

Preface

Confronted with a wide variety of conflicts, the international community has attempted to respond through humanitarian assistance, development aid, crisis prevention and conflict resolution programmes. To date many of these activities have exacerbated conflict dynamics as much as they have enhanced the opportunities for sustainable development and peace. In an effort to understand what works, lessons learned and best practices are being collected usually in the form of evaluations of individual projects or programs. Although the number of studies undertaken has increased, few lessons have been systematised or accumulated for broader discussion in the academic field or for practitioners' use.

The Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management produced this Handbook in response to the contemporary challenges which have to be faced by those who are working in and on violent conflict. The intention is to give an overview of recent developments in the field of conflict transformation from various perspectives: from academic analysts and practitioners as well as from experts representing different areas of work inside and outside of conflict zones.

The Handbook has been presented in several steps. First, it has been launched in successive series of articles on the interactive website (www.berghof-handbook.net). This site is organised as a platform to gather feedback from users and to stimulate debate on the content and focus of the articles. This feedback, as well as additional articles and input, allow the creation of an evolving manual and reference that reflects developments in the conflict transformation field. Second, we decided to publish this hard copy version, as we observed that many scholars and practitioners still asked for the complete compilation of all contributions.

We are grateful to the very positive reaction to our initiative among the colleagues, from all over the world, whom we have asked to contribute to the Handbook. They are experienced practitioners and scholars, some of them pioneers in the field and/or working on key tasks of conflict transformation. They accepted the demanding job of adapting their style of presentation to the common standards of this Handbook. Without their knowledge, motivation and flexibility the Handbook project would not have been possible. We would like to thank all the authors who contributed to both the internet and hardcopy version of the Berghof Handbook. We hope that we can establish a continuing discourse with them as well as with our readers about cutting-edge practice and theory in our field.

This publication represents a compilation of articles that have been launched up to mid-2003 on the website. The hardcopy version is not meant as a final point, but has to be seen as an 'interim report' of findings, as the Berghof team endeavours to develop the Berghof Handbook project further. Future developments will include

1. *actualization of themes and issues* which have been focused on in the past;
2. *debates and dialogues* on issues which are considered as areas of special interest and importance;
3. *providing services and feedback fora* as part of the process of restructuring the website.

This means that friends and colleagues who are interested in results of peace practice and analysis in the field of ethnopolitical conflict are invited to visit our homepage from time to time in order to discover innovative articles which can be found and downloaded by searching 'what's new'.

In the future, debates and discussions will be developed as 'work in progress' similar

to the debate on 'Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment' which was initiated in the first version of the Handbook. This debate has already been published in a print version by the Berghof Center (*see* Alex Austin, Martina Fischer, Oliver Wils (eds.): Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment. Critical Views on Theory and Practice, Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, Berlin 2003). Therefore only the initial contribution by Mark Hoffman is included in this volume.

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