Rosa Parks, an African American woman, refused to give up her seat on a bus for a white man to sit down – which was required according to the segregation laws in the United States at the time – she was arrested. Her arrest sparked a major boycott and led to an early success in the civil rights movement. What other examples do you know?

3) **Bonfire / Crisis.** During the third stage, the fire burns as far and fast as it can, burning wildly out of control. In this stage, the conflict reaches a crisis and, just like the fire, conflict consumes the materials fuelling it.

When conflicts get "hot," those involved in them often resort to overt violence in order to win – although usually, both sides end up losing something. *Overt violence* refers to actions that people purposefully do to harm, maim or kill others. War is the most organised form of overt violence that we humans have invented.

Political groups usually engage in overt violence when they are frustrated, scared and believe there is no other way of achieving their goals.

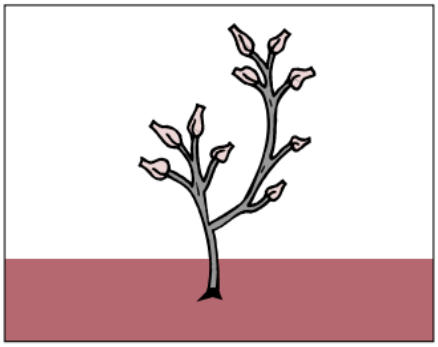
4) **Coals / Potential conflict.** At some point, the fire abates, the flames largely vanish and just the coals continue to glow as most of the fuel is burnt up. At this stage, conflicts can either continue to burn themselves out or, if new fuel is added, can re-ignite.



Overt violence usually cycles through periods of increased fighting and relative calm. If peace accords are signed, then the violence usually decreases, at least temporarily. However, if the causes of structural violence and injustices are not addressed then overt violence often increases again.

There are many examples of conflicts in which violence resurges after peace processes are underway: the Middle East, Colombia, Sudan, Sri Lanka, and the list goes on. When violence recurs, it is frustrating and depressing for those working for peace. Section III, 3.3 Trainer Motivation: Knowing Yourself includes suggestions for how to sustain yourself during stressful and trying times. Exercises 2.6 and 2.7 may also be helpful.

5) **Fire out / Regeneration.** In the fifth stage, the fire is finally out and even the embers are cool. At this stage, it is time to focus on other things besides the fire, and to rebuild and help regenerate what was lost.



If the injustices of structures and systems are adequately addressed, there will be space for reconciliation, regeneration and renewal. These processes, as Module 2 highlights, are not easy and involve as much energy as the fire, only channelled in different ways. Regeneration takes years and years. A forest that is burned down does not reappear the next year. The example of South Africa discussed above also shows that it takes decades, even generations, to reform and rebuild systems and change people's opinions of each other even after dramatic political change.

Trainer Notes: This section on conflict can lead into an immediate discussion of peacebuilding activities that can be done at various points within the conflict dynamics

Conflict and Culture

Culture is a key component in conflict. Culture influences the process of conflict – how it unfolds, what events trigger violence – and the interpretation of events and messages. Culture also affects how we perceive events and is part of the context for communication

Culture's influence on our behaviour and how we see the world often only becomes obvious when it is not shared. For example, when you travel to a new country, you see what people in that country eat and how they interact in public. These may be different from what is common or acceptable in your own country or culture. When we share the same cultural context we take for granted most norms and assumptions of how we communicate and approach conflict.

Kevin Avruch, an anthropologist who studies culture and conflict, defines *culture* as a "derivative of individual experience, something learned or created by individuals themselves or passed on to them socially by contemporaries or ancestors" (Avruch, 1998, p.5). He likens it to soil in which everything else grows. The important part of his definition is that culture is passed down from generation to generation and it is learned. In other words, it affects everything we do as well as how we see the world around us. Therefore, not only does conflict happen within a particular cultural context, every culture has its own ways of resolving conflict.

Gender, Children and Conflict

Men and women usually experience violent conflict and war differently. Understanding these differences is the first step to designing programmes that adequately take into account the different needs of women, men and children in conflict and post-conflict zones.

The role of women in conflict is mediated by cultural norms and what is expected of women, although these expectations change under conditions of great stress. In violent conflict, women are often the victims of violent war crimes, such as rape, which is sometimes used as a tool of warfare to humiliate and terrorise groups. In civil wars, women like men, can be both the perpetrators of violence and victims (Kumar, 2000).

Women are usually the ones who remain at home during violent conflict, and they are expected to keep the children, home and community together. As women take on these greater responsibilities, their roles become redefined, and this can lead to tension in the community with men after they return when the conflict is over. If fighting enters home villages and communities, women, with their children and families, are displaced and have to flee. Women and children thus become the largest groups of internally displaced or refugees. Under all of the conditions, women experience a great deal of fear, stress and trauma

Men are both perpetrators and victims of violence in war and civil conflicts. Men are usually the ones recruited, often forcibly, or volunteered to join as soldiers and fight in military combat. They experience the fighting directly. If they survive, they are often left with major physical and mental wounds. Many have limbs amputated, struggle with memories of what they experienced, and have difficulties coping with trauma, stress and fear. When these men return home, they often find their homes and communities are re-organised and they are outside their former roles, which can contribute to increased alcoholism and abuse amongst returning veterans.

Children experience violent conflict in very different ways. Girls, like women, are more likely to be victims of violence and rape while young boys are more likely to be forcibly recruited into fighting units. In some cases, young girls and boys are abducted and forced to travel with military groups. In these cases, girls are often abused as sex slaves while boys are subjected to physical and psychological abuse in order to ensure they become brutal fighters. Drug dependency, psychological and physical violence are commonly used to ensure that the children obey. Some of the special needs children have in conflict, in addition to being fed, having safe water and protection against disease, are care if they are unaccompanied, healing the physical and mental war wounds of boys and girls who are at the beginnings of their lives, returning to home communities where they may not be welcome and re-starting school (Machel, 2000, 2001).

By identifying how conflicts impact on women and men, girls and boys differently, we can develop programmes that better address their particular needs and concerns, as well as the underlying issues of injustice that may be present in structures and systems.

Some questions for reflection on gender, children and conflict for individual regions are:

1) How did women in your community experience the conflict? What happened to them? What was expected of them?
2) How did children in your community experience the conflict? What happened to boys? What happened to girls? What was expected of them?
3) How did men in your community experience the conflict? What happened to them? What was expected of them?
4) How were the elderly men and women in your community affected by conflict?
5) What are the problems for men when they return home? What adjustments are required?
6) What are the problems for women when soldiers return home? What adjustments are required?
7) What are the problems for children when the conflict ends?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurs in persons exposed to traumatic events. It was first diagnosed among World War I soldiers and was known at the time as "shell shock." In the aftermath of the Vietnam War it was renamed PTSD.

PTSD occurs after people experience serious threats to their personal well-being. Their response involves intense fear, helplessness or terror. In children, this may be expressed as disorganised or agitated behaviour. The physical manifestations of PTSD may vary culturally. In PTSD, the traumatic event is re-experienced in any number of ways, including (Herman, 1992): Recurring distressful recollections or dreams of the event; Feeling that the traumatic event is recurring (flashbacks, hallucinations); Intense psychological stress to cues which bring back memories of the event.

If PTSD becomes chronic (lasting more than 6 months), physical symptoms include

chronic fatigue, psychosomatic illness, substance abuse, and even premature death.

Treatment of PTSD includes: (1) creating a safe, trusting environment where persons feel free to explore their feelings and experience support from others in overcoming the traumatic experience; (2) learning to remember the past in a non-harmful way; (3) discovering a new way to relate to self and others.

Conflict Analysis

Why do we do conflict analysis? We do analysis for several reasons:

- To inform our programmes, and determine how we should respond to the conflict with our programmes;
- To determine who is involved in the conflict;
- To figure out what motivates people to use violence or continue conflict (e.g. economic motivations, desire for power, redressing ethnic grievances);
- To identify the conflict "fault lines" (the issues in the conflict);
- To determine how the conflict is unfolding.

In addition, we analyse the conflict we are peacebuilding within because until we understand the causes of the conflict, who is involved, and the issues and dynamics of the conflict, our peacebuilding programming will not be effective. Conflict analysis supplies a detailed picture of what is happening and helps us to determine what we might do to create more peaceful and just societies.

In this manual, a distinction is made between *conflict analysis*, which refers to analysing the conflict(s) in the country or region, and *programme analysis*, which focuses on the peacebuilding potential of our programmes. Module 6 focuses on peacebuilding programme analysis, design and evaluation, and addresses the issue of how to modify existing programmes to better respond to the current situation.

1) The 3 Ps

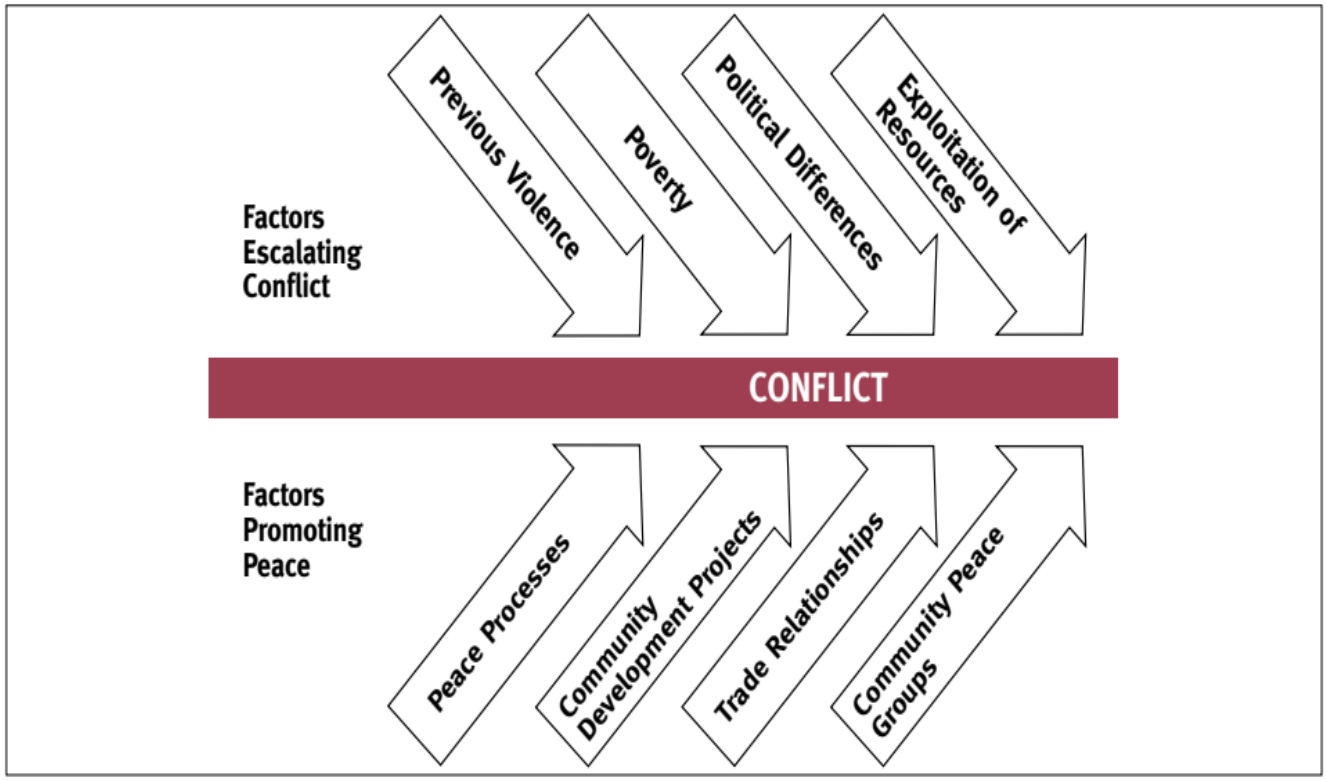
This is an analysis tool used by John Paul Lederach (in MCS, 1995, p.45). This model asks different questions about the people, the process, and the problem in order to analyse the conflict.

People: refers to the relational and psychological elements of the conflict. This includes people's feelings, emotions, individual and group perceptions of the problem. Questions to ask include: Who is involved in the conflict? Who are the primary parties in the conflict? Who are the secondary parties? How does an individual or group perceive the situation? How do perceptions of the conflict differ between the groups?

Process: refers to the way decisions get made and how people feel about it. The process of decision-making in a conflict is often a key cause because individuals may resent the decisions that are made and they may feel like they were treated unfairly, both of which contribute to feelings of powerlessness. People who feel excluded or sense they cannot influence decisions affecting their lives will rarely cooperate with decision-makers or support these decisions. They may not overtly reject the decision, but their behaviour will disrupt the relationship in subtle and covert ways. Questions to ask include: What methods are being used, if any, to resolve the conflict? Are groups using violence or is the conflict playing out in other ways (e.g. demonstrations, protests, legal battles)? What is the phase of the conflict? How has the behaviour of the various parties influenced the conflict?

Problem: refers to the specific issues involved in the conflict and the differences people have between them. This may involve different values, opposing views about how to make a decision, incompatible needs or interests, and concrete differences regarding use, distribution, or access to scarce resources (land, money, time). These are often referred to as the root causes of a conflict. Questions to ask include: What are the issues in the conflict? What are people fighting over? What are the underlying needs of the various parties in conflict? Do any mutually acceptable criteria or processes for decision-making exist? What might be some of the common values or interests in the conflict?

Figure 3.4 – The How of Conflict



History of the conflict

- What are the major events in the evolution and history of the conflict (e.g. wars or outbreaks of violence, attempted peace agreements)?

Conflict context

- What are the geographical boundaries of the conflict?
- Which important natural resources may be part of the conflict?
- What are the political, social, economic, and cultural structures of the conflict?
- What is the context at the community level? What is the context at the regional level?
- What are the contributing factors to a conflict (e.g. unemployment, scarce resources)?

Conflict parties

- Who are the primary parties? What are their goals and interests? (Primary parties are defined as directly involved in the conflict. One party's goals are perceived to be incompatible with the other party's goals.)

- Who are the secondary parties? What are their interests? How are they involved in the conflict? (Secondary parties have an indirect stake in the outcome of the conflict).
- Who are the interested third parties? What are their interests in the conflict? How are they involved? (Interested third parties are those who have an interest in the successful resolution or continuation of the conflict.)
- What are the power relationships between the various conflict parties?

Issues

- What are the issues in the conflict? Is the conflict about values and beliefs? Resources? Facts (disagreement over what is)? Interests (the underlying needs, concerns, fears, values, or wants)?
- What are the sources or root causes of the conflict?
- What are the tensions or dividers that exist in the country or community?
- What are the proximate (recent, superficial or manipulated) causes?
- How are external (outside interests that promote, manipulate or aggravate issues) factors influencing the issues?

Dynamics

- Has the conflict escalated or de-escalated over time?
- Are the parties to the conflict polarised?
- What are/were the trigger events in outbreaks of violence?
- How have the issues changed over time?
- What tactics have the parties in conflict used?

Power

When most people think of "power," they think of military strength or the use of force or coercion. In fact, philosophers and scholars have difficulty defining power, let alone agreeing on what power is. In this manual, power is understood in a broad sense. A number of different types of power are presented below. These sources or types of power are not mutually exclusive. In fact, one person may simultaneously hold several sources of power, like relational power and status power. Power is often culturally defined and relevant. For example, cultures define status or position differently, and as a result, those having positional power will differ from culture to culture.

Positional Power

Positional power is based upon the role, or position, an individual occupies in society. The power rests in the position and is transferred from one individual to another as individuals move in and out of the role. For example, the president of a country, the principal of a school, or the head of an organisation all have power because of their position, not because of their personal characteristics or social class. When a new person takes over the position as head of an organisation, the power of the position is transferred to the new person.

Relational Power

Power is an integral part of social relationships. It does not reside in a particular individual, but is the property of social relationships. Power, then can be used for both destructive and productive purposes. This view of power assumes that:

- We all need power for self-esteem and fulfilment. It is necessary for a sense of personal significance, not in an external opportunistic way, but in a fundamental internal manner. We all need to feel valued.
- Power is a necessary ingredient of communication.
- Power is not a finite resource. Power in a relationship is fluid and hard to measure. It can be expanded and limited.
- Over time, significant, static power imbalances harm and destroy individuals and relationships.
- People will seek to balance real and perceived power inequities by productive or destructive means (Lederach in MCS, 1995, p.93).

Power of Force

Physical strength and coercive mechanisms (like the gun in the Power of Human parable are sources of power. Individuals may use their own strength, as well as weapons, armaments, armies, police, and prisons to impose their will upon others.

Power of Status

Wealth and status within a society are both sources of power. Individuals can use their money or their social ties to maintain a situation that is to their advantage or to get what they want.

Power of Knowledge and Expertise

Those in a society with special knowledge and expertise, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, or mechanics, have a source of power that comes from what they know. These sources of power can be used for the community good, but people also tend to have "blind faith" in the expertise or knowledge of one individual, often ignoring their own knowledge and experience.

Power of a Group

The phrase "people-power" is often quoted and refers to the power of individuals when part of a group. For example, unions and mass protest movements have power because of their numbers.

If we think of power more broadly, we can see other instances in which individuals and groups have power. In terms of peacebuilding, we can examine who has relational power to think about who or what groups might be "critical yeast" or who might act as a connector or a siphon (see concepts in Module 4), or we can look at how our programming might help to create additional sources of power for those who currently lack power.