Civil society and peacebuilding

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Civil society organisations are present at all levels of contemporary peacebuilding. The international community has devoted substantial efforts towards building and strengthening the capacities of civil society actors, and harnessing their potential as peace actors. However, little systematic evidence-based research exists to provide policy-makers and practitioners with better knowledge about whether, how, when, and under what circumstances civil society can fulfil a peace-supporting role. This article is structured around three main questions: *Who* makes up civil society? *What* can civil society actors contribute to peacebuilding? And *how* best can civil society be involved in peacebuilding?

The first section defines civil society and describes the range of actors and organisations that fit under the civil society umbrella. The second summarises the function-oriented approach to civil society developed by Paffenholz and Spurk[1], which describes the various roles civil society actors can play in peacebuilding. The third section outlines Paffenholz's modalities framework and relates the previously described civil society functions to each of the modalities. This framework facilitates the analysis of peace processes and political transitions by schematising the ways in which civil society and other actors can be included.

Who makes up civil society?

Civil society is generally understood as the arena of voluntary, collective actions of an institutional nature around shared interests, purposes, and values that are distinct from those of the state, family, and market. Civil society consists of a large and diverse set of voluntary organisations and comprises non-state actors and associations that are not purely driven by private or economic interests, are autonomously organised, typically show civic virtue, and interact in the public sphere.

It is possible to delineate the following (non-mutually exclusive) categories of civil society actors:

- Special interest groups (for example, trade unions; professional associations for teachers, farmers, and journalists; minority and women's organisations; and veterans' associations)
- Faith-based organisations (for example, churches and Islamic associations)
- Traditional and community groups (for example, youth groups, councils of elders, women's and mother's groups; and radio listeners' clubs)
- Researchers and research institutions (for example, local and international think tanks, universities and individual researchers)

- Humanitarian or development service delivery organisations (which include local and international, 'modern', 'traditional', or religious organisations, like humanitarian aid NGOs, churches or Islamic charities)
- Human rights and advocacy organisations (which can also be clustered under special interest groups)
- Conflict resolution and peacebuilding NGOs and INGOs (which might also be advocacy or training service organisations, depending on their mandate)
- Social and political movements (which can take the form of broad-based public movements around a common cause, such as the Arab Spring, or longer-term movements, like the environmental, women's, or peace movements)
- Business associations (for example, associations of entrepreneurs or journalists, independent of the profit-making side of business)
- Networks (which generally represent a larger number of organisations from any of the categories specified above, such as a network of religious councils)

It is important to note that civil society is a reflection of broader society, and is therefore not always the 'good society' that can be counted on to support peace and democratisation. Research has found that inclusive, civic, bridging and pro-peace organisations work alongside polarised, sectarian, and occasionally militant civil society organisations.

What can civil society actors contribute to peacebuilding?

Paffenholz and Spurk have identified seven functions played by civil society in peace processes[2]. These functions include protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialisation, social cohesion, facilitation, and service delivery. Each function is discussed below in more detail.

Protection

Protection refers to the provision of security needs by civil society actors, either alone or in cooperation with other agencies. This is normally one of the core functions provided by the state; however, in cases of acute state fragility and conflict, the relationship between state and society can break down. During and after conflict, protection becomes a precondition for other civil society functions, as civil society actors are substantially hindered from taking up peacebuilding roles when threatened by violence.

Civil society protection is often associated with specialised protection NGOs like Peace Brigades International that support local actors either indirectly, for example as a watchdog, or else directly, for example through international accompaniment. These efforts have been more effective when they have been systematically combined with monitoring and advocacy campaigns. During Nepal's civil war, for example, a number of local human rights organisations monitored human rights violations by the army and the Maoists, and systematically channelled all information to the National Human Rights Commission, the media and Amnesty International (AI). AI used the data to successfully lobby at the international level for the establishment of a UN monitoring mission.

Local civil societies have also negotiated 'zones of peace', within which arms are not allowed, and have occasionally taken over responsibility for human security initiatives such as de-mining, disarmament and demobilisation when official programmes have been found wanting.

Monitoring

International and local civil society groups monitor relevant issues such as the human rights situation, or the implementation of agreements, and provide recommendations and information to decision-makers or human rights and advocacy groups. Such monitoring can work to hold governments and armed groups accountable for abuses or substandard performance, and can also serve as an early warning system (for example, the joint early warning initiative between UN OCHA, ECOWAS and a regional NGO peace network to conduct early warning in West Africa). In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, no monitoring initiative was ever set up for the Oslo process during the 1990s. This could have had considerable impact, especially because the parties were criticised for not fulfilling their promises.

Monitoring activities are most effective when designed to harmonise with protection and advocacy initiatives. For example, the International Crisis Group (ICG) monitors the situation in conflict-affected countries and provides political analysis and recommendations to decision-makers. Due to ICG's high profile, quality of analysis, and international network and media coverage, it has become an influential monitoring institution.

Advocacy

Advocacy refers to agenda-setting and the application of pressure by civil society organisations. Civil society actors can push for the commencement of negotiations, the implementation of negotiated agreements, or against the recurrence of warfare. Also important are global international advocacy campaigns that lobby, for example, against land mines, blood diamonds, or the abuse of children as soldiers. Advocacy can be divided into public and non-public forms. Public advocacy can involve petitions, demonstrations, press releases, social media or public relations campaigns. Non-public advocacy is generally back-channelled and operates through informal dialogues and relationships.

The impact of advocacy initiatives is increased when organisations have campaigning knowledge, base their advocacy on results of monitoring initiatives, and know how to use the media to support their cause. For example, in Northern Ireland, civil society groups managed to lobby successfully for the integration of human rights provisions into the peace agreement.

Socialisation

Socialisation refers to in-group bonding that supports democratic behaviour and promotes tolerant and peaceful values within society. This is realised through the active participation of citizens in various associations, networks or movements. Socialisation takes place only within groups, not between former adversary groups (referred to as social cohesion below).

Every national or local association that practises peaceful coexistence contributes to this function. There are two main types of socialisation: socialisation for peace and in-group identity-building. Socialisation for peace involves activities that promote a culture of peace whether in society at large or within a single group. In-group identity-building is an important way for marginalised groups to develop a sense of political identity that allows them to operate peacefully in the political space available. For example, the in-group education of the Maya in Guatemala by the Catholic Church helped empower a generation of civic leaders. The experience of war and widespread violence allowed for the construction of a pan-Mayan identity across 24 distinct language groups.

The key institutions in society that influence how people learn democratic and conflict-response behaviour are families, schools, religious groups, secular and cultural associations, and the workplace. In most countries in conflict, these socialisation spaces tend to reinforce existing divides.

The overwhelming focus of socialisation initiatives has been on conducting short-term projects with NGOs, which, due to their limited reach and access, have no real power to socialise people.

Intergroup social cohesion

Social capital between groups is invariably degraded or destroyed during war between those groups. Therefore, it is crucial to build 'bridging ties' across adversarial groups as well as (peaceful) 'bonding ties' within specific groups. The objective of social cohesion is to help these groups learn to live together in peaceful coexistence.

Social cohesion is an area where civil society organisations face challenges in making an impact. As explained in the discussion on socialisation above, divided societies have many strong socialisation institutions, including families, schools and religious organisations. When these institutions are polarised and hostile, few social cohesion initiatives can be very effective. In Somalia, for example, clan-based organisations worked to reinforce social cleavages and to weaken national cohesion. Externally driven problem-solving workshops tend to select English-speaking elites as representatives, people who are often already 'converted' to the idea of positive images of the other group. Evidence of this was found in an evaluation of a series of workshops in Cyprus that assessed participants' attitudes prior to and after the programme. The evaluation revealed that most participants already had a positive attitude toward the other group before participating in the workshops.

Social cohesion initiatives may generate more impact when they aim at bringing people together to work for a common cause (for example, joint water management) rather than focusing only on reconciliation. Long-term systematic initiatives have been more effective than short-term scattered ones, especially when they have focused on a wide range of societal cleavages and also bridged the gap between difficult groups.

Facilitation and mediation

Civil society can function as a facilitator to help bring parties together in a peace or transition process. Facilitation can take place both at the local and at the national level. For example, in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule, traditional mediation was the only resource for facilitating peace between the Taliban and the various Afghani communities. The Tribal Liaison Office helped organise local peace *jirgas* with religious and local leaders to explore options for peacebuilding. At the national level, prominent civil society leaders, international NGOs and research institutions are occasionally engaged in mediation or facilitation. For example, in Nigeria, the government nominated a Catholic priest as chief mediator between Ogoni groups, and in Nepal, each side of the conflict nominated two well-respected civil society leaders as facilitators. This facilitation can also be issue-oriented, as when civil society groups facilitate violence-free days to secure access for service delivery (vaccinations, food programmes, etc.). Hence, facilitation can operate in support of both protection and service delivery.

Service delivery

During armed conflict, state structures are either destroyed or weakened, and the population may be starved of essential services. Civil society actors (mainly NGOs, but sometimes associations as well) can and do step forward to provide aid and social services. There is no doubt that this function is extremely important to help the war-affected population and to support reconstruction of the state and society at large. However, service delivery can have an impact on peace processes only if agencies create entry points for other functions such as protection and social cohesion, especially when large-scale violence ends. For example, in Somalia, the total absence of a state for almost two decades made service delivery the main activity performed by civil society; Islamic charities were especially successful in creating entry points for peacebuilding by extending networks across clan and regional lines.

Seven models of civil society participation in peace and transition processes

The previous section outlined the various functions civil society can play in a peace or transition process that can be instrumental in creating positive preconditions for peace. The following section explores how civil society can engage with the main negotiating agenda of a peace or transition process, also known as Track One, presenting seven modalities of inclusion in peace and political transition processes[3]. These can apply to the participation of all actors other than the main negotiating parties, including civil society. The seven modalities have been developed through the Broadening Participation in Peace Negotiations project, the data from which is now housed at the Inclusive Peace and Transitions Initiative also at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva[4].

CONTENT

A 'Yes' campaign poster for the Good Friday Agreement during simultaneous referendums in Northern Ireland.

Direct representation at the negotiation table can be achieved in one of three ways. First, Track One parties may include more actors in the main negotiation delegations, as seen in the current negotiations in Colombia, where the parties included more highly qualified female experts (as a result of public pressure) as well as two military personnel.

Second, parties may increase the number of negotiation delegations at the table. For example, in the negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland almost all political parties were invited to the talks, not just the main ones. The Northern Irish Women's Coalition, a civil society organisation that faced exclusion from the talks then formed a political party solely for the purpose of being eligible to participate.

Third, parties can include almost all relevant constituencies within society. These formats are commonly referred to as National Dialogues, and can be for peacemaking (Afghanistan Emergency Loya Jirga, 2001) or constitution-making (Yemeni National Dialogue, 2011), and can take place at either the national or local levels. Direct representation in all forms is the strongest position for civil society advocacy.

Another civil society function associated with Track One inclusion is facilitation. In this model an international civil society actor (generally an international conflict-resolution or mediation NGO) coordinates and facilitates between local civil society and the conflict or negotiation parties. This model has recently been applied in the Philippines. Two international NGOs, the London-based Conciliation Resources and Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, played a third-party facilitation role within the International Contact Group (ICG) by providing mediation support to the official Malaysian facilitator of the peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and by reaching out to regional civil society networks through sustained dialogue on the Mindanao conflict.

Observer status can be granted to civil society groups or international and local NGOs. This happened in Liberia (2003), Sierra Leone (1996), the Solomon Islands (1991) and Burundi (1996– 98). Observer status is most closely associated with the monitoring and advocacy functions. In all the above cases, the attending civil society actors were well informed about the negotiation agenda. As a result, they were able to play a critical watchdog function, advise the conflict parties and the mediators, and form alliances with other observers to facilitate the agreement. In the case of Liberia, the groups with observer status inside the negotiations cooperated closely with groups outside the talks. They passed along critical information that allowed the outside groups to put public pressure on the parties.

Consultations can take place at different moments of a process – prior to, in parallel with, or after official negotiations. There are three types of consultations: officially endorsed consultations that form part of the negotiation format; unofficial consultations; and public consultations. Civil society forums can act as a consultative body to the negotiation process, provided the mediator and the conflict parties officially endorse them. The mandate of these forums can be specified by the mediator, the conflict parties, or by civil society itself. In most cases, the consultative forum follows the same agenda as the official negotiations, but it can also add issues to the negotiation agenda. The objective is to better understand how people assess the negotiation agenda, and whether they would like to add certain items.

Public consultations are conducted in many peace and transition processes. Especially during implementation phases, various commissions, such as those for constitutional reform, truth and reconciliation, or monitoring, hold broad-based public consultations to inform their activities. Consultative forums are associated with the advocacy function, as they provide an opportunity for civil society actors to have input into a negotiation process. Successful forums took place during the UN-led mediations in Guatemala (1994–96) and in Afghanistan (for one week in December 2001). In both cases, civil society groups were able to bring crucial issues to the negotiation agenda that would have otherwise been left out. In Guatemala, this especially concerned the rights of indigenous people and issues related to land and women. Eighty percent of all civil society proposals were incorporated into the peace agreement.

Inclusive commissions can include post-agreement commissions (for example, ceasefire- or peace-agreement monitoring commissions, truth and reconciliation commissions); commissions preparing for or conducting a peace process (such as the work of the High Commissioner for the Peace Process in Colombia); permanent bodies (such as the Interethnic Commission in Kirgizstan). The inclusion of civil society into various post-agreement mechanisms aims at strengthening democratisation as well as the sustainability of the agreement.

People lining the streets to protest against the FARC in Bogota.

Some peace agreements also include provisions for civil society to create awareness about the agreement among the population. In Somalia, for example, the 1993 agreement included a provision stipulating that civil society delegations would travel to all parts of the country to raise awareness of the agreement. In Colombia, during the peace talks between the government and the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) from 1999 to 2002, a national committee was established tasked with consulting widely with the population.

Some agreements even provide seats for civil society representatives in national legislatures, as was the case in Liberia in 2003, Burundi in 2000 and the Philippines in 1996. General provisions are rarely effective. In cases where provisions were specific, civil society groups had already played an important role during the negotiations. These findings confirm the need for space during the negotiations to discuss the details of the implementation and monitoring provisions[5]. As the case of Liberia shows, the participation of specialised civil society groups (for example, for human rights monitoring) in post-agreement mechanisms has enhanced the quality of monitoring and put more pressure on the parties to comply with the agreement.

High-level problem-solving workshops are unofficial and generally not publicised. Sometimes referred to as Track 1.5, they bring together representatives close to the leaders of the conflict parties, and offer them a space for discussion without the pressure to reach agreement. Problem-solving workshops are another avenue for civil society groups to perform a facilitation role. For example, the Schlaining Process in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict involved 20 dialogue workshops between 2000 and 2007, gathering over 100 Georgian and Abkhaz interlocutors. The dialogues were facilitated and organised by a British INGO and a German INGO in partnership with a range of Abkhaz and Georgian NGOs. Participants analysed all key issues in the formal negotiation process, enabling them to test ideas, and the potential reception of those ideas, in ways that could feed into the political negotiations and make them more effective. Communication channels existed with the mediators of the formal process, and the facilitators met regularly with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and other senior UN staff in Tbilisi and Sukhumi. Though the Schlaining Process came to an end in 2007, it fostered a generation of ideas and communication channels across the conflict divide.

Public decision-making: After negotiation, peace agreements and/or new constitutions are often submitted for ratification by the population of the society (or societies) concerned. This is particularly common in democratic societies. Votes are normally treated as binding, and hence are a crucial moment in a negotiation process. The success of a public vote depends on a number of factors, such as the level of public support for and understanding of the agreement; the pertinence of the questions put to the public; and the mobilisation of public support for or against the referendum. Referendums can have unwanted outcomes, as seen in Cyprus with the referendum over the Annan Plan in 2004, or the failed ratification by the parliaments of the normalisation protocols between Armenia and Turkey in 2010. The timing of and issues put to referendums therefore need to be part of a carefully planned strategy.

Mass action may create a general pro- or anti-process atmosphere. As already observed, mass action can be the most potent expression of the advocacy function. In Mexico in 1994, widespread public outrage and protest made it impossible for the Mexican government to continue its military campaign against the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas, effectively forcing a ceasefire. In contrast, during the 2002 peace process in Sri Lanka, demonstrations against peace negotiations and the Norwegian facilitation – often carried out by Buddhist monks – became more frequent and louder than the demonstrations in support of the peace process.

Conclusions

Local and international civil society organisations are a pervasive feature of contemporary peacebuilding. Civil society organisations continue to play important roles in protecting people from violence, providing services, monitoring human rights abuses, and advocating for an end to wars or authoritarian rule. Civil society organisations and actors also play an important role in building peace at the local level as well as through their direct participation in Track One negotiations. The value of this participation, in terms of enhancing the sustainability of peace agreements, has been confirmed by research. However, the debates and examples discussed in this article have highlighted a number of important issues that will determine the future relevance of civil society's role in peace processes.

First, Track One mediators' and conflict parties' engagement of civil society is still far from routine. Nor is it always designed in such a way that civil society actors are able to make their most effective contribution to a process, without adding undue complexity. Better research-to-policy transfer is needed to help mediators and negotiators understand and manage this complex issue.

Second, civil society actors do not always engage in the activities most appropriate to a given context and phase of a conflict. The most striking examples are the functions of protection, monitoring, socialisation and social cohesion. While protection and monitoring are always highly relevant during armed conflict and war, there are few civil society organisations performing these roles during these phases. On the other hand, many organisations engage in social cohesion and socialisation initiatives, including dialogue projects, conflict-resolution workshops, exchange programmes and peace education projects during these phases, even though they have been shown to be more relevant after large-scale violence has ended.

Finally, civil society organisations are a mirror of the encompassing society, supporting peace as well as, in some cases, obstructing peace processes by preaching hate and polarising adversary groups. It is therefore not simply a normatively good move to involve a broad set of actors, but a sensitive and delicate process. What different actors in civil society (both international and local) can contribute to peace processes differs considerably and is also dependent on a set of context-specific factors, such as the level of violence, the role of the state, and the role of the media, as well as on the behaviour of powerful regional actors.

For biography of the author, see page 37.

Notes

1 T. Paffenholz and C.Spurk , 'A Comprehensive Analytical Framework', in T. Paffenholz (ed), *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment,* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010), 65-78.

2 Ibid.

3 T. Paffenholz, 'Civil Society and Peace Negotiations: Beyond the Inclusion–Exclusion Dichotomy' *Negotiation Journal* 30 (2014), 69-91.

4 For more results see: www.inclusivepeace.org

5 D. Lanz, 'Who Gets a Seat at the Table? A Framework for Understanding the Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Peace Negotiations', *International Negotiation* 16 (2011), 275-295.