

FutureGenerations Graduate School

TOWARD ETHNIC CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: A CASE STUDY OF CITIZEN PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES ON THE 2006 GUYANA ELECTIONS

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List of Acronyms

AI	Appreciative Inquiry	PNC	People's National Congress (1957 – 1997)
AFC	Alliance for Change	PNC/R	People's National Congress/Reform (1997 – 2001)
APNU	A Partnership for National Unity	PNCR	People's National Congress Reform (2001 – present)
BCPR	Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Recovery	PPP	People's Progressive Party (Civic)
BUG	Bikers Uniting Guyana	RDC	Regional Democratic Council
CARICOM	Caribbean Community	ROC	Rights of the Child
CBOs	Community Based Organisations	RTI	Research Triangle Institute
CD	Community Development	SC	Social Cohesion
CDC	Community Development Councils	SCP	Social Cohesion Programme
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency	SPG	Social Partners Group
EAB	Electoral Assistance Bureau	SoG	Spirit of Guyana
ENDCC	Enfield - New Doe Community Council	UF	United Force (Party)
ERC	Ethnic Relations Commission	UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
GAP	Guyana Action Party	UNV	United Nations Volunteer
GBA	Guyana Bar Association	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
GDCCR	Guyana Democratic Consolidation and Conflict Resolution Project	VYC	Volunteer Youth Corps
GDF	Guyana Defence Force	WAVE	Women Against Violence Everywhere
GECOM	Guyana Elections Commission	WPA	Working People's Alliance
GHRA	Guyana Human Rights Association	YFCBI	Youth Focused Community-Based Initiatives
GoG	Government of Guyana	YPAC	Youth Project Advisory Committee
GPBN	Guyana Peace Builders Network		
IRO	Inter-Religious Organisation		
LEAP	Linden Economic Advancement Programme		
MMU	Media Monitoring Unit		
MSF	Multi-Stakeholder Forum		
NC	National Conversation		
NDC	Neighbourhood Democratic Council		
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations		
OAS	Organisation of American States		
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights		
PDA	Peace and Development Adviser		

On the morning of August 28, 2006, the city of Georgetown was filled with an eerie calm. People walked by, drove past each other, met in shops and market places with quiet politeness, unuttered optimism, whispers of disquiet and watchful prayers. Within this calm existed hope. For some that hope meant elections would bring the change they wanted, whether that change was a new party in power; another term for the incumbent party; the possibility that despite the historical patterns Guyanese would resist ethnic voting or that whatever the outcome Guyana would not record more destruction, more violence, or more killings. Many ordinary citizens simply had enough trauma, death, unrest, mayhem and political instability in the years following previous elections.

Did this uneasy quiet, unspoken silence which lasted the three days as Guyana awaited election results and well after the announcement that the People's Progressive Party Civic had returned to office for a fourth consecutive session mean peace? Did the absence of violence in the streets of Georgetown signal that people had nurtured their peaceful side? Or were they simply apathetic? The answer to this is multifaceted and as complex as the political history of the various ethnic groups living in Guyana. Yet, in a small but significant section of the population modest shouts and cheers of celebration could be heard. Only this time it was not from the camps of either of the old rivals but from the newly formed party, the Alliance for Change. Did this party capture the imagination of those who wanted peace? Or did their nascent emergence on the national scene also contribute to the peace writ large?

Introduction

Despite a democratic political transition in the early 1990s, Guyana has made halting progress addressing the underlying ethnic conflict between its Indian and African communities. In addition to divisions along occupational and geographic lines, the two communities predominantly back different political parties with the former, representing a plurality of the population, supporting the ruling People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and the latter supporting the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR).¹ Social and political upheavals in the early 1960s resulted in hundreds killed in spasms of

¹ The party was known as the People's National Congress (PNC) from its formation in 1957 until 1997. To contest the 1997 elections it incorporated several independent citizens to its leadership team and renamed itself PNC/Reform (PNC/R). By 2001, this group had been integrated into the leadership of the party and this was reflected in the new party moniker People's National Congress Reform (PNCR). In a further bid to reach out beyond the party ranks, it contested the 2006 elections as the leader of a coalition known as PNCR-One Guyana (PNCR-1G). This paper will use the acronym associated with the party at the time period in question or, in some cases, simply PNC.

ethnic violence that pitted neighbour against neighbour and village against village and left indelible memories of violence on the psychic landscape.

Historical ethnic identity tensions have been kept alive by politicians and fuelled by subsequent political contestation at the national and regional levels. Disagreement exists about the basic nature of the conflict. Some argue that the conflict is political and that ethnic groups live side by side in harmony until the time of elections when their political views, loyalties and sympathies result in separation between friends, neighbours, groups, and communities. Others point to the confluence of demography, ethnic voting, and a winner-take-all political system that appears to condemn the African Guyanese to a permanent political minority status that is inherently destabilising and incompatible with a healthy democratic system. This situation is not dissimilar to the factors that kept Indian Guyanese from the corridors of power from the time of independence from Britain in 1966 until 1992, when the first internationally observed elections resulted in a PPP/C win at the polls. While the nature of the conflict is contested, there is a general consensus that it is multifaceted and has stymied development, compromised human security, fuelled outward migration, and led to the ineffective participation of all groups in the political process; particularly those processes outside of democratic national elections.

The elections of 1992, 1997, and 2001 were each followed by significant public unrest, loss of property to arson, and ethnic violence. The proximate triggers of the violence were election disputes, although deeper traumas were never far below the surface. Regional and international mediation in this period produced several political accords that led to constitutional reforms and extensive “menus of measures” to address disputes and grievances, but failed to establish a culture of political dialogue or involve the wider society in cooperation and reconciliation. Frustration was further fuelled by the protracted and partial implementation of constitutional reforms aimed at enhancing ethnic relations, improving political cooperation, strengthening the legislature vis-à-vis the executive, and bolstering human rights. A notable exception to this general rule was the establishment of the Ethnic Relations Commission in 2002. But while elections were indeed the traditional flashpoint for violent episodes of the conflict, the first decade of the new millennium brought forth new, destabilising dynamics.

Following an extended period of post-election disturbances in 2001, the political and security situation deteriorated markedly in 2002-2003 with the outbreak of what was termed a “crime wave” but which had both unmistakable political and ethnic dimensions. Anywhere from 200-400 civilians were killed during this period in ethnic and criminal attacks and countless more traumatised, violated, and brutalised. Eventually the military had to be mobilised to reassert the state’s authority over a section of the coast where the perpetrators of the violence were concentrated. In the meantime, questions of the state’s involvement in extra-judicial killings and its relationship with

narco-traffickers drove fears that the violence had fundamentally compromised the democratic state.

Multiple crises of governance and shortcomings of elite-level conflict management efforts catalysed a search for alternative approaches within civil society and international development partners who were eager for Guyana to become a stable, thriving country, free from protracted violence. A primary motivating concern was the prospect that the 2006 elections could be a trigger for explosive violence that could push Guyana over the precipice to becoming a failed state.

These approaches began with the singular efforts of prominent individuals, the University of Guyana, and organised sections of Guyanese civil society, from the private sector to trade unions to religious bodies, and various rights organisations. While these efforts had limited tangible impact in terms of political outcomes, they nevertheless were acknowledged by political actors and began to open up political space and validate the notion that perhaps an ethnically inclusive “third voice” of civil society and citizens groups could play a role in mitigating the centrifugal tendencies of Guyanese politics.

By 2003 the government and development partners launched several important programmes explicitly aimed at building conflict management capacities and promoting social cohesion, namely through the Ethnic Relations Commission, the multi-donor supported United Nations Social Cohesion Programme (SCP) and the USAID Guyana Democratic Consolidation and Conflict Resolution (GDCCR) project. These efforts were diverse, widespread, and sustained for more than three years leading up to the elections. They involved a wide range of actors including politicians, youth activists, local government officials, police officers, non-governmental organisations, and ordinary citizens. On August 28, 2006, the PPP/C was re-elected at polls conducted in an environment of tense apprehension, but without violence, without the loss of property or life, and without dispute of the results by opposition parties. For all involved in promoting peace and non-violence this was a decisive break from the past.

Section 1- Research Purpose and Methodology

The research was led by Roxanne Myers, who had been involved in previous research and evaluation initiatives concerning the peacebuilding efforts leading up to the 2006 elections. Jason Calder provided additional perspective to the analysis based upon his long experience with Guyana at the Carter Centre from 1993-2006.

A. Research Purpose

This research is part of a multi-country study of cases where civil society and other non-state actors are believed to have shaped and influenced the larger dynamics and course

of a nation's peacebuilding² experience at a particular point in time. The objective is to understand the impact these actors and actions have had on "peace writ large"³ and what set of strategies and actions, within a particular context, contributed to that impact. The research is interested in the transformation of conflict⁴ and not simply its management and how it is experienced by the majority of communities⁵ involved.

Guyana's fit within this framework stems from its history of ethnopolitical conflict⁶ and the period of rising violence and instability in the period preceding the 2006 elections. While this is not a typical case of armed conflict or civil war, the violent events of this period reverberated throughout this small society creating a widespread climate of fear. Nearly everyone was concerned that the country was coming apart and that a wider conflagration was possible. National elections were widely seen as a potential flashpoint for violence that could impact the stability of the state. For these reasons, the experience of a "peaceful" election in the face of widespread expectations to the contrary constitutes an important event in Guyana's experience.

B. Methodology

The case study is drawn from both a desk review and from field-based research using key informant interviews and focus groups in several communities around the country. The local research team employed five approaches to data collection:

- Desk analysis of published and unpublished literature pertaining to Guyana's historical context and recent peacebuilding initiatives;
- Focus group interviews with 80 individuals at the community level who participated in peacebuilding activities (See Annex A: Community Meeting Participants);

² According to Larissa Fast and Reina Neufeldt, peacebuilding involves "Actions taken to prevent violent conflict from erupting and to end violent conflict and subsequently transform relationships, interactions, and structures after violence subsides. Peacebuilding activities can be undertaken on many 'tracks' and in many sectors whether by development agencies, community-based organizations, the media, business, or political leaders. The goal is to create, support, or enhance healthy and sustainable interactions, relationships, and structures that are tolerant, respectful, and constructively respond to root causes and symptoms of conflict over the long term." (Fast & Neufeldt 2005).

³ The term "Peace Writ Large" was used by Mary Anderson and Lara Olsen in the seminal Reflecting on Peace Practice project to describe society-as-a-whole's experience of peace, where peace is seen to encompass not only the cessation of violence and destructive conflict, but also the transformation of unjust structures (Anderson & Olsen 2003).

⁴ The conflict transformation paradigm seeks to fundamentally change the relationships, attitudes, behaviors and social structures that animate and define a conflict. It goes beyond attempts to contain or manage the conflict (conflict management) as well as the "win-win" deals that can be achieved between contesting groups (conflict resolution). As such, a conflict transformation approach focuses on the long-term, root cause issues and patterns of division and exclusion within a society or culture.

⁵ The term "community" in this paper is used interchangeably to mean communities of place, cultural communities, or even psychological communities "of face to face personal interaction governed by sentiments of trust, co-operation, and altruism." (Bell 1993)

⁶ In this study the idea of ethnic conflict encompasses both its violent and non-violent manifestations.

- Interviews with 23 key informants from government, political parties, media, civil society, and international agencies (See Annex B: Key Informants Interviewed);
- Visits to six community project sites in four of Guyana's administrative regions where the major peacebuilding programmes were active (See Table 3); and
- A roundtable workshop with 20 selected stakeholders (See Annex C: Roundtable Participants).

These research activities were used in combination to qualitatively assess different aspects of the peacebuilding initiatives in question. The findings were triangulated to discern the achievements of discreet activities as well as their contribution to the overall outcome of a violence-free election.

Written Documentation

Access to project documents from UNDP and RTI/USAID provided important information for understanding what the projects attempted to achieve. These included project proposals, interim reports and final project reports. This paper also benefited from Myers's previous involvement as a technical evaluator on specific components of these projects and access by both authors to unpublished work.

Interviews with Communities

Communities were selected based on their involvement with peacebuilding efforts. Thus interviewees were sampled purposively for groups who had implemented or benefited from peacebuilding initiatives. Focus group interviews were conducted in the natural environments of interviewees. These meetings served to elicit important information, compare it to data from other sources, and form an assessment of the perceptions of success of various projects and activities. Community leaders were contacted and asked to invite at least ten residents of the community who participated in or benefitted from projects or were involved in the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives. A total of six community meetings with 80 citizens were held across geographic Regions 3, 4, 5, and 6. This sample consists of 50 women and 30 men drawn from working class backgrounds who were disproportionately over 35 years old. They took the time to sit with the research team and discuss their experiences in building peaceful communities. The interviews were analysed and synthesised via an iterative process of triangulation and verification with key informants. The research team intended to gather data proportionately from Guyanese of African and Indian descent, but found that more peacebuilding efforts were implemented in communities populated predominantly by African-Guyanese.

Interviews with Key Informants

A number of prominent individuals and practitioners who were involved in one way or another in the peacebuilding process were also invited to share their experiences and opinions. Politicians were included to glean their insights about the impacts of the peacebuilding initiatives. Generally, these conversations were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol. In this category, the research team had conversations with 23 persons. In some instances these were ongoing dialogues over three months.

Site Visits

The local research team undertook six site visits to villages in Regions 3, 4, 5 and 6 where community-level peacebuilding activities under the SCP and GDCCR took place. Given the large area covered by these two projects and the similarity of activity across project sites, a decision was taken to visit and observe only a subset of the total twenty-eight SCP community-based project sites. The six sites were selected to represent the diversity in the types of activities undertaken and on the basis of being innovative and explicitly community-based. The activities included infrastructural development (Salem), Social Engagement (Enfield New Doe); Research/Education (Better Hope), Recreational (Mahaicony) and Skills Training (Buxton) and the rehabilitation of a community centre (Farm/Zeskendren).

Review Workshops

This research has benefitted from presentation of the case study or its key findings in three meetings, one of which was held in Guyana and two outside the country.

In October 8, 2008, a roundtable discussion was held at the National Library in Georgetown, Guyana to validate key findings, solicit input from individuals who had not yet been interviewed, and to clarify ideas and opinions. The lead researcher, Roxanne Myers, shared the preliminary findings of the study after which questions were fielded from the group. Twenty representatives from political parties, the academic community, the donor community, and activists welcomed the research project, and the discussions were informed and spirited.

On December 15-16, 2008, the case study was one of six studies presented and discussed at the Cumulative Impact Case Study Consultation of the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project in Cambridge, MA. The Cumulative Impacts series examines national experiences of how various peacebuilding efforts “added-up” to peace-writ-large. Future Generations-sponsored case studies on Guyana and Nepal were reviewed with RPP case studies of Aceh, Indonesia; Tajikistan; Sri Lanka; and Israel-Palestine. Case study authors and peacebuilding and conflict experts and practitioners took part in the meeting.

Another opportunity for critical feedback on the Guyana case study came at a Future Generations-sponsored meeting in London on March 17-19, 2009, hosted with Conciliation Resources. Case studies of Afghanistan, Burundi, Guyana, Nepal and Somaliland were presented by their authors and discussed with peace practitioners and experts. The case studies were shared in an online forum with meeting participants in advance to solicit initial feedback and clarification in preparation for the in situ meeting. A group of practitioners and experts took part in the three day meeting with the authors to review and analyse the studies in breakout and plenary sessions.

Section 2 - The Evolution of Ethnopolitical Conflict in Guyana

A. General Background

While geographically within South America, shared language, economic, social, cultural, and political ties link Guyana to the Caribbean archipelago and explain its membership in the regional Caribbean Community (CARICOM).⁷ It shares contiguous borders with its neighbours, Venezuela (to the west), Suriname (to the east). Brazil lies to the south and is officially connected by a single road and the Takutu River bridge. Guyana's largely unmanned, porous borders provide limited inhibition for criminal elements, such as narco-traffickers, arms-smugglers, and illegal gold and diamond miners. While narco-trafficking, organised crime, and common crime cause Guyanese to live with insecurity, instability, and ongoing violence, there are some regions of the country where citizens exist in relative peace and harmonious relationships.

The country has a rich endowment of timber, minerals, fauna, and flora, in addition to one of the most spectacular pristine rain forests in the world, and the Kaieteur falls, which is the world's highest single drop waterfall. For more than 200 years the economy has largely depended on timber, rice, bauxite, sugar, and to a smaller extent, fish. Traditionally described as "a land of six peoples," referring to the population's various immigrant extractions, Guyana sustains a population of 751,223, with 86 percent living along the coastal belt, which is about 25 km wide and lies below sea level and the protection of a sea defence system. Further inland the country is sparsely inhabited mainly by Amerindians. Along the coastal plain, a high degree of homogeneity exists within communities and clusters of villages, creating East Indian and African enclaves. While local markets have served as a broker institution between segregated communities, the boundary lines harden during periods of heightened ethnic tensions with each group defending or prohibiting entry of the other into their communities.

The forces of empire and colonialism made Guyana the ethnically diverse country it is today. The 2002 Census shows that Guyanese of East Indian descent comprise 43.45

⁷ CARICOM is a regional grouping of Anglo-Caribbean countries plus Haiti and Surinam with a nascent Common Single Market and Economy (CSME).

percent of the population and persons of African heritage comprise 30.20 percent. Amerindians are 9.16 percent with Whites, Portuguese, and Chinese together making up less than one percent. Those of “Mixed” heritage comprise 16.73 percent (Guyana Statistical Report, 2002). There are three important trends to note that are significant to any study of Guyana’s ethno-political conflict. First, the share of East Indian Guyanese in the population has declined significantly since 1980 when this group made up 51.4 percent of the population, although they still remain the single largest ethnic group. During this same period, African Guyanese share of the population has remained roughly the same. Second, the 2002 Census shows that persons identifying as “Mixed” increased their share of the population by almost 5 percentage points since the 1991 census. Finally, Amerindians were the only other group that showed an increase in population share (up 2.7 percentage points since 1991).

Several factors explain these trends. Guyana has had historically high emigration rates dating from even before independence. The Diaspora communities in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom are significant (World Bank, 2011, p.27). This explains the generally static population level at around 750,000 since 1980 and the declining share of the East Indian population reflects their relatively higher emigration rates compared to other groups.

The rise in the Mixed share of the population is an interesting phenomenon and may have to do with “identity consciousness”⁸ (Erikson, 1968) and the resistance to the phenomenon of being assigned social and political categories based on phenotype. Ethnicity is the prime marker of political affiliation and membership in Guyana, and thus identity becomes personally and socially significant to East Indian and African Guyanese who participate in the maintenance, escalation, or transformation of ethnic competition and conflict. Consequently, a person of mixed ethnicity can appear neutral, or detached through claims of a distinct ethnic identity, multiple allegiances or unwillingness to legitimise internecine ethnic tensions. Such feelings might have spurred individuals increasingly to identify themselves in the recent census as Mixed rather than one of the major ethnic groups.

Notwithstanding these explanations, there is a strong tendency to perceive a person of partial-African ancestry as African and by extension predisposed to the African-based political party (PNCR); ignoring any claims to neutrality, opposition, or distance. The perception is not without merits as both major parties have historically mobilised supporters based on ethnicity, while advancing claims of a multiethnic agenda. Thus ethno-political conflict in Guyana is characterised, displayed, and managed by an imagined community of the two dominant ethnic groups—East Indians and Africans—while other ethnic groups within the society are unwittingly excluded. In this context it is important to note that both major political parties have depended on Amerindian

⁸ A combination of inner conditions and external circumstances.

“swing vote” support in hinterland communities. The emergence of an Amerindian-based political party (the Guyana Action Party) suggests an opportunity for consolidating the influence of this ethnic group within the political space, but it faces a challenge to do so from the major political parties that are skilled in absorbing Amerindian leaders into their ranks.

B. Historical Roots of Ethnopolitical Conflict

The conflict in Guyana is multifaceted. The fact that national patriotic songs are sung about “One nation, one people, one destiny” and “We’re not giving up...a blade of grass” speaks not only about commitment to overcome ethnic divides, but also about pride in the sovereignty of this country. These sentiments run alongside the realities of ethnic tensions and political mobilisation, the basis for which is found in the history of colonisation, first by the Dutch (1580-1803) and then by the British (1803-1966). Slavery and indentureship during this period laid the basis for the exploitation of ethnic differences to facilitate the sugar plantation economy (Premdas, 1995, p. 25) with no regard for how groups transplanted from various cultural and social traditions might one day build a harmonious integrated society.

Following the abolition of slavery by Great Britain in 1838, the African population (estimated at 82,000) refused to accept the pittance offered by their former masters and left the agricultural estates in large numbers, purchasing and establishing villages along the coast where they cultivated small plantations (Adamson, 1972, pp. 35-36). The shortage of labour forced the British planters to bring in indentured workers, including Chinese, Portuguese and, in particular, East Indians. It has been argued that the willingness of the Indian indentured labourers to accept the low pay offered by the planters aroused the Africans’ hostility toward them as, in effect, “unwitting strikebreakers” (Rodney, 1981, p. 181). Colonial economic and demographic policy, in combination with the mistrust arising from cultural differences, thus sowed suspicion and hostility between the two main groups.

Over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the British colonial system effectively created a social hierarchy between the groups, with each group’s social standing determined by its contribution to the plantation economy. The Amerindians, having lost their role as trackers of runaway slaves when slavery ended, were for the most part pushed to the margins of the colonial system. African-Guyanese, who, as a matter of survival and adaptation, had embraced Christianity and obtained a European education, were recruited in large numbers into the civil service, business, and the fledgling industrial sector. A large number of Africans were recruited into the law enforcement agencies, which were used when necessary to enforce the British system of division, control, and dominance, notably in putting down uprisings by Indian farm workers who demanded pay raises. The East Indians, who tenaciously held onto their religious traditions, were largely excluded from the predominantly Christian infused

education system for a time, but managed to improve their standard of living through rice farming and trade and were the predominant ethnic group in the labour force of the sugar industry. This segregation in the economic spheres went hand-in-hand with increased residential separation, with the majority of Africans in the urban centres, the East Indians in the rural areas, and Amerindians remaining in the hinterland interior.

This economic and geographic segmentation was reproduced in the voluntary organisations that naturally arose in each sector (Premdas, 1995, pp. 79-94). One or the other ethnic group generally dominated trade unions. The bauxite and various government worker unions reflected the concentration of Africans in those sectors while rice producer groups and sugar unions were heavily comprised of East Indians. Church organisations reflected the ethnic divide as well with Africans in the Protestant Christian churches, East Indians divided among the Hindu and Muslim faiths, and the Amerindians, Portuguese and other Europeans in the Catholic Church. In addition, there were myriad cultural organisations that naturally reflected one group or another. These organisations - their leaders and members - were actively involved in the independence struggle and so it was that as party politics emerged and eventually became ethnically polarised, the “civil society” sector would increasingly reflect these divisions as well. A slight exception to this trend of ethno-associational bifurcation was the business sector, which was dominated by Portuguese and the slice of the Indian and African middle class that had arisen at the time.

As the end of the colonial era approached, Guyana was a de facto multiracial and multiethnic country, with fractures along ethnic lines in the social and economic spheres. It was on these fractured foundations that its emerging political leaders would organise and wage the struggle for independence from the British Empire.

C. Ethnopolitical Conflict During the Pre and Post-Independence

Born out of the labour movement in 1950, Guyana’s first political party, the People’s Progressive Party, started out as a multiracial party led by a three-member team: Dr. Cheddi Jagan, a Guyanese of East Indian descent; his wife, Janet Jagan, a Caucasian American; and Linden Forbes Burnham, a Guyanese of African descent. United in their nationalism against colonialism, the leaders of the two main ethnic groups initially acted in solidarity in the pursuit of a shared vision of national interest. Their collaboration and leadership during the negotiations for independence were a powerful symbol of the country’s resolve for both the Guyanese people and the British Empire.

The PPP won the first parliamentary elections permitted by the colonial government in 1953 with 18 out of the 24 seats. By an internal arrangement, Burnham became the leader of the party while Dr. Jagan became leader of Parliament. Fearing the PPP would make Guyana a communist state, the British suspended the constitution only four short months into Jagan’s term of office, sent in the military and replaced the elected

government. Competition between Jagan and Burnham resulted in a split of the PPP into Jaganite and Burnhamite factions in 1957. Burnham would rename his faction the PNC one year later following the 1957 elections.

This political split of the country along ethnic lines, gave all aspects of political struggle a deeply emotional and existential meaning for both of the major ethnic groups. To consolidate the new parties, each leader appealed to his respective ethnic base and organised their party accordingly. The population initially displayed some resistance to this divisionism from the top, but any ambivalence quickly evaporated through a combination of internal communal intimidation and the intense and violent political power struggles that were to come during the 1957-1964 period (Premdas, 1995, p. 51-52) until what had been communal prejudice and suspicion were transformed into abject fear of ethnic domination of each by the other.

The elections of 1957 and 1961 were contested under a first-past-the-post constituency system and won by the PPP on the basis of its East Indian majority. However, the colonial authorities held ultimate power and this significantly limited the PPP's governing programme; a situation Jagan called "being in office but not in power" (Jagan, 1997, p.188). During this period Burnham moderated his party's ideological outlook and increasingly cooperated with the small, pro-capitalist UF party in a bid to overcome the PPP's demographic advantage and present the PNC to the British as the less geopolitically threatening alternative for independence. The party that won the 1961 elections was expected to take the country to independence and as such this was major topic in the 1961 campaign. The PPP won the 1961 elections, but despite its loss at the polls the opposition PNC and UF, fearing PPP and East Indian domination, calculated that an unstable Guyana under Jagan might make the British reconsider the timetable and conditions for independence. This set of calculations set the stage for an unprecedented series of political cum ethnic confrontations.

The period of 1961 to 1964 was marked by a series of political and social upheavals that would change Guyana forever. The PNC and UF staunchly resisted the PPP government in parliament through a series of strikes, boycotts, protest actions, blockades, and political subterfuge. In these actions the opposition mobilised the support of African-dominated trade unions, the business community, international "free labour" organisations and the African-dominated police force. Protests and strikes invoked against the PPP budget proposal (1962) and proposed labour legislation (1963) exposed the vulnerability of the government, based as it was in the capital Georgetown, an stronghold of the opposition, and dependent for public security upon an African police force of questionable loyalty. The strikes against the budget brought the government to a standstill and resulted in the burning of significant sections of Georgetown. The 80-day strike of 1963 crippled the government and precipitated the breakdown of basic law and order: "Indians were beaten and killed [in Georgetown], while in rural areas Africans

were subjected to similar treatment. Shootings and bombings became commonplace. Civil war had commenced” (Premdas, 1995, p. 104). In both instances the PPP had to ask the colonial authorities to intervene to bring order.

In the face of the extended crisis, Britain postponed independence until after another election could be held. A conference between Guyana’s political leaders and the colonial authorities in October 1963 saw the PNC and UF request a change in the voting system for the next election (1964) to proportional representation, with which the PPP refused to agree.⁹ To break the stalemate, the Guyanese leaders agreed to be bound by a decision of the colonial authorities and the British decided in favour of proportional representation for the 1964 elections.

The PPP was outraged at what it perceived as a completely one-sided decision and launched protest strikes of its own in early 1964. The industrial action, which originated in the sugar estates, quickly deteriorated into more generalized civil strife as word of an attack or killing in one location spread and triggered reprisals in another. Mars (2001) describes what subsequently took place over a four-month period as “near-genocidal warfare between East Indians and African politicized communities” involving bombings, arson, shootings, assaults, rape, forced displacement, ethnic riots and massacres (p. 360). These consumed not only the lives of those directly involved but also innocent men, women and children caught up in the attacks and reprisals. In the final tally, hundreds were killed, many more multiples wounded, tens of thousands displaced and millions of dollars in homes and property destroyed.

Strikingly, the disintegration of many mixed communities accelerated with some East Indian and African families literally dismantling and moving their homes to ethnically similar villages. Premdas (1995) notes that “when the strikes came to an end, no one was sure of the extent of the physical damage that the inter-communal civil strife had left in its devastating wake...[but] more important than physical damage [...] was the complete political and social division that resulted between Indians and Africans. For all practical purposes, the state was completely bifurcated and demands for partition became commonplace” (p.109). The violent manifestation of inter-communal struggle in the 1961-1964 period left an indelible mark on the landscape and psyche of the Guyanese people and would cast a long shadow on elections and politics for decades to come.

No evaluation of this period of Guyana’s history would be complete without understanding the role that the Cold War ideological struggle played in constructing and fuelling the conflict. London and Washington were at this time acutely concerned that the Marxist-oriented PPP under Jagan would align itself with the Soviet Union and provide another beachhead for communism in the Americas. Reporting in *The New*

⁹ Under the first-past-the-post constituency systems in place up to this point, the PPP won elections with a plurality of the vote. A proportional representation system would allow the PNC and UF to form the government with a combined electoral majority.

York Times and Washington Post established how the CIA and British Intelligence supported the 1962 and 1963 anti-government strikes and demonstrations through Western-aligned international trade union organisations that were linked with the African-dominated Guyana Trade Union Conference (Premdas, 1995, p.107; Jagan, 1997, pp. 248-249) For his part, Jagan sought and received support from Cuba and the Soviet Union to counter act these forces and break an international blockade of food and fuel against his government. The U.S. also weighed in with Britain on the issue of independence for British Guiana. President John F. Kennedy's was told by his advisors¹⁰ that an independent Guyana under Burnham would be preferable to one under Jagan and that this could be arranged by changing the electoral system to proportional representation ahead of independence which would favour the PNC (Premdas, 1995, p. 107-08). Again, reports in the *New York Times* corroborated that this was the main topic of a meeting between President Kennedy and Prime Minister McMillan (Pearson, 1964 in Jagan, 1997, pp. 248-249). This external involvement in Guyana's affairs played a significant role in shaping the strategies and tactics employed by Guyanese political leaders and injected resources into the violent political confrontation between the East Indian and African communities in the high stakes run-up to independence.

While the PPP again won a plurality of votes at the December 1964 elections, the PNC and UF joined forces to form a majority coalition government and won the historic honour of leading the country to independence. Independence was granted on May 26, 1966 in a ceremony that was boycotted by the PPP and its Indian supporters. Burnham's PNC knew it could not maintain power through democratic means on the basis of its African support and the country's extreme polarisation meant there was no chance of attracting Indian support away from the PPP. Shortly after independence the PNC (with Western acquiescence and support) orchestrated the rigging of the 1968 elections, terminating its coalition with the UF and consolidating its capture of the state. The PNC remained in authoritarian control of Guyana until 1992 through political repression, expansion of the security state, political control of the public service and judiciary, and the stealing of elections. Burnham drastically expanded the security state and his regime came to be recognised as the most repressive in all of the Caribbean (Ryan 1999) at that time.

"Paramountcy of the Party" was advanced by the PNC as national policy and as such all organs of the state were either nationalised or came under the direct control of party loyalists and PNC objectives became public policy. Burnham rewrote the constitution in 1980, creating an executive presidency with far reaching powers. In the pursuit of "cooperative socialism" the state came to control 80 percent of the economy, which eventually led to an economic crisis that contributed to the rapid deterioration of social

¹⁰ In his memoir (1965), Special Advisor to the Kennedy Administration, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., recounts his discussions with President Kennedy on the topic of British Guiana.

services, infrastructure, and the overall quality of life. The government's policy 'to house, feed and clothe the nation' limited the importation of foreign goods and products. The import substitution policy affected everyone across all strata of the society but many of the restricted items were central to the traditional foods of Indian Guyanese (flour, chick peas, spices), which was received by that community as an attempt to suppress their culture and consequently fuelled their emigration. While the formal economy sank, the black market economy, largely run by Indian-Guyanese, thrived at great risk to their well-being. The PNC under the leadership of the late President Desmond Hoyte reversed this policy and removed restrictions on food imports.

Without competitive elections the struggle between the two communities manifested itself in other ways. Expansion of the public and security services and the nationalisation of industries were used by the PNC to award patronage to its communal supporters. The state security apparatus was employed to suppress political dissent, whether from African or East Indian quarters. The debasement of the police force through its use in political thuggery would haunt the force for decades to come. Increased state control of the economy permitted the manipulation of sectors in which the Indian community was dominant (rice, sugar, business) through regulations, licensing, and tax policy. For its part, the PPP utilised industrial unrest as a resistance strategy. Its political control over the largest sugar union demonstrated its power to bring the economy, and thus the government, to its knees if it so desired. A 135-day long sugar workers strike in 1977 did just that, despite the government's use of coercive and violent means to suppress it. The strike was so considerable that it severely debilitated the government's coercive capacity thereafter (Mars, 2001, p. 361).

Burnham's autocratic rule did not completely eliminate space for opposition political parties. In 1973 the Working People's Alliance (WPA) was founded as a multiethnic party that advocated racial harmony, free elections, and democratic socialism. Although the WPA did not officially become a political party until 1979, it was opposed to Burnham's authoritarianism and provided an alternative to both Burnham's PNC and Jagan's PPP. Amidst political boycott and strident opposition from the WPA –including its leader, the renowned historian and scholar Dr. Walter Rodney– the resolve of Burnham to consolidate his position was unbridled. The WPA's formidable challenge to the Burnham regime, which included industrial organising among African bauxite workers, was matched with a series of violent confrontations with police and PNC operatives. Eventually, Rodney was killed in 1980 by an explosive device, allegedly manufactured by a GDF electronics technician. Both local and international actors levelled serious criticism against the PNC for the demise of Rodney.

Hugh Desmond Hoyte became president after Burnham's death in 1985. He introduced economic reform policies that helped the country recover from its economic stagnation and decline. Along with dismantling of the socialist framework of Guyana's economy

and inviting foreign investment, Hoyte also opened innovative investments in the field of environmental sustainability. In 1989, at the Commonwealth heads of government meeting, he proposed setting aside 371,000 hectares of Guyana's rainforest: this became the Iwokrama Rainforest Project (Singh, 2011). He permitted the importation of newsprint and the establishment of a private newspaper — the Stabroek News and granted licenses to nationals to operate television stations (Kwayana, 2002). Hoyte also sought to heal some of the ethnic wounds of the Burnham years, by including a wider pool of appointments of qualified Guyanese of East Indian descent to key positions within the public and security sectors. He became known among his own supporters as "Desmond Persaud" for perceived preference towards Indian-Guyanese.

Increasing domestic and international pressure, including interventions by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, resulted in internationally observed "free and fair" elections in 1992 where the PPP/C's¹¹ Cheddi Jagan, out of power for almost three decades, became president. Most Guyanese were thankful that the country had transitioned to a new era in its political life, but democratic elections only ushered in another chapter in Guyana's ethnic conflict.

D. Ethnopolitical Conflict in the era of Internationally Observed Elections

The period between 1992 and 2001 saw the ethnopolitical conflict awaken from dormancy and escalate with each successive election. Normal politics between the two major parties was infused with the larger struggle of the two communities. Tensions would become acute around elections with demonstrations following for weeks and including incidents of election-related violence. In addition to 1992, the PNC lost the elections of 1997 and 2001. In both cases they challenged the results of the election through the courts and on the streets. These losses confirmed fears among the African-Guyanese community and leadership of the PNC that they were becoming permanently excluded from power given their demographic minority, ethnic voting patterns, and the winner-take-all nature of the election system. For its part, the PPP/C saw the PNC's protests as a reprise of the 1960s and as nothing more than the party's unwillingness to accept the new democratic dispensation. Sections of the Indian-Guyanese community were firmly against the PPP/C conceding any ground in the face of what it viewed as attempts to destabilise the government. Over this period the international community became increasingly involved in attempts to mediate Guyana's political impasse and numerous extra-parliamentary political dialogue processes were launched. The constitution was reformed in 2000 in an attempt to promote greater political cooperation

¹¹ The PPP had formed a civic alliance to include professionals, businesspersons and technocrats to run for the 1992 elections in order to broaden its appeal. The party contested the elections under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) banner. As with Hoyte's inclusion of Indo-Guyanese in his administration, the PPP/C leadership included several Afro-Guyanese in prominent positions.

through the parliament. Nevertheless, as described below, these efforts proved inadequate to the challenges.

Portending a pattern to come, post-election violence accompanied the 1992 election, when supporters of the PNC claimed disenfranchisement, as names were not found on the voters' list in specified polling stations. Citywide protests erupted particularly in the business centre of Georgetown and Indian-Guyanese owned stores were looted and robbed. PNC leaders seemed not to be in control of their supporters who stormed the Guyana Elections Commission. The police and army combed the streets in order to restore law and order, and a curfew was temporarily imposed. The final announcement of the winner was delayed in an attempt to quell the violence and convince all contesting parties to accept the poll results. The PNC was reluctant to concede defeat as Hoyte had apparently underestimated the extent of ethnic polarisation in the society or miscalculated the party's crossover prospects with the Indian-Guyanese community based on the support of prominent businesspersons who favoured his economic reforms.

It was not long into the PPP/C's first administration before the PNC began drawing attention to alleged PPP/C corruption and discrimination. Specific grievances were expressed in the government's treatment of public sector workers, the allocation of land and house lots, and the award and execution of state contracts, in addition to an overall lack of inclusiveness in national decision-making. The PNC said governance under the PPP/C was marked by a spirit of vindictiveness and "ethnic triumphalism." The PPP/C dismissed these claims as simple political agitation and in cases such as the reform of the public service, pointed out that the government's actions were simply in line with policies launched by the Hoyte Administration and required by the Bretton Woods institutions.

The next national elections took place in December 1997. The PPP/C, led by Janet Jagan, widow of the now late-President Cheddi Jagan, again won at the polls in an election observed by the OAS and Commonwealth. Although voting was peaceful and orderly on election day, a significant breakdown in the process of transmitting the results after ballots were counted caused major delays and an environment of intense suspicion. The PNC/R refused to accept the results or recognise the legitimacy of the government. Tensions were further exacerbated when president-elect Janet Jagan tossed over her shoulder a court order with which she was served that sought to delay a hastily-arranged swearing-in ceremony.¹² Protestors took to the streets for weeks and held night vigils outside the office of GECOM, the State House and the Office of the President. Some gatherings became violent as protestors robbed or physically attacked persons who were perceived to be supporters of the PPP/C. The PNC/R consistently denied its involvement with these attacks and attributed them to paid criminal elements sent to delegitimise its

¹² A PNC/R election petition later filed in the High Court would eventually invalidate the 1997 elections, based on the unconstitutional requirements for voter identification cards.

peaceful protests. One person was killed during the violence: a security guard at a television station that was firebombed. Many attributed the vehemence of the opposition to Jagan being a foreigner (she was US-born), even though at that time she had lived and served in Guyana for over 30 years.

Growing regional concern over Guyana's stability spurred CARICOM to send a high-level delegation to resolve the growing standoff. The delegation brokered the Herdmanston Accord (January 1998) which was later followed-up and reinforced with the St. Lucia Statement (July 1998). Through the Herdmanston Accord the parties agreed to the halt of street demonstrations (and the government's ban on them), an election audit, an ongoing political dialogue process, and to undertake constitutional reform. In a major concession, the PPP/C also agreed to shorten its constitutional term of office from five to three years (CARICOM, 1998). The election audit took place and did not change the results. The constitutional reform process of 1999-2000 made important progress in the areas of electoral reform, reducing the power of the presidency, enhancing the role of the parliament and establishing various parliamentary commissions to protect rights and promote ethnic relations. The election-related reforms were implemented ahead of the 2001 elections, but the remaining would be delayed and become the source of contentious political bargaining. For its part, the CARICOM-facilitated 'Inter-party Dialogue' between executive members of the PNC/R and PPP/C was unproductive and eventually stalled largely due to adversarial framing of issues on each side.

The PPP/C won again at the March 2001 elections and the main opposition PNC/R again filed a legal motion in the courts to prevent the swearing in of the third elected PPP/C presidential candidate, Bharrat Jagdeo. The legal challenge failed and this time protests took place beyond the capital city in villages on the East Coast.¹³ Ethnic attacks against Indian-Guyanese in Georgetown occurred again in the midst of opposition street protests. Fire destroyed a section of the city's business district. The African village of Buxton/Friendship 15 kilometres east of Georgetown was the epicentre of further demonstrations. Villagers clashed with police, blockaded the main public road, and attacked Indian-Guyanese commuters. Neighbouring Indian villages were invaded and business robbed. In predominantly Indian villages, locals established policing groups in self-defence, and harassed and/or attacked African-Guyanese passing through predominantly Indian communities.¹⁴ Given the scenario of violent actions and counter actions, the distinction between opportunistic crimes and ethnic violence was blurred.

¹³ Guyanese commonly refer to the northern shoreline region east of Georgetown and the Demerara River as the East Coast.

¹⁴ Author's personal experience as part of the Media Monitoring Team, traveling through Better Hope, East Coast Demerara, July 2001.

Further high-level dialogue became imperative as the crisis wore on and appeared to be escalating. Over a month after the elections President Jagdeo and PNCR leader Desmond Hoyte finally met on 24-25 April 2001 and agreed to a menu of measures to address a wide range of electoral and non-electoral issues. This agreement resulted in the PNCR's recognition of the government (without prejudice to pending legal challenges) and a halt to street protests, which restored normalcy in Georgetown and most of the coastal areas. The agreement embraced a continuing leaders' dialogue, an array "joint committees"¹⁵ to address major grievance issues that Hoyte had listed in a radio address to the nation, implementation of outstanding constitutional reforms within a year of the seating of parliament, the depoliticisation of the public service, an inquiry into extra-judicial killings by the police force, and an all-party committee to address the functioning of the National Assembly.

The leaders' dialogue and joint committees progressed for the most part over the next eleven months and there was hope that progress was being made on several heretofore seemingly intractable issues. The leaders met several times and gave joint press conferences on the progress of the dialogue. When an action of the Prime Minister undercut the work of one of the committees, Hoyte suspended the talks for a month. This episode highlighted the fragile nature of the talks, but also the contradiction that the dialogue structure presented. As the independent Stabroek News noted in an editorial, "Let the Dialogue Continue," (2001):

"...it has not yet dawned on most people what a significant innovation these committees represent in the normal system of governance. They do in fact signify a curtailment of normal executive powers in the areas effected and perhaps understandably the full significance of this has not yet been understood or accepted by many persons, including members and supporters of the government. Thus in one or two cases steps have been taken by ministers that are arguably incompatible with or cut across the terms of reference of the committees. The dialogue process means in effect that where issues have been referred to committees, ministers have to advise themselves or be advised as to the effect this has on their portfolio. That could be a question of some difficulty in certain cases..."

A later Stabroek News editorial, "Whither the Dialogue Process?" (2001) summed up the significance of the dialogue process in the wider context of Guyana's ethnopolitical struggles:

"Yet there is an intrinsic validity to the dialogue process and the committees. They have provided an important measure of political peace and the promise of widening areas of agreement. To understand the vital relevance of the process one

¹⁵ Joint committees were established on local government reform, national security, land and house lot distribution, the bauxite industry, depressed community needs and the government's monopoly on communications media.

must back up over familiar ground. Recent elections in Guyana, even when adjudged efficient and honest, have been able to provide legitimacy but not nationwide acceptance. There has been the now familiar Guyana pattern of elections plus riots. While the hostility and non-acceptance by a major part of the community has focused on the mechanics of the electoral system, one feels that the hostility derives from the realisation that given the well established pattern of ethnic voting, one party, one group will always win. At an earlier phase, the same realisation had led to the resort to various forms of rigging.”

In March 2002 Hoyte suspended (in his words “paused”) the dialogue with President Jagdeo citing delays in the implementation of outstanding constitutional reforms and in decisions within or emerging from the joint committees. It is difficult to determine the underlying reasons why the dialogue process failed, but it is possible that the PPP/C government grew tired of the encroachment the extra-parliamentary dialogue process represented on its electoral mandate. The collapse of the dialogue was accompanied by the PNCR walking out of parliament for what would turn out to be a 14-month long boycott.

With the tensions of the recent election still simmering, the country was about to experience the worst period of ethnic and criminal violence since the 1960s. The chaos that ensued was termed a “crime wave” by the government and media, but it had unmistakable political and ethnic dimensions. Somewhere between 200-400 people were killed during 2002-2003 (UN Human Rights Council, 2009, p. 20); a stunning number in historic context and for such a small population.¹⁶ Although the crime abated once the main perpetrators were killed, Guyanese along the coast lived in fear for their own safety and security for several years.

The events were triggered on Mashramani (Guyana’s Republic Day), February 23, 2002, when five young African Guyanese prisoners awaiting trial broke out of the Camp Street Prison in Georgetown. The five ensconced themselves in Buxton with the assistance of some community members and other collaborators, and from there mounted brazen daylight raids and robberies in Georgetown and the East Coast that terrorised the country. The violence spread as law and order broke down and other opportunistic criminal elements joined the mayhem. For many months the newspapers were filled with almost daily reports of audacious and brutal crimes that the police were unable to stop. The violence had several elements: criminal violence, ethnic assaults, targeted attacks on the police, and gang warfare. Pamphlets that were released in the name of the escapees spoke of the intention to target police and government ministers and their families (Kwayana, 2005, p. 35). There were instances of politically-motivated attacks as well, but more generally the violence was politicised by the involvement and association of militants with ties to opposition political parties (Kwayana, 2005; Kissoon, 2002) and by

¹⁶ For a proportional comparison, this would be akin to 120,000 killed in a single “crime wave” in the United States (author calculation).

statements made by the major political parties, although by and large the PPP/C and PNCR publicly adopted the discourse of a “crime wave” in their public statements, clearly reflecting their understanding of the explosiveness of the situation should they address the situation as a “civil war.” Disentangling these forms of violence from one another in individual instances was often impossible.

Many of the crimes, especially early on, were mainly targeted against the East Indian Guyanese population (Cholmondeley, 2004; Kissoon, 2003; Kwayana, 2005). Using Buxton as a base, the escapees and their associates attacked businesses; cash-rich establishments such as jewellery shops, liquor stores and currency exchanges were frequent targets. East Indians, particularly businessmen and their families, were targeted for these robberies as well as kidnapping, ransom, and extortion; some were murdered. African-Guyanese were not spared from the mayhem as they too became victims of brutal violence. Political activists David Hinds, Andaiye and Kwayana put it this way in an appeal to the public:

“In the past, each of us has made statements condemning African Guyanese atrocities against Indian Guyanese, and we condemn them even more strongly now, as the violence becomes more brutal. A similar though less brutal violence has begun to spread to African Guyanese victims. We warned before that in the end, crime and violence know no race” (2002).

Women were sexually assaulted and raped in home invasions and public attacks, intensifying a pattern that was particularly evident during the post-election violence of 1997 and 2001 (Trotz, 2004). There was tremendous pressure on the PPP/C from the Indian community to respond to the attacks.

The escapees and their associates also targeted the police force and its ranks. Policemen were gunned down in well-planned and coordinated attacks on police stations and units. In some instances the police were lured into ambushes, the only seeming purpose of which was to kill policemen. According to estimates, there were more police officers killed during this period than in the force’s entire existence to that point (“The Dirty War”, 2007). The focus on the police reflected the longstanding problem of police brutality and extrajudicial killing, particularly of African-Guyanese youth. It was also seen by the Indian-Guyanese community as an attempt to destabilize the government by weakening morale in the police force and possibly getting it to “switch sides.”

Kwayana (2005) and Kissoon (2002) both point to a conspiracy of extremists involving former opposition political parties, media personalities, and former military personnel as the organisers or “masterminds” (Kwayana’s term) of the violence.¹⁷ Their evidence suggests that this group wanted to use the criminals to provoke a political crisis and destabilise or remove the government. At a minimum, a destabilization campaign could

¹⁷ Eusi Kwayana is an elder of Buxton and WPA leader who was driven from the community by the criminals. Fredrick Kissoon is a journalist with the Kaieteur News. Both conducted their own investigations of the 2002-2003 violence. Their courage and dedication to making some sense of what happened during a very complex and polarised period has been invaluable to this research.

weaken the PPP/C and get it to capitulate to calls for power-sharing. In a recorded video message broadcast on two national television stations, one escapee claimed the mantle of “freedom fighter” for Africans being discriminated against by an East Indian PPP/C Government.¹⁸ Some aspects of the criminals’ operations reflected training in military strategy and tactics and were deliberate in their targeting of symbols of state authority. In some instances, there were coordinated and successful military-style raids on strategic targets (such as government arms storehouses) by armed men with heavy weapons and bulletproof vests giving the impression of an insurgency at work. The most overt political strike of the group was an attack on the town of Rose Hall (Berbice) in the far east of the country- well outside the group’s territory - during the PPP/C’s congress in July 2002. The gunmen were unable to locate the congress, but ended up killing two policemen and a PPP/C youth branch member in what was clearly a deliberate but poorly executed operation.

While there appears to have been a political dimension to the crime wave, it never presented a clear political vision or platform. Nor did not become a movement or become embraced or adopted by the PNCR although the party was certainly articulating some of the same concerns (extra-judicial killings, discrimination, corruption, victimisation). The PNCR seemed to understand the potential explosiveness of the situation and kept its distance, although it was under significant pressure to embrace the militants’ cause.

It is important here to make a comment about the community of Buxton/Friendship, which is where the escapees were based and from where the violence emanated. The community is predominantly African with a rich cultural history as one of the first villages established after the abolition of slavery. During the 1970s, it was also was the centre of the WPA’s militant organising and opposition to the Burnham regime which attracted harsh counter measures by the state, including economic marginalisation and violent repression meted out by police and its tactical and intelligence units (Kissoon, 2003). The issue of state-sanctioned extra-judicial killings by the police date to this period and continued as a major source of African Guyanese grievance through the 2000s in Buxton and beyond.¹⁹ Economic decline and neglect deepened the sense of alienation and segments of the population proved sympathetic to the discourse of revenge against the police and struggle against the government (Kwayana, 2005). In the main however most residents of Buxton were simply terrorised and cowed by the criminals. Citizens who opposed them were murdered, village elders were run off, women were raped, and children forced into the service of the armed gangs. The community itself was the first victim of the violence and its most traumatised.

¹⁸ Guyana police angered by TV tape of escaped criminal, The Jamaica Observer, 12 May 2002. Retrieved from: http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/25460_Guyana-police-angered-by-TV-tape-of-escaped-criminal#ixzz1Vu7sK1b8

¹⁹ Under the PPP/C Administration, the police force’s elite Target Special Squad (nicknamed the “Black Clothes”) was consistently singled out for its excessive use of force.

In response to the crime wave, the government mobilised the police and eventually the army to hunt down the escapees. However, for most of the period it appeared that the police were outmanned and outgunned by the criminals. By October 2002, several of the escapees had been killed and the violence began to take on a different form. Confrontations between heavily armed gangs with ties to the narco-trafficking industry became more common. Rumours began to surface of a “phantom force” of hit men that had been formed to eliminate the escapees and their associates, possibly financed by some in the Indian business community. It was alleged to consist of former members of the police Target Special Squad and be operated by a well-known drug lord (“The Shadowlands...”, 2010). Daytime shootouts between rival gangs, execution style torture and killings, and drive-by shootings became more frequent.

Eventually the speculation arose that the “phantom squad” might be receiving support from the government and attention began to focus on the Minister of Home Affairs. In 2004, speculation came to a head when PNCR advocacy for a public inquiry, together with international pressure, led to a Commission of Inquiry into the Minister’s involvement in organizing extra-judicial killings. Opposition politicians objected to what they saw as the narrow scope of the committee’s inquiry and withheld their support. After the killing of a self-confessed associate of the phantom squad who had implicated the Minister in a recorded video distributed to the U.S. embassy and the media, witnesses stayed away from the commission and it ultimately concluded without finding the Minister guilty. In May 2003, the government deployed a joint police/army operation into Buxton to “clean out” (in the words of the President of Guyana) the community and after several months the village was returned to state authority (GINA, 2003).

During this unprecedented period of national crisis, the two main political rivals were unable to muster a joint response. In public statements, the PPP/C alleged that radical elements of the PNCR were involved in the crime wave in order to destabilise the government and that the PNCR was unwilling to bring them to heel. For its part, the PNCR accused the government of high-level connections with drug cartels, supporting the “phantom squads,” and perpetrating extrajudicial killings. From these polarised positions, the parties proved unable to even agree on a joint communiqué about the crisis. Neither side appeared to be willing to alienate hard line elements of their constituency and it is reasonable to speculate that the PPP/C was determined to address the issue as a criminal, not political one, so as to avoid being drawn into any political negotiation under duress.

In the midst of this period of heightened instability, the PNCR went through a leadership transition with the passing of Desmond Hoyte in December 2002. Robert Corbin succeeded him as PNCR leader in January 2003. The political impasse continued for several more months before Corbin and President Jagdeo finally met in what they

termed the beginning of a process of “constructive engagement.” With the majority of the escapees eliminated by the police or phantom squad and the army and police moving into Buxton, the two focused on resuming the political dialogue and returning politics to parliament.

On May 2, 2003 the PNCR took up its seats in Parliament and Corbin was sworn in as Opposition Leader. Enabling the PNCR’s return was the announcement of several breakthroughs: the Parliamentary Management Committee, called for since the 1998 St. Lucia Statement, would be established as would several parliamentary standing committees²⁰ that had been agreed upon during the constitutional reforms. The Opposition had been agitating for these bodies for some time in the belief that they would make the operation and deliberations of parliament more inclusive of minority parties. The all-important Ethnic Relations Commission was also established and both President Jagdeo and Leader Corbin attended its inauguration. Shortly thereafter on May 6 the two leaders issued a “Joint Communiqué” which announced the resumption of high-level dialogue and addressed how matters from the Hoyte-Jagdeo/Joint Committee process would be acted upon. A Follow-up Agreement (June 18) was released after the leaders next meeting, which took stock of progress and laid out a further plan of action. Despite the high hopes for the constructive engagement process, it showed signs of faltering in October 2003 and by March 2004 the PNCR announced its withdrawal from the process citing the government’s non-implementation of agreements and its demands for a public inquiry into the phantom squad and extra-judicial killings.

As the 2006 elections approached, Guyanese society bore a heavy burden of fear and uncertainty for the future. In light of everything that had happened since 2001 and the latest failure of political dialogue, concerns were widespread that the elections could trigger another wave of violence. While the criminalised violence had declined from the levels of 2002-2003, it still continued sporadically. No one was sure whether the phantom squad had been taken out of commission or would resurface again with new targets. When the drug lord that ran the squad was apprehended in Trinidad and Tobago in June 2006 and delivered for trial in the U.S., the nation remained on edge, unsure how his removal would affect things locally. There were still high profile killings with strong political resonance. One of the militant television personalities who had praised the gunmen and promoted their cause was murdered in early 2006. Three months later the Agriculture Minister was gunned down in his house along with several family members.

²⁰ These standing committees included four sector committees on natural resources, economic services, foreign relations, and social services; a constitutional reform committee; and the committee of appointments. These would be permanent committees that involved both the government and opposition parties in approximate proportion to their numbers in the legislature.

It was not clear at the time, but several developments from within Guyanese society and with the assistance of international partners would help to change the course of history.

Section 3 - The Dynamics of Peace and Conflict

A. Conflict Analysis

Guyana's political history illustrates how ethnicity and politics, managed divisively, can cripple a nation's development. Ambitious national leaders prey upon fears and prejudices, mobilising their ethnic bases in their contest for political power. Associations in the civic space are often brought into the ethnic struggle and compromised. External actors manipulate the incentives for political competition or directly take sides in the conflict for ideological and geopolitical reasons. Political and biased media of all stripes reinforce the polarisation. Inter-ethnic violence (direct or by proxy) whether during widespread civil strife, acts of protest (political, industrial), ordinary crimes and crime prevention, or state security operations erode social capital and reinforce the narratives of mutual distrust and fear. At every turn politicians struggle to promote integrated (and integrative) institutions and political rules of the game in favour of cooperation and conciliation. The result is the paucity of cross-communal legitimacy enjoyed by key social and political institutions; the impoverishment of politics, and elections especially, into a struggle for ethnic survival; and the underdevelopment of conflict management systems within the state and society.

With both communities living in fear of domination by the other, mutual insecurity and suspicion colours the view of state policy and action in the public realm. Stable and legitimate governance becomes nearly impossible. Both communities have used their power to undermine attempts by the other to govern, as was demonstrated by the PNC in the 1960s and the PPP's in the 1970s. Ryan (1999) summarises this succinctly by noting that "...Guyana is basically ungovernable if either of the two dominant ethnic groups feel it is being systematically deprived of its basic political rights" (pp.178-179). The emphasis is added because perception is what often drives reaction in a highly polarised society. At one level, the Guyanese conflict comes down to the absence of systems of conciliation and power-sharing at all levels of governance. It is for this reason that many argue for consociationalism²¹ as the only solution for Guyana.

The underlying question is: "Do Guyanese of different ethnicities hate each other?" Ordinary citizens can be heard echoing the sentiments "we live as one, we don't have problems with each other, is dem politicians does cause trouble, man." Yet, after 40 years of independence, citizens allow themselves to be influenced by politicians. Other citizens, especially those living in rural and peri-urban communities also note that, "we

²¹ Consociationalism is a form of power-sharing that involves guaranteed group representation in government. Political scientist Arendt Lijphart is commonly associated with the concept as a tool for managing deeply divided societies.

does live good, until elections time.” Then the battle lines are drawn, and political views, loyalties, and sympathies result in separation between neighbours, groups, and communities. Some villagers stop talking to each other until after elections for no apparent reason.

Political historians argue that this deep-seated behaviour has sprouted from the seed of ethnic solidarity that has been sown during the early 1960s. After the PPP party split in the 1950s, both groups adopted racial rhetoric in order to sway the sympathies of their main voter base in the communities. The PPP took up the Hindi rallying cry of “*apan jhaat*” a coded phrase to “vote for your own.” The African-Guyanese responded with a similar call for racial solidarity with the PNC evoking the fear of Indian Guyanese hegemony (Premdas, 1995, pp. 72-78). Thus both parties mobilised loyalties to political leaders based on ethnic identity. Notwithstanding this feature, it can be argued that the conflict is ethnic and racial even though personal interaction between citizens is mostly harmonious and civil. Yet not far beneath the surface, relations can become strained over political sympathies, loyalties, and entrenched negative stereotypes of each other. If fear about differences did not exist then politicians would have no material to mobilise.

Both Indian and African-Guyanese nurture entrenched, negative stereotypes, beliefs and fears of each other (Premdas, 1995, pp. 25, 75-76). These perceptions are perpetuated through reproduction within both groups and contribute to a sense of hopelessness about a common Guyanese identity, social, and political change, and a collective future in Guyana, because these mutual perceptions are assumed to be immutable.

Historical trauma is another dimension of ethnic conflict in Guyana. Overcoming past hurts inflicted during slavery, indentureship, colonisation, and politically motivated violence in the pre-independence era has left deep scars on Guyana’s collective psyche. Often, these incidents are not documented, but during recent violence elder citizens have said, “we do not want to return to the 60s, those were horrible times.” The fact that past atrocities reside in the psyche of citizens unprocessed and without safe spaces for discussion and dialogue, they unwittingly act out their pain in their daily interactions with each other. Otherwise the past hurts quickly surface when new incidents of conflict arise between the two groups. In effect, no healing has taken place as new scars overlay old hurts and the narratives of ethnic injustice persist within families and communities even when there is no personal experience with ethnic violence or discrimination. Both main political parties expressed interest in a Truth and Reconciliation type process, but no action has been taken in this regard. The main challenge to a collective Guyanese identity and national unity has been mutual mistrust between the main ethnic groups. The inability to trust the motives and contributions of people other than those from one’s own group and to earn the trust of others, even when well intentioned, has been a crippling feature of Guyanese society.

To this day, historical wrongdoing spanning over 40 years and seen through ethnic lenses has been kept alive by some politicians and fuelled by political contestation. Governance and the right to govern are seen through the lens of each group's national contribution to the state during the 1950s and 1960s. Both groups feel it's their inherent right to govern and decide on who should benefit from the largesse of the state. Even though both major political parties claim to be multiethnic, they have not been able to counter perceptions of race-based politics and ethnic mobilisation.

PNCR leaders never accepted publicly that anti-government street demonstrations often led to violence and mayhem, mostly orchestrated against Indian-Guyanese. This is not the same as saying that they publicly promoted violence or anti-Indian hatred. Yet sections of the public critical of the PNCR cite slogans expressed by President Desmond Hoyte during protest rallies such as "slow fiah" and "mo fiah" as being linked to incidents of arson and fires. Many observers deemed these slogans to be coded language for belligerent action and a call for anti-Indian hatred and violence. However, opinions within the African-Guyanese community differed; for them the phrase is non-literal rhetoric. Depending on the listeners "slow fire", "more fire" or "long cooking" could be the kind applied to tough meat to make it tender and more appetising if the household does not own a pressure cooker. The phrase could have been interpreted as a call to keep up the militancy, apply pressure and intensity in demands for changes to the PPP/C government that would yield the tangible results the protestors desired (Kwayana, 2005, pp. 32-33).

Exclusion from the decision-making process vis-à-vis a parliamentary system that promotes the exclusion of minority parties in decision-making has also exacerbated ethnic tensions. Agreement by the parliamentary opposition for the passage of most legislation and policies is not necessary, as the ruling party has typically captured a majority of seats in the National Assembly. Further, the Westminster "winner-take-all" mentality contributes to a culture of confrontation rather than consensus building and compromise. Weak or dysfunctional institutions in which potentially costly disputes between ethnic groups are mediated compound this confrontation. In diverse multiethnic societies, such institutions make the difference between zero-sum outcomes and cooperative solutions.

A highly centralised government further compounds the lack of inclusion in political institutions. Political actors are often far removed from the populations they serve and this has contributed to weak community participation and development. Local government elections are now (in 2011) 15 years overdue; a victim of the intransigence of the main political parties to agree upon a new election system ("Parties still...", 2010). Many of the local councils elected in 1994 are nonexistent or dysfunctional, denying citizens effective forums to solve problems, vent grievances, or articulate

community development priorities.²² In many cases the central government has appointed new local committees, provoking new controversies. For its part, the open party list system in national elections means parliamentarians do not represent geographic constituencies. Guyanese do not have “their representative” in the Parliament, with whom they can take up issues, further separating the government from the governed. Some of this is mitigated by how small of a society Guyana is, but it remains a flaw in the system of democracy.

As a social norm, a citizen’s political persuasion is only disclosed during in-group discussions; citizens will not disclose such matters to a social researcher. For the most part, civilised discussion among persons of different political views does not constitute a norm, even on matters deemed nonpolitical, without speculation of one’s political sentiments. More often than not any criticism of a public policy or service is regarded as a racial or political statement. Similarly there is the tendency of opposition parties to regard the intentions of the government as sinister and discriminatory even if there is no reasonable basis in fact for such a claim. The party in power and the main opposition play out the conflict through a series of claims and counterclaims that the opposition’s actions are solely designed to undermine the government and that the government is bent on discrimination and marginalization of the opposition’s supporters. The latter exacerbates Guyanese identity politics, as citizens’ suspicions are constantly aroused and they thus build less social capital and are less able to cooperate and associate across ethnic lines.

Party loyalty is maintained irrespective of that party’s performance in government. Governments tend to deliver patronage to their supporters rather than services to the general population. Loyalty to ethnic party seems to trump under-performing institutions, lack of transparency, state corruption, and violent crimes for voters in national elections. Socio-economic status does not impact choice of political party, even though there has been the trend for the working class to be at the forefront of civil disobedience and post-election protests. Poverty affects all ethnic groups across the population. Yet, there is the tendency of ethnic groups to perceive the cause of their poverty as a direct result of actions of “the other” vis-à-vis their access to the resources of the state or the degree of transparency in how the government of the day prioritises the distribution of economic resources, allocation of jobs, and the award of contracts for public goods and services.

The failures in development in some sections of the African-Guyanese community perceived to be pro-opposition have led to claims of economic marginalization and discrimination. Accusations are often levelled against the government for only representing the interests of its own constituency at the peril of those known to be

²² On the other hand, this lacuna in the local governance system does create space for new community leaders and young people to mobilize for community development.

opposition supporters. At the same time, some Indian-Guyanese communities feel that the PPP/C government has rewarded African-Guyanese communities for “bad behaviour” by responding to protests for improved social and public services at the opportunity costs of development in Indian-Guyanese communities that are in dire need of similar services²³. This compounds the fact that Indian-Guyanese are victimised as a result of racial targeting during violent periods. Thus notions of discrimination and victimisation are based on each groups’ perception of their own situation relative to other groups in the society. Yet, most African Guyanese still feel that the PNCR is best suited to govern the country and Indian Guyanese feel that the PPP/C can do a better job, even though both groups have experienced under-employment or lack of human security under governments of both parties.

When the PPP/C won successive elections in 1992, 1997, 2001, and 2006, the African-Guyanese segment of the population interpreted the loss of political power as exclusion from a fair share of the economic pie. At the same time, some Indian-Guyanese feel they hold political office, but political power is tenuous as the Government, by virtue of frequent challenges to its legitimacy and more recently the upsurge in criminal violence, may not command the complete loyalty of the mostly African-Guyanese security services. This sentiment was countered by the establishment of community policing groups in communities that are vulnerable to violence and crimes, and increased access to firearms by citizens and businesspersons (mostly Indian-Guyanese) to defend themselves against perpetrators alleged to be mainly African-Guyanese. On the other hand, repeated extra-judicial killings, lack of justice for families who have lost loved ones or property, or experienced other forms of human rights violations have also contributed to the general state of citizen insecurity. These features of citizen safety and security are compounded by a lack of public confidence in the competence of the security forces to maintain law and order and have less to do with the ethnic composition of the Guyana Police Force and Judiciary.

B. Local Capacities for Peace

Up to this point the study has focused predominantly on the conflict dynamics of Guyanese society. However, there exists undeniable positive in the midst of what appears to be an intractable conflict. This section highlights some of these capacities for peace that have survived the vicissitudes of history and remain strong, holding Guyanese society together.

Like many multiethnic countries, Guyana has national and cultural events and pastimes that draw communities together. Guyana's diversity, while politicised and a source of conflict, is at the same time a source of strength. Guyanese of all ethnic backgrounds across social strata and differing political views interact and celebrate in selected social

²³ Residents of Annandale personal communication 16 December 2009

spaces including a day at the Cricket Ground, Mashramani (the Republic Day carnival), and Christmas celebrations. Indian-Guyanese openly celebrate Hindu festivals such as phagwah and diwali and all Guyanese partake in some of the public manifestations of the holidays such as the playful hurling of colourful powder on unsuspecting neighbours and strangers during phagwah. While there are some controversies surrounding the meaning or marking of certain national holidays, they are largely a source of Guyanese national pride.

Almost 90 percent of Guyana's population lives concentrated on a thin coastal strip along the northern shore of the country. This proximity feeds what Guyanese speak of as patterns of "neighbourliness." They invoke memories of shared lives with neighbours and friends of the opposite group and reminisce about "the good old days" when people lived with each other in peace and when children were respectful of their elders, regardless of their race or ethnicity. In more recent times citizens pointed to the generosity, goodwill, and kindness that people displayed to one another regardless of ethnicity in response to a disastrous flood that affected the coastal belt in 2005 in which many people suffered loss to their property and livelihoods.

Guyana's ethnic diversity begets a religious diversity as well, but it has avoided a history of religious strife. Although Hinduism has only Indian-Guyanese followers, two of the other major religions (Christianity and Islam) have both African- and Indian-Guyanese followers. The latter may provide some basis for inter-ethnic cohesion. Denominational differences within the Christian and Muslim communities appear to be based on ideological rather than identity-based differences that have not given rise to antagonistic cleavages. While at various times during Guyana's history religious associations have been drawn into the political fray, they have tended to remain on the sidelines of conflict until more recently when they were mobilised for peacebuilding ahead of the 2006 elections.

What has been said thus far on the media has generally been negative and the media reached lows during the 1997 and 2001 elections. But on balance television, radio and print media in Guyana are not forces of ethnic extremism and polarisation. Although only a few high quality media outlets exist, there are a number of well-trained and committed journalists present within a small media fraternity. Since 1992 the challenge has been to foster more media professionalism and use these high quality outlets as an alternative to other less-responsible and partisan voices. The electronic media, particularly television, has wide reach across the country and remains largely unregulated. Although the sole radio station with national coverage is state-owned, state-controlled and displays a pro-government bias and exclusion of opposition parties, it does not actively promote ethnic chauvinism or hate. Nonetheless the GECOM (2008) Media Monitoring Unit noted that in the run-up to the 2006 national elections state-owned television had been decidedly exclusive in favour of the government (p.16). In

any case, a number of journalists and publishers have been open-minded to more conflict-sensitive and human rights-based reporting during elections and thereafter.

By and large the Guyanese military has stayed out of politics and is one of the country's most widely-respected institutions. Guyana has never experienced a military-led coup d'etat, although many would argue that it was complicit in upholding the PNC regime of the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, while the military is primarily constituted of African-Guyanese, who are known to support the PNCR, it has remained accountable to civilian authority through history, including during PPP/C rule. Many would argue that this loyalty and popular credibility was tested from 2003-2008 when the government sent platoons to encamp and restore order to the community of Buxton. This being said, many prominent Indian-Guyanese political figures privately express distrust of the military while publicly praising its professionalism. Several recent incidents of civilian confrontations and claims of civilian abuse have called the professionalism of the military into some question (Dev, 2008).

Guyana has a vibrant, internationally-connected business community that with the exception of the 1960s and its close association then with the UF party, has tended to stay out of politics and actually promote peace and stability. This active business sector engages a large number of stakeholders in the political system. Business owners have a great deal to lose if mechanisms to promote sustainable peace are not employed. It has a history of investing resources for peacebuilding and pressuring politicians to pursue less conflictual paths. The business community played an important role in mediating a resolution to a general workers' strike called by four public service unions for wage and salary increases in 1999. This more active role in conflict resolution efforts continued with the private sector's involvement in the Social Partners Group conciliation initiative in 2002 (see Section 4 below).

Another potential peace capacity in Guyana is represented by the number of women in Parliament. In fact, a Guyanese woman holds the highest position held by any woman in a judicial system in the Caribbean region. Yet women in public office and key decision making positions are perceived as putting their party's interests over the interests of women and individual women have taken very ugly public roles in some of the post-election protests (Trotz, 2004, p. 4). At the same time, the most active of political party stalwarts are rank and file party members, most of whom are women. When the political parties want to mobilise their constituents for demonstrations and public gatherings, it is mainly women who respond to the call. During the crime wave it was women across political and ethnic boundaries that mobilised publicly to pressure politicians to take action. Nevertheless, they are not equally represented at the peace table.

The round of constitutional reforms in 1999-2000 inspired by the Herdmanston Accords increased the country's conflict management capacity in several ways. First, the reform process itself was inclusive and participatory in ways that were unprecedented in the

country's history giving the results wide public support. The Constitutional Reform Commission included representatives of all parliamentary political parties as well as important social stakeholder groups and although time and budget were limited it conducted outreach to communities throughout the country as part of its deliberative process. The cooperation experienced during the Commission's tenure has been underscored by major political parties as an example of how politics in Guyana can be positive and productive. The substantive reforms to the constitution included enhancing the role of the parliament vis-à-vis the executive, and establishing several independent rights commissions (e.g. for women, for the child, for indigenous peoples) and the Ethnic Relations Commission. The Ethnic Relations Commission would later play a pivotal role in the peacebuilding process that preceded the 2006 elections.

Despite its mixed track record of success, political dialogue promises the potential for the resolution of differences, increased understanding and stronger relationships among its principals, less polarised communication, and a wider sense among the people that their leaders are interested in solving problems. In this light Guyana's many political dialogue efforts between 1998 and 2006 made contributions to peace by advancing a set of acceptable compromises on contentious issues. Nevertheless, there are several fair critiques of the dialogues. One was that their extra-parliamentary nature weakened the proper role of the parliament in governance. Another was that their failure against their most ambitious objectives led to greater frustration with the political process. While correct up to a point, the dialogues responded to a felt need within the body politic and complemented the parliamentary process as well. On balance they encouraged norms of dialogue and political engagement that are important for conflict management and conflict transformation.

Finally, while not a "local capacity" of Guyana, per se, the interest of the international community in Guyana has been, on balance, an asset. Various international organisations and actors have undertaken mediation and facilitation efforts over the years such as former U.S. President Jimmy Carter (1990-1992, 2001, 2004), CARICOM (1997-1998), and Commonwealth Special Envoy, Sir Paul Reeves (2001-2006). Multilateral organisations like the U.N., regional bodies such as the OAS, as well as bilateral partners such as the U.S., U.K. and Canada have also lent good offices. By 2003 a critical mass of donor attention to issues related to conflict resolution and constructive responses had coalesced, partly in response to the state of insecurity highlighted by the crime wave and also due to fears of spiralling violent conflict and impacts on other development activities in Guyana. With donor attention, resources for a variety of positive and proactive strategies emerged. In order to ensure complementarity, effective coordination, and efficient conflict response, many activities were channeled through the Social Cohesion Programme led by the United Nations Development Programme. The Government, cognizant of the limitations of previous initiatives and the

urgent need for multi-track diplomacy, conceded to the program while opting out of being its main implementer.²⁴

Section 4 - Mobilisation of Alternative Responses to the Crisis

A. Beyond Elite Level Conflict Resolution: Pre-2003 Efforts

After ten years of limited success at conflict resolution at the track one (official) level, a number of peacebuilding initiatives at the grassroots and civil society levels were launched in the context of enhancing conflict management and good governance. While varied, these efforts emphasised the importance of local ownership and capacity building of local actors. While these efforts had limited tangible impact in terms of the wider course of the conflict, they nevertheless began to open up civic space and validate the notion that perhaps an ethnically inclusive “third force” of civil society and citizens groups could play a role in mitigating the centrifugal tendencies of Guyanese politics. This focus was both deliberate and new to the Guyana context.

Academic Partnership

During 2000-2004 the University of Guyana engaged in scholarly and community-based outreach programmes in collaboration with Clark Atlanta University. This project attempted to shore-up the paucity of skills in conflict resolution that existed within the society at the time. Besides exchange of scholars, the main academic pursuit was pedagogical development and courses offerings in conflict resolution and mediation at the University of Guyana. Another innovative aspect of the partnership was a series of community outreach workshops in conflict resolution across the country and within the overseas diaspora (Grant, 2003, p.41). While these workshops were welcomed and invaluable learning experiences for both communities and faculty, the lack of sustained contact with local communities proved to be a profound limitation.

Intermediary-Led Consultations

A notable precursor to later civic peacebuilding processes was the Carter Centre’s June 2002 initiative to engage a broad-based group of prominent citizens from across the ethnopolitical divide in developing a shared analysis of the problems and potential solutions to the challenge of ethnopolitical polarisation. This took the form of a multi-day retreat facilitated by international experts in conflict resolution. This may have been the first time that political elites and key civil society members spent days with each other away from the ‘warzone’ to discuss the problem of resolving ethnic conflict and understanding their common needs.²⁵ On the down side these meetings were limited to

²⁴ Head of Presidential Secretariat, Dr. Roger Luncheon, personal communication, R.Myers in June 2007.

²⁵ Comments to the author (R. Myers) by a participant in this workshop underscored the humanizing element that occurs in such settings.

prominent members of the society who in many instances found limited opportunities or unyielding structures within which to act upon the new knowledge and ideas from the meeting. Nonetheless, at least 35 percent²⁶ of these participants became actively engaged in peacebuilding efforts before the 2006 elections, and this meeting effectively kick started a robust engagement between international partners and civil society.

Following the Carter Centre's retreat, a "citizen's forum" was organised with intentions to craft a clear civil society agenda that would inform the actions of the main political protagonists. A number of ordinary and well-known citizens met regularly to discuss and document strategies that could address the crime wave, reduce political intransigence, and foster renewed confidence in Guyana's potential for foreign investment. The group comprised members across the spectrum of civil society in Guyana including private individuals, attorneys, trade unionists, ex-military and police officers, academics, the private sector commission and chambers of commerce, and rights groups. The group issued an open invitation in the daily newspapers for others to join their efforts. Politicians were not involved due to the popular view that they epitomised the problem and that it was time for civil society to assert itself and advocate for solutions.

Social Partners Group

Out of these discussions emerged a more formal civil society grouping known as the Social Partners Group (SPG), which consisted of the Private Sector Commission, the Trade Union Congress, and the Guyana Bar Association. These organisations represented key stakeholders in Guyanese society and drew members from across the ethnic divide.²⁷ The SPG asserted that the problems engulfing the society in 2002-2003 were much greater than the political parties and invoked Article 13 of the reformed constitution, which recognised the role of civil society in supporting the state and democracy as the basis for its action and claim that the bilateral engagements between the PPP/C and PNCR should be broadened to include other stakeholders.

After two months of behind-the-scenes consultations, the first Joint Consultation between the Social Partners, President Jagdeo, Opposition Leader Hoyte and the other parliamentary political parties was held in September 2002 in the midst of the crime wave and during the "pause" in the Jagdeo-Hoyte dialogue. At the Consultation the SPG presented a proposal for a wider dialogue process to address the national crisis, which the SPG offered to facilitate (Social Partners, 2002). Early signs of the trouble for the SPG initiative emerged when the PPP/C questioned the impartiality of the trade union and bar association representatives, suggesting that a facilitated mediation and

²⁶ Author's (R. Myers) calculation.

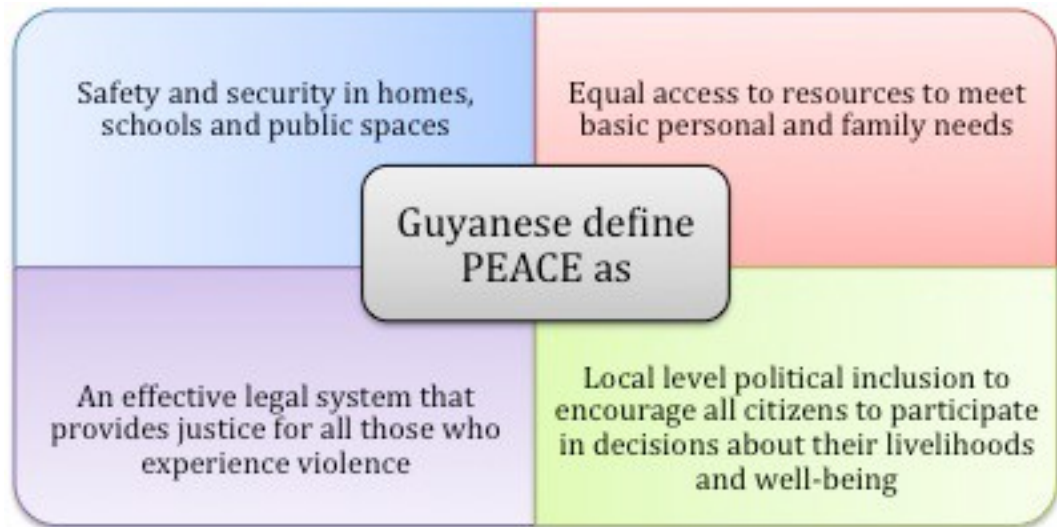
²⁷ A notable flaw in this grouping concerns the major sugar union's split with the Trade Union Congress which leaves the latter body heavily weighted toward predominantly African Guyanese sectors of the economy.

dialogue process could not proceed with facilitators whose impartiality was questioned by one of the parties to the dialogue. Although the proposed dialogue did not proceed, the SPG was welcomed by the government and the other political parties to assist in the facilitation of an all-party statement on the crime situation. Efforts toward this end proceeded for several months, but ultimately did not bear fruit. While the impact of the SPG is contested, it was the first time that a national grouping of this nature attempted anything like a facilitated political dialogue and its efforts spurred the two major parties to articulate their positions on the question of ‘shared governance.’ The PNCR did so in a paper equating the concept with executive power sharing and the PPP/C articulating its idea of ‘inclusive governance’ (Cholmondeley, 2004). Even though the SPG did not achieve its aims, the experience allowed civil society to take a measure of its influence and to recalibrate in its search for a role in finding solutions to the problems that affected all sectors of society.

Civil Society Advocacy

While the Social Partners were focused on facilitated dialogue at the political level, two other interest-focused groups, the Rights of the Child (ROC) and Women Against Violence Everywhere (WAVE), mounted successful grassroots efforts to give voice to the citizenry’s call for an end to violence, peace and ethnic harmony. Youths involved in ROC advocated and mobilised their peers to establish “Race Free Zones,” mounting murals of handprints of citizens in strategic locations, and utilising public service announcements for peace. At the peak of the crime wave in 2003-2004, women mobilised and held peace stand-ups in the centre of Georgetown’s business district. More than 300 women from all walks of life gathered for peaceful protest each Friday at noon for two months with placards and appealed to both the authorities and the criminals to end the violence, violent crime and restore law and order. WAVE also petitioned the Parliament by collecting signatures to address the need for safety and security, for women and children. WAVE also provided women-to-women support for survivors of violence and those who lost husbands and children in senseless killings or disappearances.

Figure 1: Guyanese Define Peace



Collectively, the efforts of the various citizen initiatives, the Social Partners, and civil society organisations like WAVE and ROC represented a response from society to the protracted political stalemate and social breakdown that the country was experiencing at the time. These brief encounters sowed seeds for the engagement of citizens and communities in peacebuilding that would come later. Ordinary citizens wanted peace in the society; most citizens articulated that desire in one of more of the sentiments listed in Figure 1 above.

Section 5 - A New Theory of Change Coalesces

The aforementioned interventions were premised on multiple understandings of the conflict. In the aftermath of the 2001 elections, the public discourse focused on the looming possibility that Guyana was on the brink of becoming a failed state. Local media specialist and conflict management consultant, Hugh Cholmondeley (2001), posited that the prevailing situation in which "...political dialogue that excludes the general populace together with the media promoting discord and fomenting racial hatred is a lethal mixture that guarantees failure for peacebuilding, reconciliation and a 'return to normalcy'..." Guyana's international partners were also coming to the conclusion that Guyana was experiencing what a World Bank report described as a "crisis of governance" (World Bank, 2003). This crisis was overwhelming the democracy and governance programmes designed by bilateral and multilateral development partners at the time. A significant segment of the populace had little confidence in the state, which

was not perceived by some as a neutral force upholding law and order but as a tool of social control of one ethnic group over another.

A. The Challenge of Elite Mediation

When elite political interventions produced limited success, several organisations within the international community began to focus on the potential for more broad-based interventions involving civil society and the general population ahead of the 2006 general elections. The theory of change that emerged within this group²⁸ proposed to complement existing elite-level mediation efforts with support to the latent capacities for peace that existed within Guyanese society across all ethnic groups in an effort to bring their voice and power to bear on the divisive tendencies of politics and national elections. An underlying assumption of such an approach was that citizens would be willing to take the risks to stand up against the status quo if given the appropriate tools. Further, it assumed that individuals would resort to their basic human goodness if they understood the wider impact of their actions on the society at large.

B. A New Approach - Conflict Transformation

While the term ‘conflict transformation’ is subject to varying interpretations (Miall, 2004), it was introduced in the Guyana context at around this time and was understood to mean a departure from conflict management and conflict resolution approaches as these were seen as inadequate to the depth of Guyana’s challenges. It focused attention on relationships between individuals at the vortex of conflict and less on the overall conflict dynamic itself. In general terms, this had the effect of avoiding the discussion about the nature of the conflict but provided a trajectory to discuss the future for Guyanese living together. Another area of focus within the conflict transformation framework was attention to the social structures and institutions that support peace with justice (Lederach, 2003).

Conflict transformation captured the ideals for change that were desirable in Guyana. This theoretical approach and practice provided hope for working with the conflict in the society from the individual level on up. The underlying process of change is that the personal growth of the peacebuilder enhances healthy interpersonal interactions that redound to shifts in paradigms about the causes and solutions of the conflict. Here the focus was not in changing the conflict per se, as this may never be achieved, but in humanising the other and understanding the others’ needs and responding to those needs constructively. Change was understood both at the level of individual responsibility and the broader patterns of social interaction across each strata of society. The general populace would be summoned to action. The emphasis on dialogue across multi-levels of actors and within natural social settings would be encouraged both within the political

²⁸ Recollection of co-author (J. Calder) former Assistant Program Director at the Carter Centre, on discussions between representatives of the Carter Centre, United Nations/UNDP, and the Commonwealth in 2002.

sphere and the private domains. The iterative interactions between these two spaces, particularly in a small society, was hoped to promote a scale-level impact.

Section 6 - The Emergence of Coordinated, Multi-Level Peacebuilding (2003 -2006)

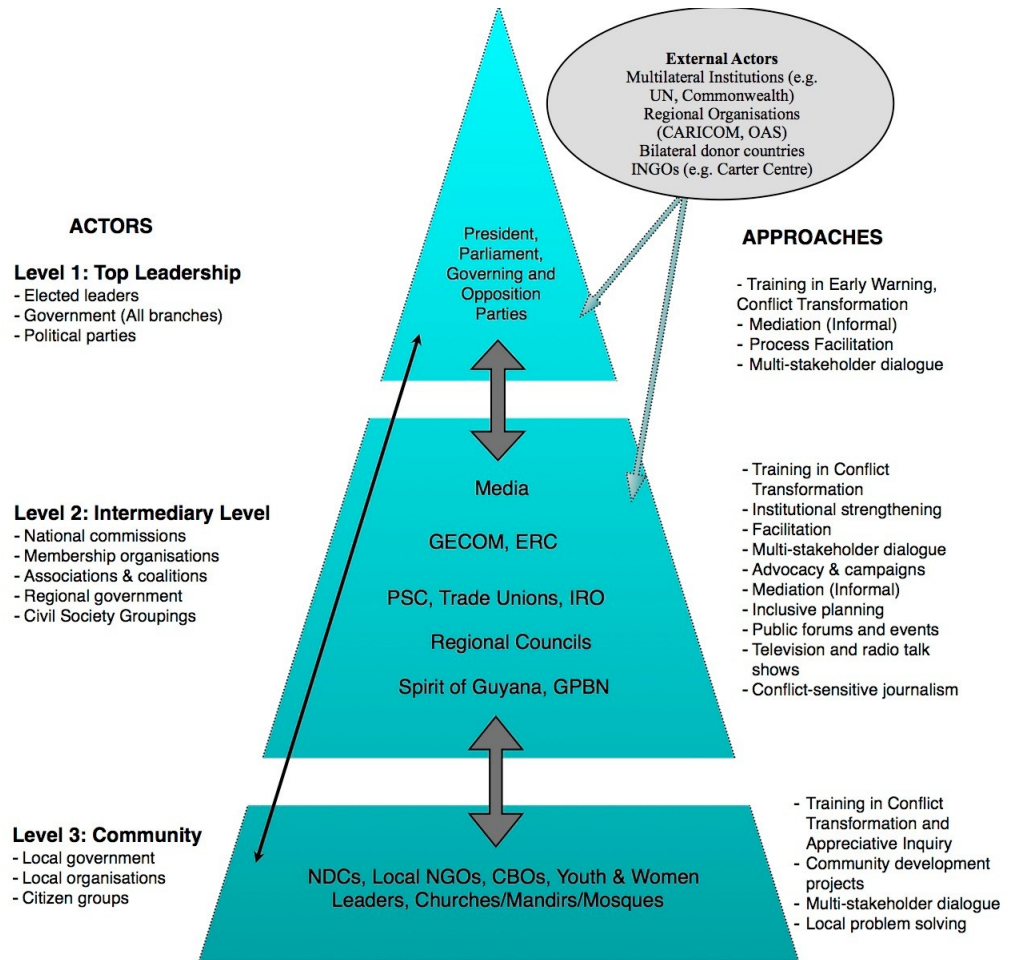
By 2003-2004, the United Nations multi-donor Social Cohesion Programme (SCP)²⁹ began to frontally address the relational dynamics that could contribute to election-related violence. These efforts were diverse, widespread, and sustained for more than three years leading up to and through the 2006 elections. They involved important institutions such as the Ethnic Relations Commission and a wide range of actors from politicians, to youth activists, to local government officials, to police officers, and to non-governmental organisations and ordinary citizens. Other programmes supported by international development partners also made contributions to citizen-centred peacebuilding, including the USAID Guyana Democratic Consolidation and Conflict Resolution (GDCCR) Project.³⁰

One way of conceptualising these programme's actors and strategies is through John Paul Lederach's triangle of actors and approaches to peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997, p. 39). While not explicitly used by the SCP or GDCCR projects, they together fit easily within this framework.

²⁹ SCP was a \$2.7M project directly executed by the UNDP that was funded by UNDP, CIDA and DFID.

³⁰ GDCCR was a four-year US\$7.7M project administered by RTI International from June 2004 to September 2008 funded by USAID (RTI 2008). The project included components on the justice administration, good governance, political competition and consensus building, and civil society strengthening. This case study focuses on the civil society strengthening activities with an explicit conflict resolution component.

Figure 1: Illustration of Multi-Level Interaction Within and Across Sectors



The base of the triangle consists of the space occupied by communities and citizens. Various types of citizen engagement and actions involving community-based organisations, NGOs, women and youth leaders, local government, and churches took place here. Actions at the base interacted vertically with actors and institutions at the intermediary level in the form of in-group action and collaboration across communities of identity, occupation, or geography. Training of membership-based organisations, multi-stakeholder dialogue, and various engagements with and through the media (e.g. public forums, talk shows, conflict-sensitive journalism, advocacy and campaigns) helped open and expand the intermediary space and link the grassroots to the apex directly and through shared public experience and discourse. The apex of the diagram is the space occupied by elected leaders and political party elites. These actors interacted mostly with intermediary level institutions and organisations, but also bypassed this level and interacted directly with the grassroots. This allowed political parties and leaders also to be influenced by the actions taken by citizens and communities. The

diagram places international organisations on the outside, but interacting with actors formally and informally at both official and intermediary levels.

The rest of this section describes four clusters of activity that directly contributed to the mobilisation of citizens for peacebuilding activities ahead of the elections with a primary emphasis on the SCP:³¹

1. Orientation and capacity building in conflict transformation
2. Citizen mobilisation and advocacy for peace
3. Nationwide multi-level, multi-stakeholder dialogues
4. Youth-led community development and social cohesion projects

A final evaluation of the SCP conducted by a team that included a co-author (Lund & Myers, 2007) suggested that a total of approximately 30 percent of the population of Guyana was personally involved in some activity of the SCP while many others heard its message through personal contacts, interactions with representatives of state institutions, and heavy media coverage of the events. The summary in this section draws on this evaluation for description, while interpretation and analysis based on further data collection for this study follows in the next sections.

A. Programme Design and Strategy

The SCP set out the core problem as one of pervasive distrust in society at multiple levels that prevented political consensus from emerging and proposed three primary objectives (UNDP, 2007, p. 6):

- progress toward social cohesion and effective mediation
- enhanced security, safety and access to justice for citizens
- progress toward implementation of agreed Constitutional reforms

The strategy was to engage a large cross section of Guyanese society and key leaders and institutions at several levels and impart to them the cognitive frameworks, skills and strategies associated with the conflict transformation paradigm. Once basic capacities were imparted, local stakeholders and organisations would be encouraged to identify and initiate their own further actions, which might attract further programme support or simply move forward on their own. As such, many of the programme's activities were not rigidly predetermined, allowing for local ownership to drive the agenda. In addition, it was anticipated that this approach would provide greater opportunities for beneficial linkages and spillovers to occur organically rather than through a centrally-directed effort. As noted earlier, the Government of Guyana allowed the civic initiatives the

³¹ The SCP undertook many additional initiatives to support institutional strengthening for peace, such as training for the University of Guyana, police force, magistrates, the media, and work to strengthen the parliament. Simmons & Myers (2007) and Lund & Myers (2007) describe these activities.

space to grow without being associated with direct implementation during a period of heightened partisan distrust. The UNDP office in Guyana ran the programme and hired a full time Peace and Development Advisor (PDA), with a small professional support team, to lead and provide technical assistance for the conflict transformation activities.

The project was approved by the Government of Guyana in May 2003 and launched shortly thereafter, continuing through November 2006. The SCP reviewed progress in September 2005, approximately midway through the programme. The review highlighted limited traction in programme areas reliant on political will and consensus among the political elite and found greater needs, common interests and willingness within civil society and local governments to engage in peacebuilding initiatives as the elections approached. The SCP reprogrammed and emphasised activities that would impact the election environment. Practically speaking, this meant a focus toward citizen-based and citizen-driven initiatives rather than trying to assist the political parties to advance on dialogue and constitutional reform issues following the collapse of the “constructive engagement” process in 2004. The SCP (and in parallel the GDCCR) shored-up support for youth-focused community development and supported additional conflict transformation workshops and activities more widely across the country. These were more broadly cast and involved over 400 persons with a commitment to peaceful resolution of conflict within their own spheres of influence. The activities that encompassed this multi-level, citizen-centred approach are described in the following sections.

B. Orientation and Capacity Building in Conflict Transformation³²

The foundation of much of the SCP was capacity building in conflict analysis and transformation for key stakeholders at multiple levels across the society. This included government officials, senior political party members, parliamentarians, regional and local government authorities, trade unionists, private sector bodies, public servants, civil society organisations, the police force and judiciary, youth leaders, and constitutional bodies such as the Ethnic Relations Commission. As Lund and Myers (2007) noted:

“A number of workshops or meetings were undertaken for “key political role-players” that brought groups together in Guyana, or sent selected individuals abroad, to introduce them to conflict concepts, early warning analysis and mechanisms, sensitization, dialogue and communication skills, and envisioning. The hope was that the increased knowledge, self-awareness, skills and contact fostered by these occasions would encourage more respectful approaches to

³² The Social Cohesion Programme also provided capacity building in mediation and human rights training to the police force and the judicial system given their important roles in maintaining order, in particular during periods of political tension. These programmes are covered in greater detail in Lund & Myers (2007).

current issues between them and more trust and spur self-initiated cooperative activities on the participants' part...." (p. 32)

As noted, once trained and exposed to the relevant concepts, the idea was that those who received the training would identify and initiate their own further actions. This type of capacity building for political actors, the ERC, civil society, and local government are briefly examined below. Table 1 shows a list of the different training initiatives in conflict transformation and facilitation skills.

Table 1: Conflict Transformation and Facilitation Training

No.	Type of Training	Recipient	Expert/Trainer	Partnership	Geographic Coverage
1	Conflict Management (Early Warning Systems)	PPP/C and PNCR general secretaries	International Conference	UN-SCP	N.A.
2	Conflict Transformation & Conflict Resolution	All political party leaders	International	UN-SCP	All Regions
		Key civil society leaders	International	UN-SCP	Regions 4, 5 and 6
		Local government officials & staff	Regional	UN-SCP	Regions 3, 4, 5 and 6, 10
		Youth Arms PPP/C & PNCR	International	UN-SCP	Region 4
		Ethnic Relations Commission	International	UN-SCP	All Regions
		Religious Leaders	SCP Peace Advisor	UN-SCP	Region 4
		Cultural Leaders	SCP Peace Advisor	UN-SCP	Region 4
		Professionals - across sectors	International	UN-SCP	Regions 3,4,5 and 6
		Youth	Regional and Local	UN-SCP	Regions 3,4,5, 6 and 10
3	Ethnic Relations	Ethnic Relations Commission	International	UN-SCP	All Regions
		Religious Leaders	Local - ERC	UN-SCP	Region 4
4	Facilitation - Dialogue	Professionals - across sectors	International	UN-SCP	All Regions

No.	Type of Training	Recipient	Expert/Trainer	Partnership	Geographic Coverage
		Ethnic Relations Commission	International	UN-SCP	All Regions
		Frontline workers	Local - ERC-SoG	UN-SCP	All Regions
		Religious leaders	Local - ERC-SoG	UN-SCP	Region 4
5	Facilitation - Process Design	Professionals - across sectors	International	UN-SCP	All Regions
6	Human Rights Documentation	Ethnic Relations Commission	International	UN-SCP	All Regions
7	Appreciative Inquiry	Local government chairpersons	International	USAID-GDCCR	Regions 2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10
		Professionals - across sectors	International	USAID-GDCCR	Regions 2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10
		Frontline workers	International	USAID-GDCCR	Regions 2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10
		Community Groups	Local	USAID-GDCCR & UN-SCP	Regions 3, 4, 5 and 6
		Youth	Local	USAID-GDCCR & UN-SCP	Regions 3,4, 5 and 6

Engaging Political Actors

Early activities focused on political actors since the “constructive engagement” process was just getting underway and represented an opportunity. In July 2003, the SCP sponsored the General Secretaries of the PPP and PNCR to attend a training workshop on conflict analysis outside the country that introduced them to conflict early warning systems and encouraged them to consider “collaborative procedures to recognize, monitor, and address social tensions” (Lund & Myers 2007, p. 32). A three-day workshop retreat was held for representative of the youth arms of the PPP and PNCR in October 2003 (and a second one over a year later in 2005). Also in 2003, the SCP provided secretarial support to a renewed attempt by elements associated with the Social Partners Group, augmented with international donor and diplomatic partners, to facilitate the “constructive engagement” process before it broke down in early 2004. The

programme continued to engage political leaders after this, but took up opportunities with other institutions and segments of society.

In April 2005, working in collaboration with the Ethnic Relations Commission, the SCP facilitated a conflict transformation workshop with political party members and civil society groups. This two-day workshop convened 68 participants from over 30 organisations. Led by Roelf Meyer, a South African politician who was central to his country's peace process, the participation drew from religious and cultural organisations, political parties, non-governmental organisations, as well as the government. The purpose of the workshop was mainly orientation and exposure to key concepts and topics and to open a space for the fostering of relations and unfettered discussion that was not intended to come to closure. The participants were encouraged to take ideas from the meeting and engage them with their organisations and colleagues. The meeting served an important purpose since it gathered political leaders with a wide range of other stakeholders on a level platform around the ideas of conflict transformation and how they might apply to Guyana.

Standing up the Ethnic Relations Commission

A breakthrough that marked the initiation of the 2003 “constructive engagement” was the establishment of the ERC after a long and contentious delay. The SCP took an immediate focus on strengthening the constitutional body to play a prominent role in promoting social cohesion and better ethnic relations. The ERC/SCP joint partnership aimed among other things to support effective mediation and constitutional reform agreements relative to ethnic relations and to enhance social cohesion in all sectors of the society.³³

Based on a July 2004 needs assessment of the ERC, the SCP provided the ERC Commissioners with workshops on strategic planning, ethnic relations, and conflict transformation. Technical assistance on ethnic relations was provided through South African expert Andreas Odendaal. The SCP also procured a human rights expert from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for three months to familiarise the Commission with standard operating procedures and guidelines on the processing of individual allegations or complaints. It was clear that ongoing training would be needed on key substantive and topical issues within the ERC and with the Guyanese public broadly, planning for which was taken up by SCP and the GDCCR.

Once established with a solid foundation, the ERC was to take the leadership role in several important initiatives between 2004 and 2006 to promote better ethnic relations and social cohesion. This included sponsoring conflict transformation and ethnic relations training for a variety of social groups and a nationwide multi-stakeholder

³³ Memorandum of Understanding between Ethnic Relations Commission and the UNDP/Multi-Donor Social Cohesion Programme signed November 10, 2004.

dialogue process (described more fully below). It also seized the opportunity to host a public forum on the Report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism and Discrimination in Guyana after his visit in 2003.

One of the early initiatives of the ERC was a National Film Festival in August 2004 across Guyana's ten administrative regions that highlighted themes of tolerance and reconciliation. The ERC underwrote the costs associated with the festival and the SCP trained 142 young people as facilitators to support post-viewing discussions. Citizens' attendance was low in many places, so the ERC decided to also use the films with more "captive audiences" like schools, community outreach meetings and NGOs (Lund & Myers, 2007, p.47).

Investing in Civil Society

Building on the Meyer workshop for politicians and civil society, the SCP brought together respected members of Guyanese society (parliamentarians, religious leaders, business leaders, community leaders, etc.) for training in facilitation, good process, and conflict mitigation and resolution with the idea that they could become peacebuilding resources within their respective communities and networks. With the appropriate skills, they could intervene in their home communities or anywhere across Guyana in the event of election or communal violence. The first two-day training-of-trainers workshops on "Building Capacity for Process Design and Facilitation" was held in April 2005 with Dr. Ron Kraybill of Eastern Mennonite University with a follow-up training in October as elections got closer. Inspired and emboldened by the training, participants formed the Sprit of Guyana (SoG) and pursued their peacebuilding function within their own respective domains. SoG was later called upon by the ERC to be the main facilitators in the nationwide multi-stakeholder dialogue. The group also mobilised activities during the pre-election peace campaign. After a year of practice, SoG received further training in the aftermath of the elections when the group had the chance to reflect on their facilitation experiences.

The ERC itself conducted its own outreach and capacity building training for some sectors of civil society. It conducted two conflict transformation workshops each for religious groups and cultural associations in June and August 2004. Consistent with the general approach of the SCP, these groups were provided training and committed themselves to subsequent community outreach activities to multiply the impact of the workshops.

Late in the programme, in August 2006, the SCP provided support for the convening of the Guyana Peace Builders Network (GPBN). This effort was successful in attracting over 400 persons from previous peacebuilding programmes undertaken by joint UNICEF/SCP activities. GPBN was seen as a way to connect all the individuals that attended the workshops, public forums, and trainings (inclusive of SoG) in an online

supportive network for the promotion and advocacy of peacebuilding in Guyana. The idea was that members would share ideas, notify the network of peacebuilding initiatives, and stay connected for mutual support and encouragement. In the absence of national election debates for political candidates, the GPBN organised a public forum with all contesting political parties to discuss how they would contribute to peaceful elections outcomes.

Strengthening Local Government

Post-election disturbances in 2001 had spread beyond the traditional locus of Georgetown, so the SCP was cognisant of the need to engage regional authorities in conflict prevention initiatives. The programme chose to focus in five administrative regions³⁴ where violence was a concern within or between communities. Interestingly, early meetings revealed that assistance was needed to bridge fractured relations both within various local authorities and between them and the regional administration. Lund and Myers (2007) noted “the fractures were most precarious along political and ethnic lines, resulting in uncooperative relationships that stymied regional development and conflict management” (p.50).

Conflict transformation workshops were given for RDC councillors and staff of Regions 3, 4 & 5. This training provided the impetus for subsequent youth-based community projects (see p.52 below), which enhanced the RDC’s interaction with local communities. This came at the initiative of the Chairman of the Region 4 RDC who, based on his enthusiastic response to the training workshop, strongly encouraged UNDP to initiate similar training with youth. The SCP responded positively to the request, shared the idea with other RDC chairpersons, and subsequently launched the community-based conflict transformation trainings for youth in Regions 3, 5, and 6 (see below). In collaboration with GDCCR, similar training workshops for leaders of Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and Community Development Councils (CDCs) in Region 6 were also implemented.

The SCP intervention in Region 10 was different and focused on social and economic development as the key variable for social cohesion. Region 10 is the historic centre of Guyana’s bauxite industry and an African-Guyanese and opposition constituency that has seen hard times since market reforms hit the community in the late 1980s. The region articulated the need for a more conflict-sensitive regional development strategy to address the uneven development patterns of the area. Key stakeholders came together and agreed upon a process to develop the regional strategy with the full participation of communities and local authorities (NDCs, CDCs). The SCP, the Linden Economic

³⁴ These were Region 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara; Region 4 - Demerara/Mahaica; Region 5 - Mahaica/Berbice; Region 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne; and Region 10 - Upper Demerara/Berbice. Together these five regions account for 84 percent of Guyana’s population.

Advancement Programme (LEAP),³⁵ and the Linden Chamber of Commerce agreed to assist the RDC in the plan's development and the SCP made available technical assistance for the effort. Importantly, the process for engaging local communities in the strategy development process helped link them to institutions with resources to address their problems and opened channels for dialogue (Lund & Myers, 2007,p.51).

During this time period another intervention targeted local government officials, in tandem with key professionals and frontline workers, with training to enhance community capacity. The USAID-funded GDCCR project used the framework and methodology of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)³⁶ for a series of trainings to facilitate more effective management of community relations for positive social change. According to interviews with RTI officials, the GDCCR project successfully completed AI foundation training with approximately 350 representatives of over 69 organisations in Region 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 10 and another 20 organisations in Region 6. Subsequently, the GDCCR collaborated with SCP to conduct AI foundational training for youth leaders and community groups involved in community development activities identified by the local government chairpersons from Regions 3, 4, 5 and 6.

The GDCCR provided ongoing coaching and AI materials to participants who used the AI approach further in their communities or spheres of influence. One example of this is the Enfield New Doe Park NDC, which engaged the local community using the AI approach to spur activities in village sports and fundraising events to enhancing the community centre. The GDCCR cites the political participation and selection from among its trainees of two women candidates to serve in Parliament as the main unintended achievement of the AI intervention. The project officials argued that AI provided a new lens for these 'first time' women politicians to envision the important contribution they could make to the country as Parliamentarians although the political atmosphere provided numerous challenges.

C. Citizen Mobilisation and Advocacy for Peace

As the 2006 elections approached, the public's focus on elections became acute. Those who had been trained by the SCP and the ERC began to plan and execute their own peacebuilding initiatives throughout their communities and in the proverbial public square of Georgetown. These activities were many, varied, and widely covered in the media creating a distinctly different pre-election environment to which Guyanese were

³⁵ LEAP is a Government of Guyana and European Union programme with the objective of fostering entrepreneurship and enterprise for economic development of the town of Linden

³⁶ AI is built on two framing principles: appreciation of people and the organisational system and articulation of organisational best practices as a means of creating a better vision for the future. Its aim is to generate new knowledge and assist members of an organisation to collectively envision a desired future. Using the AI process, each community member examines and identifies specific moments, events and stories of the best that already exists in their organisation or village and then determines ways to reproduce and sustain those successes. The process involves storytelling and interviewing to draw the best of the past in order to effectively visualise a successful future.

accustomed, despite several shocking incidents of violence including the killing of the Minister of Agriculture and a well-known journalist and activist. Nongovernmental organisations, citizen groups, and associations organised cultural festivals; peace vigils; peace concerts; marathons and bike rides for peace; poetry, essay and song contests; media messaging; and peace pledge campaigns for prominent citizens and political leaders to publicly pledge their efforts to uphold peace in Guyana. Table 2 provides highlights many of these initiatives.

One sample of the many peace vigils had residents encouraged to light candles for peace in their communities. Often these were done as a collective with the singing of folksongs, national songs, prayers and hymns. Initiatives such as these got the attention of political parties as well; politicians were often invited to make a public showing of support at such events. In one instance, peace vigil organisers said that while a political party (the AFC) could not attend their event, it lit candles for peace at the final campaign rally that was held the same night.³⁷ Several of the more high profile and unique civic initiatives are described in more detail below.

Table 2: Citizen Advocacy and Mobilisation Interventions

No.	Activity	Strategy	Organiser	Partner(s)	Geographical Reach
1	Cultural Fest	Involved all cultural groups to enhance tolerance and understanding	ERC	USAID	3000-5000 persons in Region 4
2	Peace Advocacy	Popular artistes (singers, disc jockeys and beauty queens) involved in calls for peaceful elections	ERC	EAB/British High Commission/USAID	Nationwide
3	Poster and Essay Competition for children and youths age 9-19	Topics about culture, sports, environment, ethnic harmony & peace	ERC	---	Nationwide
4	Peace Messages Word & Jingles	Radio/television featuring youth with positive messages	Spirit of Guyana (SoG)	UNSCP/NCN	Nationwide

³⁷ AFC leaders personal communication with author, R. Myers, 9 May 2008

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5	Peace Songs	500 musical CDs distributed to mini-bus and taxi drivers	SoG	UNSCP and Entertainers Making a Difference (EMAD)	Region 4
6	Voices of Reason, Visions of Hope	Television sound bites	Private Business Sector	USAID	Nationwide
7	Peace Pledge	Public signature campaign	IRO	---	Nationwide
8	Peace Banners	Posted at strategic sites around the city and peri-urban communities	IRO	British High Commission/ EAB	Region 4
9	Poetry for Peace	Poetry invited from youths	Science of Spirituality	SoG/UNSCP	Region 4
10	Peace Buttons	General public	IRO	UNSCP	Nationwide
11	Peace Walk	General public	Volunteer Youth Corps	SoG, USAID, GHARP & Private sector	65 persons Region 4
12	Peace Rides	General public and biking clubs riding across three regions	Bikers Uniting Guyana	UNSCP	300 persons Regions 4, 5 and 6
13	Peace Vigils	General public held candlelight watch with prayers, songs	Volunteer Youth Corps	USAID/GPBN	Regions 4 and 10
14	Peace Marathon	10km Run	Volunteer Youth Corps	UNSCP	Georgetown
15	Public Fora	Open forum with South African peacemaker Roelf Meyer	ERC	UNSCP	73 representatives from 49 organisations
		Public discussion with politicians of contesting parties and citizens	GPBN	---	60 persons in Georgetown
16	Public Advertisement	Appeal to peaceful poll and voting early	ACDA	---	Nationwide

Source: Adapted from Report "From Violent to Peaceful Elections" authored by Simmons and Myers (2006)

Inter-Religious Mobilisation for Peace

Efforts to bring faith-based groups into a peacebuilding process and support an ecumenical coalition began in May 2005. Discussions to develop conflict management projects initially involved groupings from the Judeo-Christian tradition but later included the Hindu, Muslim, and other faith-based groups joined. Participants of the conflict transformation training workshops expressed a clear interest in developing a united approach to resolve ethnic tensions and the political impasse. The SCP helped catalyse the creation of the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), which mobilised peace walks with politicians and civil society during the election campaign. They also served as interlocutors between the political parties in refining a peace pledge that was signed in public view by all political parties except the main opposition PNCR. The PNCR's refusal to endorse the pledge reflected its position not to inadvertently conflate the right to public protest with its support for peace.

Bikers Uniting Guyana

Bikers Uniting Guyana (BUG) was a non-religious, non-political organisation comprised of cycling enthusiasts (mostly men) dedicated to showing their support for peace and harmony in Guyana. BUG mobilised bikers on pedal cycles and motorcycles for group rides on two occasions, first from the municipalities of Corriverton to New Amsterdam in Berbice and then from Corriverton to Georgetown and Linden. The latter covered a distance of fifty miles on the coastal plain. During both rides, which were widely covered by the television and print media, the bikers encouraged citizens along the way to sign the national peace pledge to refrain from violence. BUG riders deliberately crossed the geographical markers of difference, conflict and violence symbolising the courage needed to unite the country.

Red Thread Women's Development Organisation

Red Thread entered a partnership with SCP to document, evaluate, and reduce ethnic conflict between women in the contiguous coastal villages of Buxton and Annandale with a history of communal tensions by exposing the myths of difference. When the January 2005 floods intervened, the SCP brought women affected by the flood together to tell stories about their experiences and how they managed to sustain their own livelihoods and those of their children and families. Women were encouraged to create time-use dairies as they worked, using an inclusive definition of work as a way of uncovering the costs of ethnic conflict to women and their families. The main objective of this intervention was to provide women with firsthand information about their shared experiences across ethnicity and build bridges as women from African, Indian, and Amerindian communities working together.

Forty-two women in diverse communities completed the time-use diaries and held community meetings to discuss findings. Their discussions about conflict, violence,

ethnic discrimination and fear of ethnic discrimination became commonplace, although some women registered discomfort about talking openly about ethnic violence. Nonetheless, participants began to recognise similarities between their lives, as reflected in the diaries. They also pointed out that much of their work is not counted or valued. Women found that despite differences in ethnicity or communities from which they came, they all have a great deal in common in terms of their losses during the natural disaster and did similar survival work.

D. Youth-Led Community Development and Social Cohesion Projects

A major focus at the community level for the SCP was on “unattached” youth: those who were not in school or training programmes, or were unemployed. These youth were easy targets for gangs and other criminals associated with the growing problem of narco-trafficking and gun violence in Guyana. The increasing involvement of youth in criminal and violent activities and as “child soldiers” in places like Buxton during the crime wave had shocked the conscience of the country and caused an outcry.

The Youth Focused Community Based Initiatives (YFCBI) was focused in the three³⁸ administrative regions that encompassed Georgetown and surrounding coastal areas where past violence and election-related unrest was a concern. The goal was to engage unattached youth in training and community development activities that were informed by the social cohesion concept. The SCP held initial discussions with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Local Government as well as the Regional Development Councils of these areas in 2004 to design a framework for the intervention, which was eventually endorsed by the main political parties in June 2005.

The RDCs would assist in the identification of communities from which the youth would be chosen. Consequently they would be required to engage community members and local authorities (RDCs and NDCs) to plan a community development project, which would be supported by a small grant (up to US\$5,000) from the SCP. The projects were intended to improve community and local government interactions and build social cohesion. Experienced NGOs³⁹ were contracted as mentors and monitors for the chosen youth and their activities.

In preparation for the youth-led community interventions, the SCP undertook comprehensive four-day training workshops involving 139 youths and local government officials from selected communities across the three regions in 2005 and early 2006. Participants were deliberately chosen to reflect the gender and ethnic balance of the communities they represented. The workshops introduced core concepts of conflict

³⁸ Region 3: Essequibo Islands-West Demerara, Region 4: Demerara-Mahaica and Region 5: Mahaica-Berbice.

³⁹ These NGOs were Women Across Differences, the Guyana Association of Professional Social Workers, St. Francis Community Developers and Youth Challenge Guyana.

transformation and community engagement. Topics included civic education, leadership development, human rights, conflict transformation, proposal writing, and project development. The monitors/mentors participated in the training sessions as well and did some initial follow-up coaching for youth that required it.

The youth returned to their respective communities to build consensus on a common project. The SCP supported with international and regional consultants to assist, the latter drawing on other Caribbean experiences of community dialogues through educational developmental theatre. Out of these efforts, and with the support of mentors/monitors, the youth leaders prepared project proposals that demonstrated potential for enhancing social cohesion at the community level.

A Youth Project Advisory Committee (YPAC) was established to oversee funding to the youth projects. Standard proposals, including a letter of endorsement by community members and Regional Chairpersons, were submitted in support of each proposal. A six round selection process was undertaken by the YPAC together with the SCP team. Monitors/mentors provided input and recommendations to the selection team. Assessment criteria included sustainability, community endorsement, and the ability of the community to match ten percent of the total project cost and contribution towards social cohesion. The community projects that were approved included recreational centres, skills training centres, and community development projects, including land irrigation, bridge construction and electrification, education, and community libraries..

YPAC approved financing of 28 projects between June and October 2006. Project implementation was supported by the monitors/mentors and supervised by the YPAC. NDCs were also keen to grasp the opportunity to work with young people and provided materials, buildings, land, storage, office space and co-funding for various community projects. During the fieldwork, one resident said, “Is now ah know who is de NDC Chairman...ah see he all de time but ah now know he name and where to find he.”⁴⁰ Both the Chairman and the young leaders viewed the example positively.

Table 3: Type and Distribution of CD, SC and AI Projects

No.	Region/Neighbourhood Democratic Council	Community/Village	Project Type	Approx. Number of Persons Engaged
Region 3				

⁴⁰ In Standard English: “I could now identify the Chairman (of NDC), I have seen him before but now I know his name and where to find him.”

1	Mora/Parika	Salem	Electrified two communities (Salem and Nammryck).	50 residents and local government officials
Region 4				
2	Kuru Kururu	Kuru Kururu	Built a recreation/day care centre.	25 youths and residents
3	Craig	Craig	Furnished the New Horizon Research Centre/Library.	15 youths, residents and local govt officials
4	La Bonne Intention/ Better Hope	Better Hope	Furnished a computer lab and skills training centre.	75 youths, residents and local government officials
5	Foulis/Buxton	Buxton	Furnished and established a skills training centre.	15 youths, 4 teachers and 3 local government officials
Region 5				
6	Bath/Woodley Park	Bath Settlement Woodley Park	Constructed two bus sheds and fenced the community centre.	10 youths in collaboration with local government officials
7	Blairmont/Gelderland	Blairmont, Ithaca Shieldstown	Installed three sets of benches & garbage disposal bins. Rehabilitated the community centre.	25 youths, local governments officials and teachers
8	De Hoop Viilage	De Hoop Branch Road	Fence and irrigate land for community centre.	20 youths, residents and local government officials
9	Hamlet/Chance	Perth Village	Drained, landfilled and fenced a community centre ground.	21 youths, local government
10	Mahaicony/Abary	Calcutta Village	Complete set of bleachers at community centre.	20 youths, residents, local government officials
11	Profit/Rising Sun	Weldad Village	Rehabilitated building. Established library with computer and other furnishings.	27 youths, residents and local officials
12	Rosignol/Zeelust	Cotton Tree Village	Established a community library.	28 youths, residents, local government officials
13	Union/Naargstighied	Lovely Lass Village	Fenced and developed a recreational park.	7 youths, residents, local government

14	Woodlands/Bel Air		Furnished a multipurpose centre.	8 youths, residents, local government officials
15	Woodlands/Farm	Zeskendren	Furnished a community centre for use as a skills training centre.	18 youths, residents and local government officials
Region 6				
16	Enfield/ New Doe	Enfield	Social and recreational engagement Refurbished community centre	26 youth, residents and local government officials

E. Nationwide Multi-level, Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues

One of the most important events in the immediate lead-up to the elections was the Multi-stakeholder Forum (MSF) and National Conversation (NC) from March to November 2006. This was a national dialogue among Guyanese about ethnic and other differences and their collective future. The SCP seized on the momentum of the political leaders' conflict transformation workshop that highlighted the need for such an initiative and lent strategic support to the ERC, which carried it out. As mentioned, the ERC utilised members of SoG as dialogue facilitators based on their facilitation and process management skills acquired through SCP training.

The MSF/NC process was an elaborate bottom-up staging of community and stakeholder dialogues across multiple levels of society.⁴¹ Every Region was expected to conduct a prescribed number of sessions under the guidance of at least two facilitators per session. First, community-dialogues took place across 65 NDCs, six municipalities, and Amerindian Village Councils. Separate dialogue events were held with 750 women, youth, and religious leaders covering the ten administrative regions. A series of regional conferences helped to aggregate suggestions from the dialogues and the process finally culminated with the National Conversation in Georgetown. Implementers interviewed during this research gave the guiding motivation of the National Conversation as enhancing social cohesion and deepening participatory democracy through dialogue. Table 4 shows the scope of the MSF dialogues by geographic region.

⁴¹ Multistakeholder Forum and National Conversation Proposal, Guyana, 2006 and UNDP/ERC Memorandum of Understanding and National Conversation Proposal, 2006

Table 4: Multi-stakeholder Forum Dialogues by Region

No.	Administrative Regions	Population of the Region	Number of Community Dialogues	Number of Citizens	Cumulative Population
	Region 1	24,275	6	315	315
2	Region 2	49,253	15	356	671
3	Region 3	103,061	17	353	1024
4	Region 4	310,320	34	744	1768
	Region 5	52,428	15	403	2171
6	Region 6	123,695	23	771	2942
7	Region 7	17,597	4	61	3003
8	Region 8	100,951	5	137	3140
	Region 9	19,387	4	193	3333
	Region 10	41,112	15	477	3810
11	National Conversation	Nationwide	2 day meeting	298	
12	Appreciative Inquiry Dialogues - Regions 4 and 6		5 dialogues	130	

Section 7 - Findings and Impacts

This case study builds upon two pieces of previous research in which one of the co-authors was involved. One of those studies (Simmons & Myers, 2006) took place in the immediate aftermath of the 2006 elections and collected initial impressions from a range of stakeholders and the public about what contributed to the peaceful elections. The second study (Lund & Myers, 2007) was a comprehensive programme evaluation of the SCP conducted for the UNDP. The purpose of the current study, with reference to these prior efforts, is to consider the enduring impact and significance of the programmes after the passage of several years by, in part, revisiting some of the key actors as well as conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups with community-level interlocutors who participated in or otherwise experienced the peacebuilding initiatives.

A short summary of the previous studies is imperative before laying out the findings of the current study. Firstly, the findings of this study are presented through an analysis the high-impact activities supported by the SCP and GDCCR across six peacebuilding criteria. Secondly, the cumulative impacts of these initiatives are then assessed in terms

of their impact on society as a whole and thirdly, the impact on the national discourse in the lead up to the 2006 elections. Finally, other factors that may have contributed to the peaceful elections are acknowledged.

A. Findings of Previous Studies

It is useful to quickly summarise some of the findings of those previous studies. In *“From Violent to Peaceful Elections: A Preliminary Look at GGRE 2006,”* Simmons and Myers (2006) looked at relational, structural, and institutional factors that contributed to the peaceful elections. They noted a general agreement that the absence of violence at the elections was a significant milestone in Guyana’s history, but noted that many at the time were “very cautious” about drawing sweeping conclusions about the nature of the so-called peace. In general, citizens believed that one peaceful electoral period did not mean ethnic and political tensions had been eliminated.

About the SCP itself, the report stated:

“UNDP’s Social Cohesion Programme...through the RDCs, NDCs, and youths was believed to have reverberations within the wider community of people and resulted in a display of political maturity within the general population. National community dialogues (multi-stakeholder fora) conducted by the Ethnic Relations Commission prior to the elections helped people humanise each other, vent their grievances and identify common interests. The fact that these were organised by the ERC provided the single formalised mechanism for some communities to convey their sentiments to political leaders. Citizens are now waiting to see how their concerns will be acknowledged and addressed by the relevant authorities.” (p. 11)

Of the impact of citizen-driven peace campaigns, the study noted:

“Social action for peace prior and throughout the elections period had an impact on citizens. Some of these initiatives were implemented incrementally over the past year by several players and focused on “impacting the elections environment while others are intended to foster a just and peaceful environment before and beyond elections”. One ordinary Guyanese understood the peace in this way: “all dem TV messages was sehning dat fighting and violence cyan improve we life.”⁴² Four hundred and twenty three persons who participated in conflict transformation workshops conducted by the UN Social Cohesion Programme were involved in the peace campaign or election processes in one way or another.” (p. 12)

And among its conclusions, Simmons and Myers underscored a key finding that:

“Ultimately, no single factor or efforts of a single individual, group or organisation can be credited for the peaceful outcome of the 2006 elections. It

⁴² Standard English translation: “All those television messages were saying that fighting and violence cannot improve our lives.”

seems to have been a process. It started more than three years ago with the unfolding of the Social Cohesion Programme and the general dissatisfaction of the Guyanese people with the sustained levels of violence in the country.” (p. 26).

Beyond what contributed to the relative peace of the 2006 elections the study articulated citizens’ sentiments that the state needed to step in and fill the “space of peace” with justice, equity and socio-economic development for all in the short and long-term.

In *Can Fostering a Culture of Dialogue Change the Course of a Nation?* (Lund & Myers 2007),⁴³ the authors echo the preventative significance of the Guyana SCP. Specifically, they noted:

“By virtue alone of launching an impressively large number and diverse array of time-sensitive and locally-defined actions that were aimed at reversing debilitating conflict, the SCP clearly represents an alternative approach to development and peacebuilding that is bound to be examined by other countries and agencies for what they can learn.” (p. 13)

The SCP achieved ‘multiplier effects’ as new activities organically branched out from initial, catalytic ones. While some types of activities were slowed by partisan national-level politics, those of community groups, youth, women, NGOs, NDCs, and others made more progress in engaging the citizenry. These actors had greater autonomy over their programmes and thus fewer apparent constraints on taking action than did high-level actors.

The SCP evaluation concluded that the programme indeed influenced the non-violent election outcome and enhanced social cohesion in Guyana. However, while the evaluation noted the impressive actions of ordinary citizens, it was less sanguine about the potential of civil society to shape the policy agenda beyond the immediate period. In the words of the authors:

“The SCP [helped]...to bring to life a latent constituency for awakened citizen action that cuts across party lines...But as yet, nothing resembling an organized social movement has congealed from all its activities that could form the “critical mass” that is needed to make civil society a vibrant force” (pp. 9-10).

Nor did the SCP achieve any substantive breakthroughs on the systemic political and governance issues that had animated the shared governance/inclusive governance debate of the previous decade. Indeed, the study cautioned that inadequate follow-up to the SCP could cause the dissipation of the investments made, leading to further frustration and validation of “...the claims of those who argued that the 2006 peaceful elections demonstrated the “violence of peace” by pacifying elements in the community so as to avert attention away from issues of justice,” (p. 11) a finding also echoed in the rapid assessment conducted by Simmons and Myers (2006, p. 14).

⁴³ For a summary of the evaluation, visit [Summary of SCP Evaluation.doc](#)

B. Findings of the current study

As noted previously, this study's aim is to understand how civil society and other non-state actors have shaped and influenced the larger dynamics of peace and conflict in Guyana and what set of strategies and actions, within the context of the particular time and place, contributed to that impact. The research aims to assess not simply the management of conflict, but whether it has been transformed from the perspectives of the major communities involved. This section of the case study distils the changes that occurred within different groups of actors -- professionals, local government, the Ethnic Relations Commission, CBOs and NGOs -- and how their actions affected communities, the political climate, and the course of events. Several additional factors, both domestic and international, that do not arise from the mobilisation of civic actors but which contributed to a violence-free election are also examined. The overall conclusion reinforces previous findings that the sum of actions in the civic space did indeed materially contribute to "peace writ large." The emphasis on citizen-centred peacebuilding helped break the cycle of election-related violence as hoped and also synchronized with the theme of the new multi-ethnic political party to emerge. While this relative peace has held up well under pressure since 2006, Guyana's ethnic conflict has not been resolved at a fundamental level.

Analysis of High-impact Activities

Often the question is asked, which action or set of actions had the most impact on preventing post-election violence? This study faces the inherent challenge of ascertaining which set or sets of interventions had the most impact on the overall course of events described. Making such a determination is a difficult and ultimately largely a subjective exercise given the nature of the problem, the difficulty of attribution and availability of data. Nonetheless, an attempt is made in Table 5 below to draw lines between cause and effect and provide an educated assessment of the strengths based on a framework developed by the field research team and informed by the interviews and site visits with those involved in the peacebuilding activities.

The framework examines each of the four types of programme interventions (Capacity Building & Training (CB&T); Advocacy & Mobilisation (A&M); Community Development Projects (CDPs); and the Multi-stakeholder Forum Dialogue (MSF) and examines their contribution to the following six impact variables that would contribute to the goals of promoting social cohesion, preventing violence, and furthering related reforms:

The **Geographic Reach** variable considers how extensive among the population the programme interventions reached from a qualitative and quantitative perspective;

The **Individual Change** variable considers the degree to which an intervention influenced an individual’s attitude and behaviour toward violence and their personal role in preventing it and promoting a more peaceful and tolerant culture;

The **Intra-Group Change** variable capture the dynamics within interest groups or NGOs that became involved in promoting peace as a new way of engagement with communities;

Inter-Group Change assesses the extent to which various interest groups or organisational entities were able to collaborate and promote peace and non-violence within the national setting;

The **Community Relations** variable looks at the impact of a given activity on neighbourly and inter-ethnic relations within specific geographic communities, neighbourhoods and across contiguous villages; and

The **Institutional Change** variable encompasses the degree to which public offices became more responsive to citizen concerns as a result of institutional reforms or capacity building.

Each intervention is ranked on a scale of 1 (high) to 5 (low). A fuller explanation of the rankings awarded for each intervention and criterion is provided below the table.

Table 5: Impact Ranking of Conflict Transformation Interventions

	Geographical Reach	Individual Change	Intra-Group Change	Inter-Group Change	Community Relations	Institutional Change
Capacity Building & Training	2	1	1	1	2	2
Advocacy & Mobilisation	2	2	1	2	3	5
Community Development Projects	2	3	1	2	2	4
MSF Dialogues	1	2	2	5	4	4

Scale of Ranking: 1 = very high; 2 = high; 3 = both high and low; 4=low; 5= very low.

Table 5 above shows that the capacity building and training activities achieved either “high” or “very high” ratings on each of the assessment criteria. None of the other activities scored consistently high across all categories. However, care should be taken against over interpreting this result based on the quantitative scale alone. The following discussion provides a more detailed and nuanced appreciation of each activity’s rating.

Capacity Building & Training (CB&T) - CB&T activities scored high in terms of geographic reach (2) because they drew in regional and local officials in the conflict-prone areas of five targeted regions, key individuals who could positively influence conflicts within their wide spheres of interest, and community members spread throughout the targeted geographic regions.

According to information gleaned from interviews, the CB&T workshops had the greatest impact (1) of any activity on individual attitudes and behaviour (Individual Change). As intended, this had downstream impact in other areas as at least 75 percent of the persons involved as peacebuilding activists and facilitators in the advocacy and mobilisation and community development components of the programs received conflict transformation training.

CB&T activities also were rated highly (1) in terms of the intra-group change they fostered as they featured medium- to long-term interaction among people within organisations and interest groups. These interventions helped people to work collaboratively with one another. This was particularly notable when groups were ethnically heterogeneous and thus the interaction crossed ethnic boundaries, whereas in ethnically homogeneous groups the potential for this growth did not exist.

The CB&T interventions scored highly (1) in terms of inter-group change by bringing diverse groups together over a long period of time, which resulted in changes in the way groups behaved and cooperated. See more details below in *Advocacy and Mobilisation*. In general, the positive impact of a given activity on neighbourly and inter-ethnic relations within specific geographic communities, neighbourhoods and across contiguous villages was based on the nature, duration and number of persons engaged. The CB&T activities had a high impact (2) on community relations in when trained individuals organised within their communities of interest. This occurred among some of the professionals and villagers who were trained in conflict transformation and AI, respectively.

Of all the activities, CB&T had the highest impact (2) on institutional change by influencing how local government officials approached community engagement and development. There was ample evidence that those officials who were trained in AI and by SCP became more proactive about discussing the challenges of community development with residents at public fora and meetings. In the case of the SCP, it led to

strong commitment to facilitating the youth-led community development projects. In other cases, the inverse is true; the community demand for development projects met with more responsive government officials who were more capable of discussing and acting on expressed community needs.

Advocacy & Mobilisation (A&M) - A&M activities received a relatively high score (2) for geographic reach as they were widely dispersed throughout the coastal areas of the country (where over 90 percent of the population is concentrated) and many focused on the greater capital city area given that it is the seat of government and prone to high levels of political conflict and violent protest. Citizen peace advocates also made effective use of the media to extend their reach into the homes and consciousness of the citizenry.

The A&M activities of the peace campaigns scored highly (2) on the individual change variable as well. As already examined in this report, citizens displayed high levels of willingness to promote and participate in all kinds of public peacebuilding activities.

A&M activities scored highly (1) in terms of promoting intra-group change by virtue of the intensive collaboration within NGOs, interest groups, and associations that was required to mobilise and carry out activities.

In terms of promoting inter-group change, the A&M activities were rated highly as well (2). According to this research, groups that were trained together had collaborated on at least two A&M activities, at times benefitting from the other's expertise and experience. Members were able to forge alliances and build bridges across differences. For a large majority of NGOs and groups, this level of inter-group mobilisation and cooperation had not occurred before in the history of their organisations. For instance, the religious community that previously avoided political issues, helped facilitate the endorsement of the peace pledge by the political parties. As this score indicates, trainings highly impacted relations between groups and organisations, more than mere involvement in advocacy and mobilisation activities.

The overall impact of A&M activities on community relations rated high in some neighbourhoods and low in others (3). As amplified in the upcoming section on *Impacts on Society as a Whole*, the research found that these activities positively changed individual attitudes toward conflicts and community and this had a trickle down effect of balancing community relations. At the same time, there were geographic locations where little tangible change with respect to community relations was discerned from advocacy efforts in the community or elsewhere.

Finally, the research found that A&M activities had limited or no impact on institutional change (5). There were no major institutional reforms that can be traced to advocacy activities and those instances of public offices becoming more responsive to community demands were attributed to capacity building interventions rather than advocacy.

Community Development Projects (CDPs) - CDPs scored relatively highly (2) in terms of geographic reach, not because of its nationwide scope but because they were targeted at a relevant geography of communities in three regions that, according to regional officials, had a history of past violence and election-related unrest.

Relative to other types of interventions, the CDPs had the least impact (3) on individual community members' attitudes and behaviours toward violence and tolerance (Individual Change). It is noteworthy that while the youth leading the CDPs had benefited from conflict transformation training, this was not the case for all of the community members who were ultimately involved in implementing local projects. In these projects youth leaders were more focused on working with each other, reaching agreement with local officials and residents on different aspects of community projects, and the various exigencies of completing the projects. The communities made compromises on the type and timing of locale-specific development projects that seem to work well for everyone. As such, the collaboration was more transactional and not informed by a common paradigm about how their collaboration could contribute to improved inter-group relations. This does not mean that ethnic tensions were ignored if they surfaced during the implementation of community projects. It is simply that the research did not find any explicit evidence that CDPs changed individual perspectives on, for example, ethnic or racial stereotypes of another village or community.

In terms of intra-group change, the CDPs scored very highly (1) as youths worked together in project committees to implement their locale-specific development projects. One challenge evident at this level was the ethnically homogeneous composition of some groups. As long as the intervention focused on a specific geographic community or village that was ethnically homogeneous there was no imperative to cross ethnic boundaries.

The CDPs achieved a relatively high score (2) in terms of inter-group change as well. The research found that some of the mentoring NGOs that facilitated projects in new communities developed positive relations with those communities that crossed cultural, religious or ethnic barriers and maintained these relationships even after the projects ended.

CDPs scored well on community relations (2), showing evidence of improved relations among residents and between residents and local officials who pursued projects to improve their neighbourhoods. Improved relations were aided by the leadership of youths trained in conflict transformation/resolution and the mediation of mentoring organisations. While involvement in community development projects may have supported positive community relations, as stated earlier this research found little evidence of individual transformation as a direct result of the community projects.

Finally, the CDPs did not score highly (4) in terms of any institutional change. These projects did not "trickle up" into any sort of change in local government legislation or

policy, although this was never an explicit aim of the project. There was some evidence that the CDPs provoked local officials to respond to community needs beyond the immediate needs of the project, although these examples were few.

MSF dialogues - The MSF dialogues received a high score (1) for geographic reach as it was the only intervention to be national in scope, covering all ten geographic regions. It was backed by a national institution (the ERC) and also received wide media coverage. The dialogue process went to communities, rather than bringing select individuals to a central location, and thus registered wider participation and appreciation by the public.

Participation in the MSF dialogues had significant impact (2) on individual change as well. They provided structured ‘safe spaces’ in the public domain for discussion of issues on the national agenda where none had previously existed.

The MSF dialogues also had a high impact in terms of intra-group change (2). For instance, the safe spaces created by this activity in villages and across villages allowed community development groups, associations, village committees and other groups of persons to speak openly about fears, past experiences and challenges, thus leading to new approaches to cooperation and collaboration within some groups. In some of the village meetings, the MSF dialogues proved to be cathartic; in such a safe space residents were able to openly confront wrongdoings and others offered apologies for past harm. This was exactly what some residents who were collaborating on CDPs needed to move forward together with common understanding.

The MSF dialogues had a very low impact (5) on inter-group change, but this was primarily due to the nature of the activity. Participants were drawn together from different locations for brief intervals to provide perspective on issues of importance, but not to work together on the resolution of challenges. The MSF dialogues did help to neutralise sentiments of favouritism as villagers from different areas learnt that they experienced common challenges and that there was little evidence of communities that were significantly better off than others. Maybe a deeper investment in problem solving and collaboration between different communities would have inspired higher levels of inter-group change.

Relatedly, the MSF Dialogues scored low (4) on Community Relations. These were not locale-specific community-level dialogues, so they did not help to resolve differences and promote understanding within a single community.

The ERC had the responsibility to compile a document of findings from the MSF Dialogues and National Conversation for submission to the Parliament. It did so and it was envisioned that an action plan would have flowed from this submission and would have resulted in some level of institutional change. However, this research did not find

any evidence that the Parliament used this document for national planning purposes, thus the MSF Dialogues ultimately rated low (4) in terms of Institutional Change.

As captured in the preceding analysis, these four high-impact activity areas each had different strengths when measured against the selected peacebuilding criteria. The MSF excelled in its geographic reach and the space for constructive release it provided to the thousands across the country who participated. The CBPs had a localised impact in critical areas and provided a constructive experience for the groups and communities involved. The A&M activities provided dozens of organisations and thousands of individuals with an opportunity to take a stand in the public square in favour of peace and send their message through a more attentive media. Providing an overall catalytic and inspirational stimulus for all of these activities was the CB&T activities in conflict transformation and conflict management, which gave hundreds the framework and skills to fan out and work for peace. Collectively these initiatives fit together in a way that helped influence the 2006 election process in the direction of peace.

Impact on Society as a Whole

The initiatives described in this study activated a diverse range of stakeholders including community-based organisations, cultural groups, government officials, media personnel, politicians, professionals and religious groups in the cause of peaceful elections. These groups were given a common framework for understanding how to manage conflict and what actions they could take, whether in their private lives or in the public realm, to prevent or defuse conflict and promote a more peaceful society. The linkages and networks supported through these efforts provided the basis for the alliances and collaboration that were needed as individuals and groups moved from knowledge acquisition to reflection to action. The initiatives of these groups were publicly visible and reinforced in the mind of ordinary citizens through frequent media coverage.

Civil society leaders and professionals trained in conflict transformation and dialogue pursued opportunities to use their newly acquired knowledge and skills within their own spheres of influence. With enhanced individual capacities for managing conflicts and promoting peace, there was an increase in the number of groups and organisations that started to engage in peacebuilding action. Individual efforts were complemented by collective action when professionals came together as the Spirit of Guyana and selected a coordinating committee that planned various team-building and peacebuilding initiatives during the pre-election period and launched a peace campaign, which included sustained peace messaging on radio and television. The SoG also trained and served as facilitators for the nationwide multi-stakeholder fora.

Officials of the ERC held the view that its outreach activities involving cultural and religious groups as well as the multi-stakeholder fora contributed to a significant shift in the behaviour of the population and coverage by the media. These officials noted a shift

in the mood of electioneering from one of mutual antagonism among contending parties to measured tolerance of opposing views.

Ordinary citizens pointed out during interviews for this research that the visibility and advocacy of civil society entities such as SoG, VYC, IRO, and BUG in the peace campaign inspired tolerance in others and motivated them to take personal action. Women in Yarrow Dam - a densely populated street in urban Georgetown - recalled that the peace messages on television and radio inspired them to reclaim their street from the forces of violence and crime. As one respondent said,

From changes at the individual and group level, similar positive changes occurred in communities around the country that had been identified by security forces as potential hot spots. Local government leaders were exposed to conciliation frameworks and tools. According to interviews with the NDC Chairman of the Enfield - New Doe Council (Region 6), after the first weekend of AI training with other NDC Chairpersons, he felt “transformed to realise the potential of the people in New Doe Park.” The Chairperson requested a workshop with the community, following which members formed the Enfield - New Doe Community Council (ENDCC). They felt that the AI training brought about greater unity and understanding among participants. They said it became easier to mobilise neighbours for community activities that included family fun days, cricket and football matches and civic education in schools by members of the ENDCC. The community activities reflected the ethno-cultural diversity of the communities involved so that residents were involved across the ethnic and religious spectrum of the communities within that geographic area. According to one workshop participant,

“AI improved interpersonal relations and helped persons to celebrate not what is wrong but what is right, to look at the positives. Persons now look at incidents as challenges, not as problems. It encourages closer bonds among all despite religion and social standings.”

The peacebuilding activities led by community-based organisations and NGOs found multiple expressions across communities and the relational impact was felt within the general population. Drawing from the information culled through focus group discussions and interviews with local officials, this research found that a significant or otherwise positive impact on community change vis-à-vis citizens interaction with each other. More specifically this relational impact of the citizen based initiatives bore evidence in citizen engagement experiences recounted and observed; the safe spaces created for local dialogues; the openness of politicians interacting with citizens in public fora; and the cross-community inter-ethnic socialization. It is useful to discuss these four features of community change in further detail.

Firstly, interviewees testified that community change was evident where young people were able to improve their knowledge and skills and use time productively, thus allowing more direct citizen involvement in developing the community. Citizens also

reiterated positive learning from the training in conflict transformation, including the need for positive and peaceful approaches to differences, cooperation, and shared responsibility to maintain peace in their communities. Nevertheless, some challenges and limitations were noted. Interviewees cited slow changes in discriminatory attitudes and behaviour within the community at large. One example of this was the claim by individuals in one location that market prices for goods at local shops varied depending on one's ethnicity.

Secondly, the ERC's outreach activities did create a safe space for Guyanese to agree on strategies for overcoming ethnic and other differences and to articulate their own role in the development of their community and country. In the post-election period, Guyanese were able to sit and talk with each other at the National Conversation in a respectful and highly interactive manner about national challenges in ways not done before. Interestingly, interviews with politicians revealed that they all felt that the public and civil society had flawed assumptions about the lack of communication across ethnic and political divides. Several essentially said, "We always talk to each other." The difference the National Conversation made was in the quality and purpose of the conversation. It became a meeting of exchange, analysis, and learning that familiarised citizens with the notion of "talking to", "talking with" and "speaking for," and thus watered the seeds of tolerance with good process skills for community democratic dialogues. In the words of one politician, "community dialogue changed the mentality of the population." Views from the citizens on the value of the MSF were that it provided the opportunity for a wide cross section of Guyanese to vent grievances, voice their aspirations and hope that the Parliament would address the issues through a new policy agenda. The fact of being in the same room, being heard by politicians and public officials provided the coolant that reduced incentives for mass protest about grievances.

Thirdly, town hall style forums on violence and elections hosted through the GPBN opened a space for public discourse on how to promote peace, which until then had mainly been channelled through letters to the editor in daily newspapers. The fact that ordinary Guyanese could put questions to their leaders in a public forum represented a significant milestone in a highly centralised system.

Fourthly, community development projects promoted greater interaction among individuals of different ethnicities both within and from surrounding communities. Especially through sports and other team-based activities, provisions were made to indirectly teach community members the importance of living harmoniously and how to implement community action plans with broad participation and support. One such example of the impact of community action came from the experience of the Farm-Zeskendren residents who benefitted from conflict transformation training and decided together to refurbish a community centre.

Residents interviewed by the research team in Farm-Zeskendren said, “Persons must put their differences aside.” Although it was evident that there were underlying ethnic divides within the community, the centre’s services were accessible to all residents and saw cross-communal participation by African, Indian, and Amerindian Guyanese in almost all activities. Another young man who participated in the community development project refurbishing the recreational centre and ground was adamant that “the community recreation centre instilled in the community members, especially the young ones, that coming together and working for our own benefit is the only way forward.” The centre is now the central venue for training and the location for ad hoc social services and recreation in the Mahaicony area. The attitudes highlighted in this community story point out that the community understood well enough that differences will remain but they agreed to focus on the higher goal of unity, cooperation and social cohesion.

This kind of transformative community experience occurred in fourteen other communities, yielding pockets of citizens with a new approach to community development, difference, ethnic harmony and tolerance. New attitudes were reinforced by broadly-cast media messages of non-violence, peace and social cohesion. According to those interviewed, the overall positive impact of the SCP and Appreciative Inquiry processes was the paradigm shift among citizens toward dialogue as the first option to address conflicts. In terms of the specific outcome, non-violent elections signalled that Guyanese were capable of finding alternative ways to handle grievances that surfaced during the elections and the post-election period. Even though there were fewer issues of contention in the GGRE period, citizens found mechanisms other than violent means to express themselves.

Impact on the National Discourse

One aim of this research was to seek out whether the ideas and discourses of social cohesion might have penetrated more deeply into society and endured several years later. It is noteworthy that many communities did not use the term “peacebuilding” regularly even though their activities, approaches, and motivations were intended to foster harmony and improve social relations generally, and more specifically to create spaces for greater interaction across ethnic and political divisions. Most citizens interviewed knew the term “social cohesion” that UNDP used throughout the programme. Different locales understood the terms “peacebuilding” and “social cohesion,” differently, some as a substitute for “racial harmony,” “unity” or “tolerance.” According to one interviewee, the concept of ‘All awe is one’ (All of us are one people) had greater local resonance than social cohesion. Another phrase that entered the local lexicon was “conflict transformation.” The researchers found that its meaning is less well understood by many interviewees who use it interchangeably with conflict resolution.

The mobilisation and advocacy of civic groups also affected the lexicon of the body-politic. Officials could be heard using terms like “cohesion,” “working together,” “living together,” and “inclusion.” Such language was previously minimal in the political lexicon of Guyana. The discourse of conflict transformation permeated the discourse of religious, cultural, labour and business groups and the media, in stark contrast to the high-octane political rhetoric of the past. The elections campaigns were less vicious and aggressive than previous years. The new political party, the Alliance for Change, presented itself as a viable alternative through the campaign theme “Don’t vote race, Vote change.” Some citizens felt that the AFC party’s outright rejection of racial violence hemmed in the usual excesses of the main protagonists and resonated with many residents in the urban centre.

A review of the president’s inaugural speeches of 2001 and 2006 revealed that there were more instances of language that embraced the idea of addressing the divisions and divisiveness of society. For instance, while the Inaugural Address of 2001 references unity and togetherness more often than the Inaugural Address of 2006 (perhaps due to the unrest in the immediate aftermath of the 2001 elections), there is more of an emphasis in the latter on the ideals of cooperation, cohesion, harmony and hope. Other aspects of the speech also revealed that the prevailing national discourse had not escaped the President Jagdeo when he stated:

“...I intend to meet with the leaders of the several political parties represented in the National Assembly in order to engage them in finding a modus of cooperation through which they can contribute to national development. We will have to hammer out together this framework of cooperation in which the ideas and views that are sound and positive can become part of an evolving policy environment and provide those parties that are interested, the opportunity of assisting with their implementation.”

This new approach manifested approximately seventeen months later, when the president convened an unprecedented meeting of civil society leaders to formulate a response to a massacre of innocent civilians in the village of Lusignan in January 2008. That meeting agreed to support a national security plan to deal with the escalation of crime in the country.

Moreover the media played a formidable role in the evolution of the national discourse. To the extent that the media reflected the national conversations taking place countrywide, it was significant that stories of mayhem and violence were replaced or at least offset in some measure by stories of communities in dialogue, peacebuilding activities. The media contributed to reshaping the national discourse by covering all groups involved and providing balanced conflict-sensitive analysis of the political campaigns and appealed for reasoned judgments in response to difficult situations.

**Other
Factors**

While the multi-level peacebuilding strategy featured in the SCP and other programmes in the lead up to the 2006 elections helped to influence the course of events, they did not take place in isolation. Indeed, there were other important developments and actions that cannot be ignored that in some instances interacted with the peacebuilding initiatives in important ways. While this makes it difficult to isolate any single element as decisive, such a focus ultimately is misplaced. Understanding the ways in which peacebuilding initiatives such as those witnessed in Guyana interacted with other actions and developments can provide a much richer appreciation of how success happens. This section briefly examines a number of other factors that contributed to the peaceful elections and if and how they interacted with those initiatives that are the focus of this study.

The actual organisation and conduct of the 2006 elections by election authorities is a significant variable for consideration. Previous incidents of post-election violence have coincided with public anxiety and demonstrations over electoral process shortcomings. GECOM's performance in the 2006 elections was improved over 1997 and 2001 (OAS, 2006, pp. 1-2). The voter list was a source of far less contention in 2006 and problems with the delivery of voter ID cards in 2001 were not repeated. The process of tabulating and announcing the final results - long a source of anxiety in Guyana's elections - was less chaotic and more transparent than in the past, although there was still room for improvement. It has also been observed that making election day 2006 a national holiday helped reduce traffic congestion which enhanced public security and made voting easier. A more capably run electoral process minimised the opportunities for shortcomings to erode public confidence or be the source of political conflict.

The role of mass media in the elections of 2006 was greatly improved over 2001 (OAS, 2006, p. 14). Laws on racial incitement had been strengthened and GECOM's Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) was widely recognised as having organised a stronger effort. The MMU reissued the Media Code of Conduct to which most of the major media outlets, editors and media practitioners pledged commitment. It monitored the media and issued regular public reports detailing any violations. An Independent Referral Panel of Caribbean media specialists monitored compliance while bodies such as the Guyana Press Association and its members engaged in self-monitoring and levying internal sanctions (Simmons & Myers, 2006, p. 16). While there were problems with balance in political coverage, the greater concern was with television talk shows that did not exercise enough quality control over the misinformation and unsubstantiated claims made by guests and callers. Notwithstanding the continued existence of these problems, the media environment was notably less provocative and incendiary than in 1997 and 2001.

Professional election observation by local and international observers has become a staple of Guyanese elections since 1992 and the 2006 elections were no different. The

Organisation of American States, The Commonwealth, CARICOM and The Carter Centre all sent observer missions. The Electoral Assistance Bureau, a domestic observer group, mobilised over 2000 volunteers (an unprecedented number) in one of its largest observation efforts, which included a pre-election violence monitoring component. While noting that the periods leading up to and after the elections were relative peaceful when compared with other elections, the EAB still noted the tense atmosphere ahead of the elections which was punctuated by several execution-style murders of prominent political personalities. Despite these provocations the violence remained isolated. The EAB acknowledges the contribution of the peacebuilding initiatives to the relative quiet of this period (EAB, 2007, pp. 22-23).

A number of militant television and radio personalities and others associated with violent incidents at previous elections were absent from the local scene either through migration, incarceration, or death (Simmons and Myers, 2006, p. 14). While some might argue that this could clearly explain the absence of violence, this would be too superficial a reading of the situation. All available evidence suggests that the people of Guyana would not have been receptive to calls for violence or even militancy ahead of the election. While some may attribute this to a pacification impact of the SCP, the authors do not believe this gives enough credit to the agency and will of the Guyanese people.

Perhaps one of the most significant developments was the emergence of a new political party, the Alliance for Change, which featured a youthful, multiethnic leadership and a message of hope and change. The two leaders of the AFC were an East Indian and African who had left the PPP and PNCR, respectively, after challenging their parties' policies and leadership practices. Their status as up-and-coming leaders in their respective parties gave significance to their decision to leave and create a new political party. The peacebuilding activities involved and engaged many youth and young voters who were open to calls for a change from the past. The leadership of the AFC acknowledged that the party felt its message resonated with those of the peace activists and were mutually reinforcing. A cursory analysis of election results suggest that some former supporters of the opposition PNCR saw enough reason to migrate to the AFC.

Finally, a previous study of the 2006 elections (Simmons & Myers, 2006, pp. 12, 16) noted that some observers suggest that the threat of "visa diplomacy" by the United States, Britain and Canada played a role in tempering provocative behaviour among political elites. During the period of the phantom squad killings the U.S. revoked the visa of the Minister of Home Affairs and the Commissioner of Police. It is suggested that among the elite there was a perception that Western donor countries might revoke the visas of anyone threatening the peace of the country, although this is difficult to verify.

That all of the aforementioned factors had a cumulative influence on the positive post-election climate of 2006 is not in dispute. However, the fact that several of these factors existed in previous elections gives some pause to thinking that they might have been sufficient in and of themselves to bring about the positive election results. For example, GECOM has successively improved its election administration in each successive election since 1992. International and domestic observer groups were present at previous elections that ended in controversy and post-election violence. Media monitoring mechanisms and training have featured in recent elections as well and by no means have they banished ethnically inflammatory statements from the airwaves. In light of these observations it is the conclusion of these researchers that the actively engaged citizenry of Guyana had a definitive impact on the peaceful elections of 2006.

Section 8 - Concluding Analysis

A. Programmatic Perspective

The basic thrust of the incipient peacebuilding efforts that started in 2001 and then became more formalised and programmatic from 2003-2006 employed a strategic conflict transformation approach. These efforts sought to engage multiple levels and multiple actors to address direct, structural, and cultural violence. They drew upon cultural values of neighbourliness and tolerance, engaged youth who were less invested in historic ethno-political rivalries, created new public spaces in which a discourse of peace and non-violence could flourish, and attempted to counter the centrifugal ethnic tendencies of Guyanese politics. The question can be fairly asked at this point whether the approach succeeded in its goals.

In this study, citizens in the general population who were not involved in particular peacebuilding activities felt that the activities had a significant impact on the general attitudes towards the elections outcome. Many citizens had seen messages on television, heard radio announcements, songs or some other form of appeal to non-violence. This was combined with the more generally favourable role of the media, which was singled out for reporting on elections and election incidents with more sensitivity than previous elections. Some interviewees attributed this to the signing of the Media Code of Conduct. Journalists pointed to the research team that besides the International Media Monitoring Panel, which provided weekly reports throughout the entire election (pre and post) on media behaviour, they also exercised a fair deal self-censorship.

Citizens who were themselves actively engaged in implementation of the peacebuilding activities did not feel that a single activity or intervention was solely responsible for the positive outcome. They attributed the cumulative impact to the diverse efforts targeted at individuals across all levels within the society. Opposition

political parties were more willing to acknowledge the positive impact of civil society peacebuilding efforts than the incumbent PPP/C. Interviews with at least three high-level PPP/C officials revealed an inclination to be dismissive of civil society and citizen peacebuilding efforts and instead privilege official institutional interventions, such as better security, electoral reforms, better election administration, the presence of international observers, and activities by the ERC. Politicians of the two main parties praised the conflict transformation workshop for party leaders. These party officials believed that the improved skills and disposition across political parties as a result of this training came into play in response to the massacres that occurred in 2008. Leaders from all political and non-political spaces joined the state in condemning the gross human rights violations and in responding to the crisis.

At the grassroots level, it was clear that individual capacities for conflict resolution were enhanced thus increasing the number of groups and organisations with conflict management capabilities. Citizens, saturated with the messaging on peace, were not inclined to accept violence as a response to their party losing elections. In fact, in the immediate aftermath of the elections, a prominent African leader criticised the peacebuilding initiatives as a grand exercise in pacification of the African community with a clear lack of focus on justice and community reconciliation. He accused professionals and practitioners of being co-conspirators with the donor community to suppress any form of protest and expression of grievance. Whether or not one agrees with this judgment, it does speak from a critical perspective to the impact that these activities had on the dynamics of the peaceful election.

The research team also found that large sections of the population remained unaffected by the peacebuilding initiatives. Overcome by the needs of personal safety and security, those unaffected by messages of peace were less likely to reach across villages to work towards a common goal. This is one sign that the SCP and AI initiatives may have only reached the tip of the iceberg, and such initiatives need to go deeper over a longer period to have a truly profound impact.

There is also the question of the sustainability of some of the civil society initiatives. Initiatives to build upon and sustain civil society's reach and voice through continued capacity building and networking met with mixed results. In the years following the 2006 elections, SoG continued to provide conflict resolution/transformation training to other institutions and organisations. The group decided against legal formalisation and chose to maintain a low public profile with individual members using their profile and skills to help manage conflicts at various levels. Over time the public profile of SoG as an entity diminished. The GPBN brought together online all individuals (inclusive of SoG) who received conflict transformation training. Its members sponsored a public forum of candidates ahead of the elections and commissioned a study of the impact of citizen initiatives in the immediate aftermath of the elections. With the exception of

these activities, the GPBN existed only as an online network and did not taken on overt peacebuilding initiatives in the years since the conclusion of the SCP. Several facilitators trained by the SCP formed a Facilitators' Forum in 2007 which was active through at least 2010. It formed as a way for those with facilitation skills to network and continue to hone their craft, but did not get involved in any conflict management activities.

This study was keenly interested in whether the citizen, community, and civil society peacebuilding efforts made an impact on political parties or parliament in terms of influencing the political culture toward consensus building over confrontation. Evidence for this potential impact includes the vertical fertilisation of ideas and collaboration between intermediaries/professionals and community groups. Citizens now place greater demand on their political leaders for a different way of doing politics. Overall, efforts at conciliation among elite level actors had much less traction and progress than the SCP had originally hoped. On the other hand, the politicians interviewed for this study pointed out the usefulness of efforts by intermediaries to bring them together, even if they did not achieve major policy or political breakthroughs. However, it was much harder to determine the deeper impacts of the demand for conciliatory approaches had on the political elite.

Finally, it is worth recognising the skill with which the SCP, in particular, combined its role as an external catalyst with encouraging local ownership. Essentially the SCP initiatives were externally driven and locally owned, a combination that usually spells failure but in this case was successful. International donor partners supported local initiatives to the extent that these were situated within their framework of cooperation with the government, but citizens had the freedom to design individual community projects and initiatives and to decide on the method of implementation. This approach borrows the idea of a neutral, third-party role in conflict situations and is worth replicating in other conflict-affected environments.

B. A Strategic Perspective

As documented, the strategic peacebuilding efforts examined in this study began when key actors in the international community adopted a new conflict resolution strategy predicated on engaging wider Guyanese society through a multi-level, multi-actor approach. This represented a departure from the elite level mediation that had been favoured up to that point. The strategy found expression in the idea of helping to catalyse a "third force" of citizens to counter the polarising tendencies of Guyanese politics. The hope behind this shift in strategy was that, at a minimum, explosive violence at the 2006 elections could be averted and, ideally, a breakthrough on the structural questions of a more satisfactory governance model could be achieved. A strategy based on encouraging dialogue and nonviolence was also expected to

contribute to cultural peacebuilding within Guyanese society. How does this intervention look with the passage of time?

This research concludes that the strategy succeeded in direct citizen peacebuilding by helping to bring about peaceful elections in 2006. It also has contributed to social change and cultural peacebuilding through its influence on the public discourse and by teaching and advancing the practice of dialogue to resolve problems, although there is far more to be done to improve ethnic relations at all levels. Where the strategy enjoyed the least success is in changing the structural dynamics - addressing the so-called “governance crisis” of the early 2000s - that aggravated ethnic relations in Guyana. However, by averting another electoral crisis and violence it may have done so indirectly as suggested below.

Avoiding explosive violence at the 2006 elections was a significant achievement. A cycle of election-related violence that had infected all elections since the return to competitive elections in the 1990s was broken in circumstances that appeared to be far more ominous than in previous pre-election periods. This is a remarkable accomplishment and should not be trivialised or downplayed in the face of lesser progress in other areas. When violence does not happen, the costs that had been feared in terms of lives, property, and human trauma are not incurred and are quickly forgotten. But another round of violent and contested elections in Guyana would have contributed to a normalising of electoral violence and a deepening cycle of national trauma that might still have been felt these many years later. Just because Guyana did not achieve a new governance consensus, national reconciliation or bridge the cultural rifts that keep its major communities apart should not distract from this achievement.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the approach embodied most visibly in the SCP did not achieve as much as many had hoped. There are several factors that explain this. Programmatic interventions by the international community have significant limits. They are time and resource constrained. Once the elections were over, the SCP and similar programmes were closed down and the explicit international support for peacebuilding in Guyana ended. Indeed, this suggests that the set of factors and actors that made the SCP and the like possible could not hold together after the election. Some suggest that once the election was past, the government was less interested in social cohesion and redirected donor support to other governance and economic issues. Put another way, the programmes represented a marriage of convenience for conflict prevention rather than a deep commitment to conflict transformation. Transforming the relationships between Guyana’s ethnic communities would have to start with a basic political consensus on the problem followed by a strategy and deep and abiding investments in dialogue-based initiatives, capacity building, and enabling policies put in place by the state to promote reconciliation, trust and cooperation.

Another factor that mitigated against structural change was the reluctance of the major political parties to cede space to civil society initiatives. This is coupled with civil society's own weaknesses and divisions, only some of which were overcome with programmatic support. As the election campaign approached, the climate became even more inhospitable to any kind of political dialogue about governance and constitutional reform. Eventually, the overwhelming imperative of preventing violence at the elections became the priority for citizens and the international community, including the UN and the SCP.

With the benefit of time it can be argued that the strategic peacebuilding approach indirectly helped to relieve the structural pressures on the system by facilitating the entry of a new political player. In Guyana's experience, it has always been difficult for new political parties to gain vote share in the face of an ethnically-polarised electorate. The nonpartisan mobilisation of citizens ahead of the 2006 elections around a discourse about ethnic harmony, multiculturalism and change helped to weaken this polarisation and create an opening of which the AFC was positioned to take advantage. With experienced and well-known leaders drawn from the African and East Indian communities, the AFC tapped into a desire for change, particularly among youth, and captured five seats in parliament in 2006. With its focus on promoting a civic movement or an alternative voice, the strategic peacebuilding approach may have had the unintended consequence of allowing for a new political third force to emerge and shake up the bipolar dynamics of the political system.

The structural governance dilemma that rose to the forefront of politics in the early 2000s was based on the interaction of an iron triangle of three factors: a stable two party system based on bicomunal ethnic voting blocks, a clear demographic advantage for one of the ethnic groups, and a winner-take-all system based on proportionality. Together these factors created a situation in which one ethnic community felt hopeless of ever being successful at the polls. History had shown that both major parties not could attract significant cross-communal support and both had been unwilling to fundamentally change the electoral system when the constitution was reformed in the late 1990s. Given a perennially polarised electorate and the fact that few saw decisive demographic change in the cards, most of the political debate was focused on addressing the third factor by constitutional engineering through consociationalism. As it turned out, however, the first two factors of ethnic voting and demographics were in some flux as the 2006 elections approached.

Census and immigration data were showing that the East Indian demographic advantage was slowly being eroded. What was a clear Indian numerical advantage of 51 percent in 1980 had dropped to 43 percent by 2002 with the Afro-Guyanese proportion of the population staying basically the same. All indications were that it was continuing to decline. This meant that, all things being equal, election outcomes

could be influenced by small swing group; for example the Amerindian population, or a depressed turnout or voter defection from either of the major ethnic communities. This softening of the demographic driver of election outcomes, combined with a powerful discourse for tolerance and change that helped depolarise the electorate, gave the AFC an opportunity to capture a small but meaningful foothold in the 2006 election and potentially shake-up parliamentary politics.

It remains to be seen whether the AFC will be able to maintain and grow a multi-ethnic constituency that translates into success in future elections. The other major parties will respond and recalibrate their strategies in the face of new competition. And while a new dynamic may be playing at the level of electoral politics, this does not necessarily signify a fundamental change in the underlying ethnic relations, which have stymied Guyana's development since independence. Ultimately, time will tell. Nevertheless, the case is made that a new strategic approach emphasising civic engagement for peace in 2006 had fundamental, if unanticipated, consequences for Guyana's ethno-political situation.

Epilogue

The 2006 elections were followed five years later in November 2011 with another round of General and Regional Elections in Guyana. The intervening period saw several shocking incidents of criminal violence in Lusignan, Bartica and Agricola in which masked gunmen with semi-automatic weapons gunned down innocents, including children, in their homes and on the streets. Thanks to the cool-headed response of Guyanese leaders and citizens, these assaults did not trigger another crime wave or push Guyana into ethnic conflict. The 2011 elections came off peacefully; the second in Guyana's history and a consolidation of the change witnessed in 2006. The PPP/C again won the presidency and the right to form the government with a plurality of the vote. However, this time the AFC and a PNCR-led coalition (APNU) together gained enough seats to form a majority in the National Assembly, leading to the anomaly of a minority government in a Westminster-type system. This result put a measure of real legislative and political power into the hands of the Opposition that had not been seen in years. It is unclear whether this new alignment of forces will lead to collaboration, cooperation and accommodation, or more conflict and gridlock.

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Annex A: Community Meeting Participants

NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (Peace Practitioners)			
	Ms. Eve Patrick	Youth Challenge Guyana	Region 3
	Ms. Rolinda Kirton	Spirit of Guyana	Region 4
	Ms. Vanda Radzik	Spirit of Guyana	Region 4
	Ms. Treena Dundas	Spirit of Guyana	Region 4
	Mr. Abbas Mancey	Spirit of Guyana	Region 4
	Ms. Janelle Leitch	Volunteer Youth Corps.	Region 4
	Ms. Goldie Scott	Volunteer Youth Corp	Region 4
	Mr. Terrence Simmons	Guyana Peacebuilders Network	Region 4
	Mr. Rohan Sagar	Guyana Peacebuilders Network	Region 4
	Mr. Walter Alexander	Partners for Peace and Development	Region 4
	Ms. Clonel Samuels & Team	Women Across Differences	Region 4
	Mr. Alex Foster & Team	St. Francis Community Developers	Region 6
	Mr. Shawn Brandt & Team	Bikers United	Region 6
INDEPENDENTS (Peace Practitioners)			
	Ms. Beverly Chan	AI Practitioner	Region 4
	Mr. Basil Williams	Mediator	Region 4
COMMUNITY MEMBERS (Peacebuilders)			
	Mr. Gavin Jessmy	Parika	Region 3
	Mr. Mohindi Gobin	Salem	Region 3
	Ms. Hemwantie Bascom	Salem	Region 3
	Ms. Moana Grimes	Salem	Region 3

	Mr. Bholu Persaud	Salem	Region 3
	Ms. Chandrawati Grimes	Salem	Region 3
	Mr. Azeez Mohamed	Salem	Region 3
	Mr. Burchill Vyphuis	Salem	Region 3
	Ms. Annette Vyphuis	Salem	Region 3
	Ms. Amanda Gobind	Salem	Region 3
	Ms. Rose Browne	Salem	Region 3
	Ms. Debbie Johnson	Salem	Region 3
	Ms. Ann Greene & Team	Yarrow-Dam	Region 4
	Ms. Vanessa Braam	Better Hope	Region 4
	Ms. Samantha Roghoo	Better Hope	Region 4
	Ms. Oma Devi Mangol	Better Hope	Region 4
	Mr. Layland Harris	Friendship, Buxton	Region 4
	Ms. Peggy Wade	Vigilance	Region 4
	Ms. Ashanti Trotman	Plaisance	Region 4
	Ms. Keisha Clement	Non-Pariel	Region 4
	Ms. Nathalie Persaud	De- Hoop	Region 5
	Mr. Dindial Goree	De- Hoop	Region 5
	Mr. Totaram Mohabir	De- Hoop	Region 5
	Ms. Sadeem Persaud	De- Hoop	Region 5
	Ms. Seeta Charran Mahadeo	De- Hoop	Region 5
	Mr. Rohit Lakhan	De- Hoop	Region 5
	Ms. Latchmie Dindial	De- Hoop	Region 5
	Ms. Jenise John	Farm - Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. Ann Shepherd	Farm - Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. Roxanne Joseph	Farm - Zeskendren	Region 5

	Mr. Conrad Charles	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Mr. Claude Roberts	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. Rasala Wills	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Mr. Grayon Williams	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. Jennifer Skeete	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Mr. Mahadeo Blyedat	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Mr. Berkland Sobers	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. Paula Cameron	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. Juliet Sobers	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. Beverley Chiched	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Mr. Rudyard Tappin	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. June Hope	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Mr. Nigel Lewis	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Mr. Charles Joseph	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Mr. Fitzroy Prince	Farm – Zeskendren	Region 5
	Ms. Jude Ramkissoon	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Mr. Sewekarran Nanhu	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Ms. Seeluchnie Bridglall	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Ms. Khemranie Bhisundial	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Ms. Andrea Franco	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Ms. Ada Campbell	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Ms. Karen France	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Ms. Tinencia Austin	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Ms. Abigail James	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6
	Ms. Shamena Azim	Enfield New Doe NDC	Region 6

Annex B: Key Informants Interviewed

No.	Name	Organization	Geographical Location
GOVERNMENT/COMMISSION			
	Ms. Gail Teixeira	Presidential Advisor on Governance	Region 4
	Chairman Dookie	Neighborhood Democratic Council	Region 3
	Mr. Allan Munroe	Fmr. Chairman Regional Democratic Council	Region 4
	Chairman S. Nanhu	Neighborhood Democratic Council	Region 6
	Chairman Edghill & Team	Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC)	Region 4
	Ms. Christine King	CEO, Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC)	Region 4
	Mr. John Williams	Member, Ethnic Relations Commission	Region 4
POLITICAL PARTIES			
	Mr. D. Ramotar & Team	Peoples Progressive Party Civic	Region 4
	Mr. O. Clarke & Team	Peoples National Congress Reform	Region 4
	Mr. Stanley Ming	Peoples National Congress Reform	Region 3
	Mr. Vincent Alexander	Peoples National Congress Reform	Region 4
	Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan & Team	Alliance For Change	Region 4
	Ms. Sheila Holder	Alliance For Change	Region 4
CIVIL SOCIETY			
	Mr. Eric Phillips	African Cultural Development Association	Region 4
	Mr. Bal Persaud	Private Sector Commission	Region 4

No.	Name	Organization	Geographical Location
MEDIA			
	Mr. Adam Harris	Prime News Media	Region 4
	Mr. Enrico Woolford	Capitol News	Region 4
	Mr. Denis Chabrol	British Broadcasting Commission Local Correspondent	Region 4
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS			
	Mr. Chetam Kumar	United Nations Development Programme, BCPR	USA
	Mr. Trevor Benn	United Nations Development Programme	Region 4
	Mr. Lawrence Lachmansingh	Canadian International Department Agency	Region 4
	Ms. Gloria Richards - Johnson	Research Triangle International Guyana CCRD /USAID	Region 4
	Ms. Duane Pratt	Research Triangle International Guyana CCRD /USAID	Region 4

Annex C: Roundtable Participants

GEORGETOWN ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS	
Ms. Gillian Daniels	Canadian International Department Agency
Ms. Carleen Langford	Canadian International Department Agency
Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan	Alliance For Change
Ms. Sheila Holder	Alliance For Change
Ms. Shellon Eversley	Partners for Peace and Development
Ms. Dianne Hinds	Partners for Peace and Development
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Mr. Lawrence Lachmansingh	Canadian International Department Agency
Mr. Mark Montgomery	Department For International Development
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Mr. Jason Calder	Future Generations
Mr. Troy Christopher	Videographer