



Peace processes

Despite an increase in conflicts resolved by negotiated settlement, violent conflict frequently recurs over time. Full implementation of agreements often proves difficult and reconciliation can remain elusive. Negotiation processes and peace agreements are important to bring an end to immediate violence and set the framework for political, economic and social conciliation. However, supporting sustainable and just peace is a long-term endeavour that often begins in advance of negotiation attempts and continues well after a peace agreement is concluded.

At Conciliation Resources we believe that current approaches to peace processes should be strengthened in order to promote the conditions for durable peace. We work to support peace processes that go beyond official talks and represent the priorities and interests of diverse constituencies.

Shifting the focus

Peace agreements can be key milestones on the road to long-term peace but they are not the end destination. They may only represent the ambitions of a small number of those affected by conflict and with a stake in peace. They therefore need to be accompanied by initiatives at multiple levels of society. In practice this implies:

- *'Democratising' the negotiating table* – providing opportunities for a broader range of actors and interests to be represented in formal peace talks either directly or indirectly.
- *'Democratising' the peace process* – this requires reducing the emphasis on and the expectations of what negotiations can deliver and recognising the range of formal and informal efforts, at multiple levels of society, that contribute to securing sustainable peace.
- *A shift from the hierarchy of peace 'tracks' to interconnected, complementary and diverse paths to peace.* This requires finding ways to link negotiations and official talks with unofficial initiatives that may take place primarily at civil society level.
- *Building solid foundations* for peace talks, if and when they do take place. Discussions within and between conflict sides can be necessary to prepare parties and society for talks, and create a context conducive to negotiation, compromise and reconciliation.

What do we mean by a 'peace process'?

We understand a peace process to be a series of initiatives designed to bring about an end to armed conflict, create the basis for a new inclusive political settlement and support reconciliation. This involves both formal and informal efforts to help the conflict parties and wider society reframe the conflict, reform institutions and transform relationships. These diverse initiatives that generate the conditions conducive for long-lasting peace are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

A broad-based peace agenda

A sustainable peace process involves fundamental conversations about what kind of society people want. A broad-based peace agenda goes beyond the narrow interests of the immediate conflict parties to encompass the priorities of a wide range of perspectives within a conflict context, including those of women, minorities, youth and displaced groups.

Multiple paths in Mindanao

In 1993, the Philippines developed a framework of Six Paths to Peace for the Mindanao peace process, with negotiations just one of these paths. Other parallel paths were: socio-economic reforms; continuous consultations; developing an atmosphere conducive to peace; reconciliation; and protection of civilians. The framework legitimised and validated long-held demands for reform from civil society as well as recognition of their peace efforts and the need for such efforts to continue. In peace talks from 2009-2012, the negotiating parties opened multiple venues for participation in decision-making beyond the formal negotiating table. Implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement, signed in March 2014, continues to provide space for broader participation, including for local civil society as formal members of implementation bodies.

International actors can have complementary roles. In Mindanao, the International Contact Group – a hybrid mediation support structure – included states and international NGOs. While states provided diplomatic leverage, international NGOs had the flexibility to engage with a range of actors, explore new ideas and provide specific expertise in conflict transformation. As a member, Conciliation Resources provided analysis of the peace panels' draft documents, and discussion papers on transition, normalisation and devolution of policing.

Unofficial and informal peace efforts

Official peace talks are often preceded or accompanied by years of unofficial and informal peace efforts – usually undertaken by national and international NGOs and civil society – that help lay the ground for formal negotiations or maintain momentum when official processes are stuck. They can also prepare populations for an eventual settlement by opening up discussion within each community or 'side' of the compromises inherent in any peace agreement. Such efforts help transform conflictual societal relations by working to change behaviour and attitudes, and build trust and confidence between communities and across conflict lines.

Furthermore, informal and complementary initiatives can provide opportunities for more people to discuss and shape the resolution of substantive issues – including security challenges, opportunities for economic development, and the political settlement. A peace process that encompasses such initiatives can promote a sense of responsibility and ownership for common and shared issues.

In Kashmir, the Georgian-Abkhaz context and the Basque country – contexts in which formal talks are stalled – Conciliation Resources has supported a range of civil society initiatives that allow people to share perspectives and discuss substantive issues. In the Basque country, these issues included disarmament, reintegration of prisoners and dealing with the past. In Kashmir, civil society has explored options to transform relations across the Line of Control through trade and education initiatives.

Such initiatives can operate without some of the constraints of formal negotiations and can be a useful forum to provoke new thinking and generate creative ideas for policymakers to help move the formal peace talks forward.

Promoting parallel and complementary initiatives to peace talks

Inclusion does not necessarily mean more people at the negotiating table. It can be about ensuring that those taking part in talks are mindful of views outside the negotiations and creating appropriate channels to

facilitate this. Alternative, parallel and complementary initiatives can be effective in linking the formal and informal spheres, and allowing for the inclusion of a broad range of perspectives and interests. They are an essential part of the peace process itself.

In Colombia, we have been supporting the Women, Peace and Security Collective for Reflection and Action. Comprising women from multiple sectors of Colombian society – including sectors traditionally opposed to each other such as the military and human rights groups – the Collective has developed a Peace Pact of 15 principles that it deems essential for a peaceful society. The initiative has been designed to complement the formal peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It also facilitates the involvement of civil society and those normally marginalised in a highly patriarchal society.

Such initiatives may also cultivate the conditions for a more inclusive society post-agreement. While peace processes often do reflect specific balances of power, they can also be an opportunity to open up discussion on existing power relations that contribute to conflict and injustice and that reinforce the particular unrepresentative gender, ethnic, social, economic and cultural structures in that context.

The London Process brings together Georgian and Abkhaz civil society and officials as well as international diplomats for informal dialogue. The emphasis is on information sharing, joint analysis and working together to develop practical solutions to key problems, including access to education, freedom of movement, dealing with the past, and community security. Through careful selection of participants and by creating channels to communicate with those involved in the formal talks, it is hoped that the ideas generated can help inform the internationally-mediated Geneva discussions.

The legitimacy of institutions and actors is often highly contested in conflicts. An important function of a peace process can be to provide a framework to accommodate diverse or competing sources of legitimacy. See Accord 25, *Legitimacy and peace processes*.

Resources:

Accord 13 (2002) *Owning the process: Public participation in peacemaking* www.c-r.org/accord/participation

Accord 25 (2014) *Legitimacy and peace processes: from coercion to consent* www.c-r.org/accord/legitimacy

Accord Policy Brief (2009) *Ending war: the need for peace process support strategies* www.c-r.org/resources/strategies

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