

Nine Models for Inclusion of Civil Society in Peace Processes

A growing body of literature indicates that the durability of peace increases when efforts to resolve conflict and rebuild war-torn societies involve the full range of stakeholders. Notwithstanding the accumulating evidence, the vast majority of efforts to end armed conflict and rebuild countries involve a very narrow set of players—most often armed and male.

In a few cases, different techniques have been used to increase civil society participation in peace talks. Negotiating structures have been created to permit direct and indirect access to peace talks by various interest groups (e.g., in Guatemala and Northern Ireland). Neutral technical advisory bodies have been established to allow a review process for draft accords by marginalized groups (e.g., Darfur). Where Track I processes did not exist or were stalled, civil society has helped initiate formal negotiations (e.g., South Africa, Mozambique, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) or has spearheaded separate processes of dialogue and localized peacebuilding (e.g., Colombia and Tajikistan). These experiences from around the world offer a number of critical lessons regarding successful peace processes.

1. **Northern Ireland: Direct Representation in Official Negotiations**
2. **Guatemala: Formal, Non-Binding Advisory Role**
3. **Darfur: Semi-official Technical Resource to Negotiating Teams**
4. **South Africa: Creating Space for Talks**
5. **Mozambique: Initiation and Mediation of Peace Accords**
6. **Sierra Leone: Confidence-Building Between Conflicting Parties**
7. **Liberia: Mass Mobilization for Peace**
8. **Colombia: Local, Citizen-led Peace Agreements**
9. **Tajikistan: Track II Dialogue as Basis for Official Negotiation**

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Northern Irelandⁱ

Context

After decades of violence and multiple failed peace initiatives, the process for all-party talks in 1996 offered Northern Ireland its best hope yet for lasting peace. These talks were the first to include women as well as mainstream parties and political representatives. The comprehensive nature of the talks was essential to the signing of the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement on April 10, 1998, which ultimately ended the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Model

Laying groundwork for cooperation – Local NGOs and civic leaders created an atmosphere of trust and political cooperation prior to and during the peace talks. For example:

- A citizens' inquiry commission, called Initiative '92, encouraged community groups to begin thinking about the future and increased citizens' engagement with the political process.ⁱⁱ
- The Peace and Reconciliation Group mediated between British security forces and the Irish Republican Army in the city of Derry/Londonderry, leading to a de-escalation of violence.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Academics conducted "peace polls" to record public opinion on key substantive issues, which helped negotiators define what would be an acceptable agreement to the community at large.^{iv}

Representative negotiations – Access to the negotiating table was through elections, thus ensuring public buy-in and representation of all main communities.

- ***Inclusion of potential spoilers*** - Previous talks had excluded more "extreme" political parties, such as Sinn Fein (political wing of the IRA). For the first time, the all-party talks began on the assumption that "if you are part of the problem, you need to be part of the solution."
- ***Two-track electoral system*** – 18 districts elected 5 representatives each to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue. The remaining 20 at-large seats were allocated to the 10 parties that received the most votes overall. Each party to the Forum then designated two representatives to the negotiating table.

Participating directly in talks – Women civil society leaders gathered the 10,000 signatures needed to form a cross-community political party (Northern Ireland Women's Coalition). In the election, they won two at-large seats in the Forum, and thus at the negotiating table.

- ***International support*** – Prominent US government and NGO leaders advocated inclusion of women in the peace process. Local and international NGOs provided meeting space for the NIWC and held conferences and training events attended by NIWC members.
- ***Local buy-in*** – The NIWC set up offices outside of the site of negotiations in order to be closer to its constituents. It also proposed a Civic Forum—comprised of business, trade union, and other civic representatives—to ensure inclusive participation throughout implementation of the agreement. The Forum was included as part of the Good Friday Agreement.

Impact

The NIWC delegates broadened the talks to include crucial topics such as integrated education, release and reintegration of political prisoners, victims' rights, mixed housing, and community development. As impartial delegates representing both sides of the conflict, women served as facilitators and bridged communication gaps between rival political parties. As a result of its influence and approach, the NIWC had more of its issues and proposals included in the final agreement than any other party. The impact of civil society writ large is less easy to parse. Despite the opportunity for civil society to form new groups to participate in the election for negotiations, NIWC was the only group to succeed (and few others tried).

Guatemala^v

Context

In 1996, Guatemala ended a 36-year civil war that claimed 200,000 lives—the vast majority civilians. In 1991, the Guatemalan government began negotiations with the insurgents, who had formed the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). After stalling in 1993, talks resumed in Mexico in May 1994, under a new, more inclusive structure and UN sponsorship. Between 1994 and 1996, the Guatemalan government and URNG successfully negotiated 11 peace agreements, resulting in a permanent ceasefire in 1996.

Model

Convening a broad dialogue – The Commission for National Reconciliation (CNR)—consisting of government, political party, and religious leaders—initiated the Grand National Dialogue (GND) in 1989. The GND included 47 delegates from the government, political parties, media, churches, refugee groups, cooperatives, labor unions, students, business leaders, academics, and human rights experts.

- ***Addressing structural issues*** – The GND promoted the idea of a democratic political negotiation, as opposed to one focused solely on a military ceasefire and involving only armed groups. The delegates considered structural issues underlying the conflict, such as citizen participation, quality of life, and economic policy.

Moving parties toward negotiations – The CNR next convened the “Oslo consultations” between civil society and the URNG. Five separate dialogues were held with different sectors of society (political parties; business leaders; religious groups; unions and popular organizations; and academics, cooperatives, and professional bodies).

- ***Call for direct negotiations*** – Participants in the consultations called for direct negotiations between the two parties in which all sectors would be able to participate.
- ***Shift in public opinion*** – The series of consultations created space for discussion of political issues and shifted public opinion in favor of negotiations.

Advising the negotiating teams – The 1994 Framework Accord for the Resumption of Negotiations established an Assembly of Civil Society (ACS). The ACS was a formal, non-binding civil society advisory group under the leadership of Episcopalian Bishop Rodolfo Quezada Toruño, with representation from 11 sectors: women’s organizations, business groups, trade unions, religious groups, indigenous peoples, academics, political parties, media, human rights organizations, research centers, and development NGOs.

- ***Consensus-building*** – The ACS was mandated to discuss and form consensus positions and recommendations on 6 out of 7 substantive negotiations topics (all except the military/ceasefire arrangements). The group presented recommendations regularly to negotiators, who adopted most of the suggestions.
- ***International support*** - The UN and individual governments in the “Group of Friends” supported the ACS by providing salaries, travel, logistical assistance, and training.

Impact

The negotiating teams were required to consider ACS recommendations, but were not required to implement them. In turn, ACS was able to review and endorse the final agreement language, but had no veto power over it. Despite the non-binding nature of this entity, most of the recommendations were incorporated into the final agreement. This included language on women’s equality and equal access to education, credit, housing, health services, and justice. Recommendations related to agrarian reforms and land redistribution were not included.

Darfur^{vi}

Context

The Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks on Darfur, organized by the African Union (AU), began in July 2004 and brought together the Government of Sudan, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Despite several rounds of peace talks and an AU protection force of 7,000 in Sudan, violence and broken ceasefires continued in 2004 and 2005. After seven rounds of talks, ending on May 5, 2006, the Sudan Liberation Army faction led by Minni Minawi and the Government of National Unity signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). The SLM/A-Abdul Wahid and the JEM refused to sign, and the agreement failed to resolve conflict in Darfur. The process does, however, present an innovative case of civil society inclusion, particularly focused on women.

Model

Advocating greater inclusion – Early rounds of Darfur talks included some women, but international lobbying efforts—especially by UNIFEM, the Canadian government, and African Union—in collaboration with local activists pushed for greater inclusion of women.

- ***Nonpartisan technical support*** – The result was the creation of a neutral Gender Expert Support Team (GEST) and an African Union gender adviser, who together acted as a technical resource to the female delegates on the formal negotiating teams and brought the voice of women in civil society to the talks. The GEST consisted of 15 women (both highly educated professionals and grassroots activists) from the three states of Darfur. They had semi-official status and were not a part of any one entity but consulted for the delegates, the AU mediation team, and other partners.

Influencing negotiations through advisory group – The GEST worked with women on the specific commissions focused on wealth-sharing, power-sharing, and security arrangements. The senior advisor on gender issues for the AU Mission to Sudan helped connect GEST members with women on each negotiating team.

- ***Important ally*** – Chief mediator Salim Salim was a champion of women’s participation, ensured access for GEST members, and helped elevate the views of women during deliberations.

Impact

Women’s participation highlighted the need for protection and security of IDPs and refugees. The GEST raised issues of common interest between the parties—such as food security—that effectively served as confidence-building measures. The final agreement included calls to improve women’s participation, increase protection from gender violence, and recognize women’s role in peace building. The GEST interacted directly with all official women delegates to develop a common position paper, “Women’s Priorities in the Peace Process and Reconstruction in Darfur.”

South Africa^{vii}

Context

A combination of internal and external factors led both the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP) to realize the need for political negotiations.^{viii} However, “When the official negotiations began in 1990, battles for power surfaced and political violence escalated dramatically—with a 307 percent rise in fatalities from 1985 to 1991. By 1990, many South Africans were deeply concerned about the violence and the risk posed to prospective constitutional negotiations. Despite the urgency, it was unclear who could initiate a process and be accepted by both parties. Most South Africans had no faith in President DeKlerk’s National Party (NP) government and it was widely suspected that the state security structures were complicit in the violence.”^{ix} In this environment, civil society leaders stepped in to facilitate communications between the parties, leading to adoption of the National Peace Accord in September 1991; and eventually, to creation of a new, democratic constitution in November 1993.

Model

Creating a climate ripe for negotiations – Anti-apartheid and pro-democracy activists led a worldwide boycott and divestment campaign. As a result, business and other leaders began to recognize that change was needed.

- ***Admission of responsibility*** – During a national conference of most South African denominations, the main Afrikaaner church (Dutch Reformed Church) acknowledged its role in apartheid for the first time. Delegates drafted the Rustenburg Declaration denouncing apartheid and calling for a new constitution and more equitable distribution of wealth.^x
- ***Opening lines of communication between parties*** – Civil society intermediaries, especially business and religious leaders, used their influence and credibility to help ANC and NP contacts hold secret, exploratory “talks about talks” and develop personal relationships across conflict.^{xi}

Moving forward a stalled process – In April 1991, President De Klerk proposed a peace summit involving key church and community leaders, as well as the parties to the conflict. The ANC rejected this call as propaganda and refused to attend.

- ***Conducting back-channel talks*** – Senior church leaders, the Consultative Business Movement (a coalition of progressive business leaders), and the Congress of South African Trade Unions called an emergency meeting. They developed a compromise plan with key political leaders to move the government summit forward as part of a larger, independently-convened peace conference.^{xii}

Facilitating implementation – Business, religious, and community leaders were among the 26 signatories of the National Peace Accord (NPA), which established structures to end the political violence.

- ***Peace Committees*** – The NPA set up a National Peace Committee, with a business and a religious leader as chair and vice-chair. It also established regional and local peace committees (LPCs) to monitor implementation of the NPA and resolve local disputes. LPC volunteers were recruited to be broadly representative of their communities and were given training in dispute resolution, meeting facilitation, and negotiation.

Impact

Civil society initiatives and the resulting NPA helped build trust between the parties for future political negotiations around the new constitution. The Peace Committee structure allowed for broad public participation in preventing and resolving further violence and convened space for people to air grievances and build social cohesion. South Africa held its first multi-racial elections in 1994 and its constitution, adopted in 1996, is considered to be one of the most progressive and gender-sensitive in the world.

Mozambique^{xiii}

Context

Following a ten-year war for independence from Portugal that ended in 1974, conflict broke out again in Mozambique in 1977 between the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) government and the guerilla group Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo). Churches affiliated with colonial rule (esp. the Catholic Church) were marginalized in the late 70s following independence, but rapprochement with the government in the early 1980s allowed them to play a larger role calling for peace.^{xiv} Fighting ended in 1992 with the signing of the Rome General Peace Accords and the country's first multi-party elections were held in 1994.

Model

Pushing government toward negotiations – Both the Protestant-dominated Mozambican Christian Council (CCM) and the Catholic Church pressed for peace negotiations.

- ***Collective advocacy*** - The CCM created a multi-denominational Peace and Reconciliation Commission in 1984 and began (unsuccessfully) approaching President Samora Machel to call for dialogue. By 1986, both the CCM and the Catholic Church were vocal proponents of peace and began to lobby Machel's successor, President Joaquim Chissano. A year later, President Chissano finally met with the CCM and indicated greater willingness to take steps toward dialogue. By 1987, the CCM and Catholic Church were working closely together.^{xv}

Pushing opposition groups toward negotiations – Church leaders were able to open direct contacts with Renamo through numerous meetings with Renamo leaders in Kenya and the US. In 1989, they brought the message that the opposition was ready to negotiate.^{xvi}

- ***Credibility*** – During talks in Nairobi with Renamo, “the churchmen emphasized their neutrality, stressing that reconciliation was a basic vocation of the church.”^{xvii}

Mediating peace accords – Besides pushing the parties separately toward negotiations, the CCM also facilitated contact between the two warring sides and, “churches affiliated with the CCM played a key role in brokering local ceasefires as well as defusing community tensions.”^{xviii}

- ***Official role*** - Archbishop James Goncalves served as an official observer, and then mediator, during the Rome talks that led to the peace accords.^{xix} The Community of Sant'Egidio, which had long ties with Mozambique and was viewed as a neutral third party, hosted and helped mediate the talks.
- ***Breaking gridlocks*** – There was very little trust between the two parties, but “[b]ecause both sides continued to talk with the church leaders... a climate of confidence conducive to dialogue was gradually built up.”^{xx} During impasses, the churches tried to emphasize the urgency of the peace process through petition campaigns, public prayers, and meetings with the two parties.

Impact

The resulting General Peace Accords were judged as “one of the most successful post-Cold War peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes.”^{xxi} Many credit Mozambique civil society, particularly churches and religious coalitions, with initiating the talks and seeing them through to completion.^{xxii} Their neutrality throughout the process allowed them to serve as trusted mediators and lent credibility to the talks.

Sierra Leone^{xxiii}

Context

Civil war in Sierra Leone broke out in 1991. No sides respected the peace accords signed in Abidjan in 1996. Then, in 1997, a coup was “met by civil disobedience by civilians and widespread condemnation from around the world.”^{xxiv} It was within this context that different religious communities in Sierra Leone were brought together by their opposition to the brutality of the decade-long civil war.

Model

Mobilizing for peace - The Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) formed in 1997. Religious leaders were moved to initiate the IRCSL by their religious beliefs in the promotion of social justice, the example posed by Liberia’s Inter-Religious Council, and calls from their membership for them to more actively push for peace.

Engaging with the parties - The IRCSL engaged with the junta in 1997, and while peace talks failed, the Council is credited with decreasing the human rights abuses perpetrated by the junta. It was then very vocal during the brutal fighting in Freetown in 1999 and began meeting with President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader Foday Sankoh.

- ***Concessions*** - The IRCSL successfully encouraged confidence-building measures from both sides, such as the RUF’s release of abducted children and the government’s agreement to meet for talks at a neutral venue.

Facilitating peace talks - While initially meant to be “informal mediators,” the IRCSL took on an active facilitation role during peace talks in Lomé. The RUF invited the IRCSL to its pre-negotiation meetings—a credit to the trust and respect the IRCSL had cultivated.

- ***Shuttle diplomacy*** - During tense negotiations, IRCSL members served as “go betweens” to convince the parties to return to the table and would begin preaching and praying “to sway resistant hardliners.” The IRCSL also met with Liberian President Charles Taylor, a controversial decision that helped encouraged Kabbah to accept Taylor’s participation in negotiations.

Gaining public support - After the agreement was signed, the IRCSL distributed thousands of copies to civil society and hosted forums for discussions about the implementation of the accords.

Impact

The IRCSL directed the course of the negotiations through its official statements, meetings with key parties, and active facilitation. The IRCSL is credited with kick starting the peace process and being integral facilitators during the negotiations. Unfortunately, due to other factors, war resumed in 2000.

Liberia^{xxv}

Context

In 2003, Liberia was once again in the grip of armed conflict, with various insurgent groups controlling most of the countryside and beginning to close in on the capital. A substantial network of community-based women's groups decided that they would not sit on the sidelines as passive victims of the war but would aim to bring an end to the fighting. The initiative was organized through the Liberian section of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), a West African women's network linked with WANEP.

Model

Mobilizing the masses – Women from all parts of Liberian society—including those from displaced persons camps, churches, markets, schools, NGOs, and rural communities—mobilized in a “Mass Action for Peace.” They marched through the streets carrying banners and held a daily inter-faith prayer vigil. Public support for their campaign put more pressure on the fighting parties and international community to take action.

Monitoring the peace talks – When the fighting forces agreed to a peace conference, WIPNET sent a delegation to Ghana to monitor the talks in Accra. They mobilized Liberian diaspora and refugee women and collaborated with other women's groups who were delegates at the talks, such as the Mano River Women's Peace Network.

- ***Parallel structure*** – WIPNET organized a parallel Liberian Women's Forum to assess progress in the negotiations and advocate issues of importance to Liberian women and citizens more widely. The Forum issued joint statements, particularly urging attention to civilian casualties.
- ***Engagement with parties*** – The women met regularly with delegates from all parties to discuss these issues and make recommendations. Each morning of the talks, the delegates and participating Heads of State from the region were greeted by women sitting on the lawn, holding placards demanding peace.

Holding negotiators accountable – When the talks stalled, the women barricaded the door to prevent the negotiators from leaving until they agreed to take the process seriously and reach an agreement. Their demonstration gained press attention, with television coverage of the stand-off. Partly in response to the publicity, the talks resumed.

Sitting at the table - WIPNET was asked to participate in meetings to develop peace strategies, including on the political and security committees of the talks.

Impact

The women's peace movement applied pressure significant enough to achieve peace in Liberia after 14 years of war. The movement later helped bring to power the country's first female head of state, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. WIPNET continued to promote peace and reconciliation in Liberia through radio programs; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts; and training in local peacebuilding.

Colombia^{xxvi}

Context

Since the early 1960s, a number of leftist guerrilla movements have waged “popular struggles” against the Colombian state. Despite the attempts of successive administrations to bring the situation under control, violence was widespread, particularly in rural areas. The two main armed guerrilla groups, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN), as well as a growing number of right-wing paramilitary formations, have attempted to consolidate their power throughout the country. Because of its strategic position, the municipality of Mogotes was vulnerable to both leftist and right-wing militias, and political violence increased following the 1997 local elections.

Model

Organizing civic protests – In 1997, citizens in Mogotes began protesting and organizing to combat the violence after the ELN kidnapped Mogotes’ newly elected mayor in a siege that killed five people. A pilgrimage of priests, nuns, and laypeople joined the protestors to show their support, while prayer groups—formed earlier that year—discussed the crisis.

Reclaiming popular sovereignty – The community of Mogotes developed a “project of liberation,” which espoused peace, poverty reduction, and anti-corruption; they created the Municipal Constituent Assembly (AMC) to implement the plan.

- **Organization** - The AMC drew on the notion of popular sovereignty and had broad representation from trade unions, NGOs, business leaders, and local officials. The population was divided into 18 local assemblies in different zones of the municipality. These local assemblies elected delegates to the AMC. Two-thirds of its 180 delegates were women.
- **Implementation** - Decisions within the AMC were made by consensus first, or by a simple majority if consensus was not reached. An operational committee of 13—also composed of diverse interest groups—oversaw the AMC and was in charge of disseminating public information about the assembly.

Liberating the community from violence – “The process of recovering popular sovereignty in Mogotes has served as a catalyst for community reconciliation in a previously polarized and violent society. As people have become accustomed to discussing their problems openly, incidents of violence have decreased considerably.”^{xxvii}

Impact

Mogotes’ AMC helped decrease local corruption and strengthen accountability of elected officials. Additionally, Mogotes served as a model for hundreds of others “zones of peace” in Colombia. These zones are united under an umbrella organization called Redepaz, which contributed to a plebiscite (the “citizens mandate for peace”) that affirmed the desire and commitment of rural areas to an end of violence in the country. Peace talks have recently resumed in Colombia, though the link between this and the “zones of peace” movement is difficult to define.

Tajikistan^{xxviii}

Context

Tajikistan declared independence from the former Soviet Union in August 1991. This power vacuum led to a struggle for government control and national identity. After a new authoritarian Communist regime took power, violence continued between competing factions. One of every seven citizens fled their homes. No regular channel of communication existed between the government and various opposition forces. In this post-war environment of distrust, an external NGO (the Dartmouth Conference Regional Conflicts Task Force) stepped in to facilitate a Track II dialogue process with the aim of leading to official negotiations.

Model

Participating in sustained dialogue – The Dartmouth Conference Regional Conflicts Task Force, which had been facilitating dialogues between Americans and Soviets, launched the Inter-Tajik Dialogue in 1993.

- ***Meeting the enemy*** – As a first step, participants—who came from various political and military groups, but participated in their unofficial capacity as citizens—had to be willing to risk talking with each other.
- ***Analyzing the conflict*** – Participants next mapped the origins of the conflict and relationships between the different factions.

Facilitating an official peace process – By the fourth meeting of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue in October 1993, participants developed a plan for how to start official negotiations. A few months later, the government and opposition factions agreed to UN-mediated negotiations (one official credited the Dialogue with proving that negotiation was possible, thus creating an atmosphere conducive to talks).^{xxix}

- ***Joint memoranda*** – To inform the negotiating teams of ideas discussed during the ongoing Dialogue sessions, participants drafted 18 memoranda laying out procedural and substantive recommendations for the process.
- ***Direct participation*** – Three delegates to the first round of negotiations were also members of the Dialogue and helped feed ideas and skills learned in the intercommunal meetings into the official process. Some approaches and institutions recommended by the Dialogue were implemented in the eventual agreement (e.g., a supra-governmental Coordinating Council responsible for implementation of the accord).

Recommending broader public participation – In 1996, Dialogue members recommended creation of a consultative forum of the peoples of Tajikistan in order to ensure the widest popular involvement in implementing the peace agreement. Unfortunately, the idea was not accepted by the government and opposition leaders.

Impact

Participants in the Inter-Tajik Dialogue held 35 meetings over 10 years (1993-2003). While it is difficult to assess the exact influence of the Dialogue on the parties' acceptance of peace talks, the project proved the possibility of negotiation, built trust, and developed relationships among participants.^{xxx} The overlap between participants in the Dialogue and in the official negotiations allowed Track II processes to feed into Track I. Participants also remained actively engaged following the peace agreement. Many became leaders of new civil society organizations focused on enlarging the space for civic participation in building the country.

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