

# Civil Society & Inclusive Peace

Key insights and lessons from a global consultation convened on Peace Insight

February 2019



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# Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation	NDFP	National Democratic Front
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines	NDI	National Democratic Institute
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
		NPA	New People’s Army
FARC-EP	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People’s Army	NWPPE	Nigerian Women Platform for Peaceful Elections
GPPAC	Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict	PEF	Peace and Education Foundation
IID	Initiatives for International Dialogue	RTP	Research Training Programme
IPTI	Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative	RWDS	Rural Women’s Development Society
LIMPAL	Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom	UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
		WILPF	Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
MASS	Madhesi Rights Protection Committee		
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front	WSR	Women’s Situation Room

# Executive Summary

**Inclusive peace, or the idea that all stakeholders in a society should have a role in defining and shaping peace, is now a widely accepted theoretical priority for policymakers and practitioners. But in reality it has proven extremely difficult to achieve.**

A long roster of actors play key roles in facilitating—or hindering—these efforts, from the UN and other multilateral organisations to national governments, armed actors, international donors and more. Civil society groups play a critical role in contributing to inclusion. Drawing on two online consultations with local and international civil society peacebuilders from across the world, this report shares key insights to enrich the pursuit of inclusive peace.

The goal of the “Civil Society & Inclusive Peace” consultations was to unpack different perspectives on civil society’s role in building inclusive peace and to identify key barriers and challenges they face in the process. The result was a robust discussion that demonstrated the broad, dynamic nature of civil society peacebuilders. The insights generated from these conversations can inform practical decision-making across a range of actors and sectors.

Unfortunately, structural, process and internal challenges too often limit the capacity of civil society to achieve their intended impact. These challenges have been magnified in recent years by the shrinking space for civil society in many countries across the globe. The scale of this threat is perhaps best

captured by the fact that, for some participants in these consultations, the limit of their current ambition is to ensure the mere survival of civil society as an independent force.

Given these challenges, the online consultations identified a range of strategies for advancing inclusive peace. These range from non-violent resistance and mobilisation to direct representation in formal negotiations. They also include strategies focused on root causes of conflict, such as facilitated dialogue, bridging divides between groups and addressing structural inequalities that contribute to conflict in the first place.

Choosing which peacebuilding strategies to pursue requires both self-assessment and a deep understanding of context. The latter, of course, is the core value added by civil society: groups that operate close to, or within, affected communities bring to the table a deep understanding of those communities’ insecurities, needs, and wants. Policymakers, donors and other national and international actors would do well to recognise that inclusion of these groups is not simply a tick box exercise, but a prerequisite of sustainable peace.

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## Key insights

Peace Direct, the Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (IPTI) and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) convened two related online consultations in 2018. Participants were invited to contribute to a series of online, text-based discussions over the course of two to three days. Across the two consultations, 174 participants took part from 54 countries. This report summarises the key themes of the consultations. Analysis was conducted by first grouping participant responses according to the extent to which they agreed, disagreed or offered new insights. Themes and issues that had not been posed in the framing text or questions, but had emerged during the discussions between participants, are also included here.

### The main insights are summarised below:

- **Creating a shared definition of terms like “civil society,” “peacebuilding” and “inclusion” is not always possible—but being explicit about different actors’ understanding of these terms can help lead to more tangible progress towards inclusive peace.** Donor and multilateral organisations, in particular, need to be cautious about how to identify civil society groups, as doing so can unintentionally reinforce power dynamics and marginalisation.
- **For many civil society actors, “inclusion” in peacebuilding is often experienced as a box-ticking exercise.** Meaningful inclusion requires robust stakeholder analysis and the conditions to engage and influence a process on fair terms.
- **Civil society continues to face barriers to inclusion in formal processes.** While civil society often finds opportunities to lead informal mechanisms, space needs to be found for both—and for bridging the two.
- **The diversity and breadth of civil society is both a challenge and an opportunity for peace processes.** While the role of civil society in peacebuilding depends on a number of variables, including context and stage of conflict, civil society organisations give decision makers access to diverse constituencies whose expectations can be difficult to manage. But civil society dialogues at different levels also make for more tools in the peacebuilding toolbox, as well as options that may be “outside the box.”
- **There can be a “lack of capacity” on the part of international actors.** The issue of “lack of capacity” is often discussed in relation to civil society, but it is important to recognise that the challenges involved in working with diverse civil society also require capacity on the part of state-led process conveners, international partners and donors.
- **The shrinking political space in many countries is a huge barrier to civil society’s work on inclusive peace.** What’s more, civil society actors struggle to adapt strategies to this challenge.
- **Donor priorities are a common factor driving programmatic change.** Funding dependency, restrictive donor requirements, including prescriptive timeframes and approaches, were identified as a key barrier for civil society innovation.
- **Civil society faces its own critical internal challenges:** fragmentation, elitism, political agendas and more. This points to an urgent need to build spaces for self-reflection and learning.

## Recommendations

Drawing on the key insights from these two consultations, Peace Direct developed the following recommendations aimed at international donors and other actors responsible for crucial decisions related to the makeup, funding and implementation of peacebuilding efforts.

- **To secure meaningful inclusion, decision makers should undertake broad stakeholder analyses that respect the interests of all affected groups or communities.** Those in charge of convening or funding peace processes should take responsibility for ensuring that the people invited are actually connected to the groups they claim to represent.
- **Civil society should be allowed agency to influence all stages of peace processes.** In addition to formal representation, decision makers should open channels of communication with those who are not at the table to give them the chance to input into the negotiations.
- **Given the shrinking space for civil society in countries worldwide, international donors and multilateral organisations should, where possible, apply pressure on states that continue to limit free expression by civil society.**
- **Donors should incorporate unrestricted funds that can support grassroots and more informal civil society actors.** Instead of relying solely on a limited roster of professionalised NGOs, peacebuilding donors could make efforts to include informal actors without forcing them to conform to a particular concept of civil society grantees.
- **Decision makers and international donors should support accountability mechanisms and promote community mobilisation around peace implementation.** Given that peace and conflict are not linear, support for civil society initiatives must not stop at the moment when peace accords are signed.
- **The civil society peacebuilding community needs to address internal barriers by building space for reflection and learning.** For example, civil society can build partnerships with academic institutions to help capture evidence of impact; prioritise internal strategy sessions during programme implementation; work with expert facilitators; and experiment with technology and writing tools to support reflection. Well-facilitated reflection spaces that pay attention to power, diversity and solidarity amongst civil society peers are equally crucial to collective impact.

These consultations made clear that meaningful inclusion remains more an aspiration than a reality, not only in relation to peace processes but even within civil society itself. Only by acknowledging these barriers, and pinpointing potential strategies to overcome them, can we begin to address the complexity of meaningful inclusion. This reflection and adaptation is critical, since ultimately meaningful inclusion can improve chances for more comprehensive, sustainable peace.



Greg Funnell

# 1. Introduction

Inclusive peace, or the idea that all stakeholders in a society should have a role in defining and shaping peace, is receiving widespread global recognition. Over the past two decades, the link between inclusion and peace has grown as a theoretical priority for policymakers and practitioners.

Inclusive peace, or the idea that all stakeholders in a society should have a role in defining and shaping peace, is receiving widespread global recognition. Over the past two decades, the link between inclusion and peace has grown as a theoretical priority for policymakers and practitioners<sup>1</sup>.

Still, despite the progress made through the increased recognition of inclusive peace at the theoretical and policy level, it has proven extremely difficult to achieve in reality. Arguably, the most critical stakeholder in inclusive peacebuilding is civil society. Whilst a long roster of actors play key roles in facilitating—or hindering—efforts to achieve inclusion, for this to be meaningful it must be more than a box-ticking exercise. Peace processes should take responsibility to ensure that the people invited to the table are connected to the groups they claim to represent, and that the interests of all affected groups or communities are considered.

Peace Direct, the Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (IPTI) and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) convened two online consultations in 2018 to explore these dynamics in further detail. The insights generated from these consultations form the basis of the analysis and recommendations developed in this report.

Chapter 2 considers the key concepts on which the report is based—civil society, peacebuilding, and inclusion—and establishing a shared understanding of these terms, and how they interrelate. Acknowledging that peacebuilding and civil society are multifaceted and difficult to capture with universal definitions, Chapter 3 compares different approaches to understanding civil society’s role in peacebuilding. It considers how various contexts and phases of conflict point to the adaptive nature of locally-owned peacebuilding processes; a helpful starting point to understand what is possible in the implementation of inclusive peacebuilding.

Chapter 4 outlines the barriers and challenges civil society groups face in carrying out their peacebuilding work; bringing together structural, process, and internal obstacles identified by participants from varying contexts. Chapter 5 presents the strategies employed by grassroots peacebuilders to counter these challenges and achieve effective inclusion in peacebuilding, including in-depth case studies from across the world. These strategies focus on addressing the root causes of conflict, with a wide range of non-violent approaches including facilitated dialogue, bridging divides between groups and addressing structural inequalities that contribute to conflict.

Local peacebuilding organisations have unique potential to achieve inclusivity in their work, but face numerous challenges. This report puts forward a number of specific recommendations for strengthening civil society’s work on building inclusive peace. These include promoting community mobilisation and accountability mechanisms around peace implementation, providing unrestricted funding to support grassroots actors, and ensuring civil society have the space for free expression and the agency to influence all stages of the peace process.

The report concludes that local civil society and locally-led peacebuilding approaches play a critical role in preventing and resolving conflict. To strengthen and advance inclusive peace, the contributions of local civil society must be recognised, acknowledged and engaged with. We hope the outcomes of this report and the recommendations it puts forward will lead to increased support and strengthening for local efforts and will pinpoint potential strategies that address the complexity of meaningful inclusion—ultimately improving outcomes for peace.

Peace processes should take responsibility to ensure that the people invited to the table are connected to the groups they claim to represent, and that the interests of all affected groups or communities are considered.

<sup>1</sup> This is visible through, for example, the 2030 Agenda, Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; and UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security; as well as the new UN-World Bank conflict prevention report Pathways for Peace.

## Methodology

The first online consultation, held in February, sought to explore civil society challenges, opportunities and support mechanisms related to delivering on inclusive peace. A follow-up consultation, in July, revisited some fundamental issues that had emerged, and invited participants to reflect on peacebuilding functions and civil society contributions towards broader peacebuilding goals.

Each consultation invited participants to contribute to a series of online, text-based discussions over the course of two to three days. At the beginning of each discussion, participants were asked to read a short framing text introducing the key themes and posing some opening questions to begin the conversation. Participants were asked to respond to the framing text and questions, as well as points raised by other participants in the course of the discussion.

Prior to each consultation an open “call for participants” was advertised online (through social media and on websites of the convening organisations) and shared with relevant networks (for example through personal contacts, or email mailing lists). Potential participants were asked to complete a short application form and give details about their background and interest in the consultation. From this pool of applications, participants were selected through purposive sampling. Applications were considered on the basis of their experience in peacebuilding and their relevance to the agenda of the consultation. Care was taken to ensure the selection had a good gender balance, coverage of a wide range of countries and continents, experiences at both local, national and international level, and a mix of academic and practitioner-oriented participants. In addition to the open application process, the convening organisations directly approached a number of possible participants and identified key informants for the consultations.

For the February consultation, 221 applications were received. 208 initiation emails were then sent, to which 131 participants responded by accessing the consultation. For the July consultation, 114 applications were received. 96 initiation emails were then sent, to which 81 participants responded.

Discussions took place in a password protected area of Peace Direct’s Peace Insight website.<sup>2</sup> All participants agreed to keep all discussions confidential, except where participants had given explicit consent to be publicly quoted. In these instances, participants contributed under their real names, which were shared with the group. For contributions they felt were sensitive, participants were given the opportunity to post anonymously to the group. Only the system administrator from Peace Direct retained the ability to identify anonymous contributors.

This report summarises the key themes of the consultations. Analysis was conducted by first grouping the responses according to the extent to which participants agreed, disagreed or offered new insights. Themes and issues that had not been posed in the framing text or questions, but had emerged during the discussions between participants, are also included here. Quotes from participants included in this report are illustrative of the perspectives raised during the consultations. Efforts have been made to include contributions from a wide range of participants. Participants quoted in this report have given consent to be quoted directly. Minor edits have been made to a small number of quotes to aid with readability. Some asked for their names and organisations to be included, whereas others preferred to remain anonymous.

The case studies in this report were based on select participants’ contributions in the online consultations. Follow-up interviews and email correspondence were held with those participants to develop the case studies with explicit consent, in particular to expand on the inclusive peacebuilding initiatives they described in their posts as well as on the civil society organisation in question. One case study was initially drafted by a participant and edited by Peace Direct.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.peaceinsight.org>



Kurve Wustrow



## 2. Defining civil society and inclusive peace

It is widely accepted that a diverse and active civil society is a necessary component of peace. In the last few decades, there has been global recognition that one of the key drivers of sustainable peace is inclusion of all stakeholders in the peace process. As was made clear through these consultations, all three of these concepts—civil society, peacebuilding and inclusion—are interrelated. Our assumptions about each of them affects how we approach the others. Thus, a shared understanding of what we mean by these terms can help us approach the goal of peace from the same starting point.

### 2.1 What is civil society?

“Civil society” is often used as a shorthand for the non-profit or non-governmental sector. But really, it is much more than that. It can also be understood as any collective civic action that exists somewhere between the state, business and family. Civil society’s diverse, often overlapping actors range from formal institutions to informal groups, and may include professional associations, clubs, unions, faith-based organisations, traditional and clan groups, among others. Given this broad scope, many participants argued that defining a strict interpretation of “civil society” may be counterproductive and risk unintentional exclusion. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider what key contextual factors can help us identify and understand civil society without resorting to a universal definition.

#### Formal vs. informal groups

Participants raised the concern that liberal, Western concepts continue to dominate the understanding of what constitutes civil society across diverse contexts. Qamar Jafri (Pakistan) stated that:



*“The concept of civil society is as old as human. But in modern society, most of the knowledge about civil society originates from the Western society. So, it is closely linked with the agenda of the West... In reality, civil resistance, civil disobedience and civic groups exist in almost all communities of the world.”*

The result is that informal, community-based or traditional groups are often overlooked, especially by international donors. Because many funding frameworks and engagement mechanisms are more accessible to “professional” NGOs, groups that can afford it may formalise in order to be recognised and included in a process. But just because a civil society organisation is “formal” doesn’t mean it is representative or effective. Dawud Abdirahman (Somalia) shared an example:



*“[In a project to resolve water-based conflicts in Sool, Somalia] there was no formal organization of the groups involved.... [T]he fact that civil society was not organized was almost a blessing in disguise. This is because the ‘understanding’ of civil society is basically NGOs, whose long-time association with politics and foreign-funded projects that do not necessarily respond to local priorities, has seen them lose legitimacy/trust/support.”*

#### Civil society’s relationship to the state

Despite being theoretically separate from government, civil society must still operate within the existing democratic space. In more authoritarian societies, civil society organisations may be limited in scope or operations, whether as a result of legal regulations or lack of security. Dr. E. James Rajasekaran (India) stated that:



*“In our set up, if we want to found an organization, we have to register with the Government for which formalities are there by which there will be always a threat for the organization from the Government side that at anytime they will order the closure of the organization.”*

Anyone seeking to understand civil society in such a context must, therefore, look both inside and outside the formal legal structure. The discussion also drew attention to political ideology as a possible defining factor in civil society. Some groups may position their agenda in accord with the current government, while others may oppose it. Whether or not that agenda is explicit, civil society actors may be perceived as either close to or in opposition to the government. This perceived status can lead to polarisation and mistrust between civil society groups.

Culture, identity and values

Participants highlighted the tensions between differing values and social norms in civil society. Many groups don't self-identify as "civil society," but instead define themselves by the values they represent. Grasping the diversity of norms—and the tensions between them—is fundamental to understanding civil society. For example, Mohammad Tamim Ebrahimi (Afghanistan) cited:



*"The issue of perception is also linked to culture. In most shame & honor societies people have a lot of respect for elders (who are not ready to easily change and accept new ideas) and don't trust youth (who are most of the time ready to accept change and are the ones who establish or work in civil society organizations)."*

Participants also explored assumptions about the "civil" in "civil society." While many people think of civil society as a force for good, there are also groups who push uncivil values such as xenophobia or fascism. Others simply act out of blatant self-interest. Acknowledging these diverse values, many participants argued for an open definition of civil society that includes any type of organised citizen group with the exception of those that use violence.

Dynamic, fluid nature

Another important factor in understanding civil society is that the values and identities of these actors are not static, but can shift over time. Allegiances to leaders evolve as a result of violence or political change. Sectors become intertwined as people move between them. The understanding of what is "local" civil society is complicated by the presence and involvement of diaspora groups. Thus, participants discussed the need to constantly question and update one's understanding of how civil society organises itself, and how this is perceived by others. According to Gesa Bent (Germany):



*"Self-definitions [in civil society] differ; some identify much more around value statements, others have more of a business model... In addition, civil society actors are also confronted with other actors' perceptions about what they are. And the spaces to define yourself may differ according to context."*

With all of these variables, why is it useful for local peacebuilders to unpack the meaning and character of civil society within their context? First, because assumptions about civil society directly inform peacebuilding strategies and investments all over the world. How we frame and understand "what" and "who" civil society is can empower or disempower. According to one anonymous participant:



*"In my country Sudan the debate is around who is representing who in peace negotiations...the international community and actors to peace process only recognize the formal or registered groups and support them to be present in peacebuilding negotiations and peace process."*

Additionally, understanding what we collectively mean when we say "civil society" is important because of the global trend of shrinking democratic and civic space.<sup>3</sup> Asserting and protecting this space has perhaps never been more important.

3 CIVICUS Monitor Tracking Civic Space: <https://monitor.civicus.org>

2.2 What is peacebuilding?

Just as civil society has diverse expressions, so too does peacebuilding. The online discussion began by asking how participants understand peacebuilding, whether they do so through goals, methodologies or theoretical frameworks. A wide range of perspectives were shared, reflecting a mixture of priorities and approaches. For some participants, addressing the root causes of violent conflict is a core aspect of peacebuilding. These participants highlighted the link between peacebuilding and democracy, and emphasised the need to address socio-economic inequality and empower people with the means and space to develop their own solutions to conflict. Other participants ground their peacebuilding practice in conflict transformation. For these participants, the emphasis was on trust-building, dialogue, reconciliation and the creation of a culture of peace.

Participants also conceptualised peacebuilding as a set of principles or core values. While framing these values differed across contexts, Nenad Vukosavljević (Serbia) proposed that:



*"Peace work should not be there to clean up after the military, or to be an instrument of another kind. Peace work should create locally-rooted momentum/capacity that will work together with partners, insiders and outsiders. Peace work should have a self-understanding approach of being self-critical and critical. Peace work should be nonviolent and create spaces for change (rather than just judge others)."*

Participants also cited best practice principles, such as listening and inclusion of all stakeholders, as well as theoretical insights, such as Johan Galtung's recognition of different types of violence (direct, cultural and structural).<sup>4</sup> Global policy frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>5</sup> and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions were also mentioned. However, participants underlined that the relevance of all these frameworks hinges on whether or not they are anchored in local realities.

4 Johan Galtung (1969): "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" Journal of Peace Research, 6 (3): 167–191: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002234336900600301>  
5 UN Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

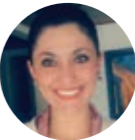
Discussants also recognised that peacebuilding is necessarily a multi-disciplinary and multi-sector effort that addresses not just the absence of violence, but also human security needs (this can range from water to education to physical security). The ways that these many sectors and approaches come together to achieve the shared goal of "peace writ large"<sup>6</sup> (societal-level peace) is further discussed in the next chapter.

Overall, participants pushed back on the idea of identifying a set of broader goals that might describe peacebuilding. First, because peacebuilding is necessarily contextual. Pascal Richard (Netherlands) stated that:



*"To me, from an operational angle we should not have universally recognised parameters for peacebuilding as it runs the risk of excluding parameters that, in some circumstances will have critical peace components. For example, a common 'working definition' of peacebuilding would be moving from ceasefire to humanitarian aid to reconciliation, etc. This is too linear a definition, which does not capture what the actual work of building sustainable peace is."*

Second, several participants highlighted the iterative and sometimes unpredictable nature of peacebuilding. Much local-level peacebuilding begins as small pockets of dialogue that may eventually spread. According to Lina María Jaramillo Rojas (Colombia):



*"It might be understood as an iceberg, we only can see the top of the iceberg where politics and legislation are fundamental to establish a concrete, tangible framework for peace building, while there is a hidden side of the iceberg under the water, the foundations of the iceberg, that is the place for civil society working on conflict transformation on a deeper level."*

6 Mary Anderson and Lara Olson (2003): Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners, Collaborative for Development Action, Available at <https://www.cdacollaborative.org>.

## 2.3 What is inclusion?

For the past two decades, the link between inclusion and peacebuilding has emerged as a priority of global policy discourse. This includes the 2030 Agenda<sup>7</sup> and the Sustainable Development Goals (in particular Goal 16)<sup>8</sup>; UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security<sup>9</sup>; and UNSCR 2250<sup>10</sup> on Youth, Peace and Security; as well as the new UN-World Bank conflict prevention report *Pathways for Peace*.<sup>11</sup> But what do these policy trends mean for inclusion in practice? What do we mean when we talk about “inclusion”? There are many factors that distinguish whether inclusion is actually meaningful. Bushra Nasr Kretschmer (Sweden) summed them up as follows:



*“Inclusion means marginalized, minority, women, youth, and others are included. They are empowered, dedicated, recognized, heard, answered, counted, funded, respected, actively engaged on the ground and on the political tables.”*

### Inclusion must be more than just a seat at the table

For inclusion to be meaningful, the groups being “included” must have sufficient influence and decision-making power over the process. Which means that those in charge of formulating the process must be willing to share power. As Jean de Dieu Basabose (Rwanda) put it:



*“Consultation means the process of ensuring that people have the rights to inform or be informed about what is happening, suggest changes and formulate recommendations, which are welcomed by decision makers.”*

7 UN (2015): Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

8 Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>

9 UN (2000): <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

10 UN (2015): “Security Council, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2250 (2015), Urges Member States to Increase Representation of Youth in Decision-Making at All Levels” <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

11 United Nations; World Bank (2018): Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>

Rachel Julian (United Kingdom) added that:



*“It also means that [marginalized communities] feel confident in their voices and the importance of their experiences... including people isn’t [just about] being represented ‘at the table’ but about their experiences mattering.”*

In other words, inclusion requires people in power to recognise not just the existence, but the agency, of marginalised groups. Dialogue and listening are, therefore, critical to successful inclusion.

### Inclusion is not a box-ticking exercise

For inclusion to work, it should be motivated by a real desire and willingness for change. While inclusion is now a global mandate, it requires more than just ticking a box for each identity group. Dennis Wasike (Kenya) stated that:



*“Most often times, due to our patriarchal societies, women and youth are left out of the table, or just invited to rubber stamp and meet the ‘gender rule.’”*

When it comes to women’s participation, in particular, discussants cited instances where inclusion actually undermines agency by limiting participation to so-called “women’s issues.” A member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) (Switzerland) shared that:



*“For example, in Syria and Yemen, the UN has primarily included women around initiatives on sexual violence rather than recognising and valuing the role of women in political and humanitarian work.”*

This points to the need for gender analysis and quality stakeholder analysis more broadly. There should be a recognition that not one person or organisation can represent an entire demographic. As Amjad Saleem noted:



*“It’s no longer ensuring that we have a youth person in the room or a woman at the table, but we also need to ensure that multiple identities are recognized and acknowledged, whether it is gender, faith and so on. We need to realize that identities are not homogeneous.”*

### Inclusion goes beyond formal negotiation processes

Participants noted the broad range of areas where inclusion is important, such as within the different phases of the peace processes; the development of peacebuilding strategies; and in the composition of the entities that implement policies. As Camila de Macedo Braga (Brazil) put it:



*“Inclusion is not just about increasing the voices that are able to speak and their impact on ongoing processes of conflict transformation. It is about making sure that - in the future that we are building - all citizens, irrespective of their ages, gender, and social group, have the appropriate channels to voice collective needs and grievances without fear of repercussion.”*

While inclusion in formal processes to end conflict is critical, participants recognised that the work of peace doesn’t end there. It is an ongoing, iterative commitment that requires a broad range of voices at every step. This also requires that inclusion be firmly grounded in its local context. Irene Awino (Kenya) noted that:



*“If inclusion is going to work, it must embrace history... a socio-historical context that will lay bare the path dependencies that have reproduced, over time, a system of injustice and inequality that often leads to conflict.”*

### Inclusion must be expressed not just in processes, but results

A process that is inclusive on paper does not necessarily lead to inclusive results. For example, according to Dennis Wasike (Kenya):



*“In my country Kenya, we are still struggling with implementing the National Peace Policy, just because critical stakeholders feel they were not consulted in the drafting, or that their input was not factored in. It took us 10 years just to come up with a national peace policy framework, and so to me inclusion is just more than being consulted, but rather, is your input factored/considered?”*

One strategy for safeguarding more inclusive results, according to participants, is to ensure that all groups are not only present, but have the capacity to take part. Helena Grönberg (United States) asserted that:



*“[T]rue inclusion also requires providing the necessary support (technical, logistical, financial etc.) to realize inclusion. In other words, providing technical support/ training on various thematic issues, financial and logistical support for travel, visas, security; ensuring meetings are held at suitable times, etc.”*

Defining what we mean by “inclusion” is important because, if done incorrectly, it can actually intensify divisions within a conflict. Processes that are inclusive in name only can lead to disillusionment and renewed tensions. Similarly, if inclusion overlooks certain groups, it can damage intra-civil society relations and make future cooperation harder. As normative frameworks increasingly recognise the importance of inclusion in peacebuilding, we must ensure that all actors—civil society, multilateral, government and others—can collectively unpack what inclusion should look like.

## Whose voice counts?

In order to understand what inclusion should look like, we must also discuss the process of deciding who gets included. On this question, participants highlighted particular groups that have traditionally been outside the power structure: victims of conflict, marginalised communities, youth, women, different ethnic groups and different strata of society. Civil society was seen by participants as a natural starting point through which such groups would demand their inclusion. But participants also noted key barriers that might prevent this, including security challenges or even a lack of awareness about how to push for representation. In some contexts, it was recognised that a demand for inclusion in specific processes may not actually exist. Tatiana Kyselova (Ukraine) noted that:



*"[Some] Ukrainians who hold non-mainstream political views (pro-Russian or anti-European) are not desperate to take part in facilitated dialogues as many currently suffer from economic depression and psychological trauma, and fear retribution for their non-mainstream political ideas."*

While most agreed that civil society groups are often at the forefront of calls for inclusive peace, they also noted that it can be difficult to determine who is "representative" of particular groups in society. Participants raised the question of integrity: Are civil society actors who they say they are, how are they perceived, and are they trusted by their supposed constituency?

The unfortunate reality, according to some participants, is that often these decisions are made either by conflict parties, who seek to instrumentalise inclusion by choosing sympathetic civil society representatives, or by powerful external actors. The latter might be donor organisations, multilaterals, mediators or international civil society. Those participants who work at international civil society organisations recognised the risks involved in the asymmetric power relations between them and their local partners. Thinking critically about these approaches should be a constant commitment. As Gesa Bent (Germany) noted:



*"Reflecting our role enables us to identify where we have the potential to act for inclusion - and where we should or should not act (e.g., where do our activist partners benefit from our partnership, by supporting their participation in a peace process, and where do we cross a line by speaking on their behalf, effectively contributing to their exclusion from the process)."*

Participants agreed that international partners must make space for local ownership of inclusive peace. According to Feroze Ahmad (Indian administered Kashmir):



*"I feel the process of inclusion has to be still encouraged largely at ground level and conscious efforts to include the locals and empower the locals to take lead is to be made by different actors working towards peacemaking. For us the people in conflict, who are day in and day out affected by the conflict directly, the peace has a great value."*



# 3. The role of civil society in peacebuilding

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Both peacebuilding and civil society are multifaceted and difficult to capture with universal definitions. This broadness can make it difficult to shape effective strategies for inclusive peace, both from a practical and policy point of view.

To help with this, some research initiatives<sup>12</sup> have set out to comparatively analyse civil society in different contexts and phases of conflict, which can be useful for identifying successful theories of change. On the other hand, the adaptive peacebuilding<sup>13</sup> approach proposes that peacebuilding must embrace uncertainty and learn to work with complexity in locally-owned processes.

A broad understanding of diverse civil society roles in different settings can help ensure that the breadth of these actors is considered when formulating inclusive peace processes. The role of civil society in peacebuilding depends on a number of variables, including functional goals and objectives, types of formal or informal processes, as well as the type and stage of conflict. Participants discussed different ways to conceptualise civil society's contribution to inclusive peace given the need for an adaptive approach.

## 3.1 Peacebuilding based on function

One way to think about civil society's role in peacebuilding is through a functional approach. The Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (IPTI) introduced seven "peacebuilding functions" that were articulated as part of a comparative research project<sup>14</sup> looking at civil society roles across various contexts. These functions are:

1. **Protection** of citizens and communities against violence from all parties;
2. **Monitoring** of human rights violations, of peace agreement implementation, etc.;
3. **Advocacy** and public communication for peace and human rights;
4. **In-group socialisation** to values of peace and democracy, or to develop the in-group identity of marginalised groups;
5. **Social cohesion** by bringing people together from adversarial groups;
6. **Intermediation** and facilitation of dialogue; and
7. **Service delivery** to create entry points for peacebuilding.

Participants discussed these functions and whether they were useful for analysis and strategy purposes. Some participants noted that frameworks like this one can be useful to cut through complexity and support a strategic overview of civil society peacebuilding. Mapping what civil society is doing in each of the functions could help peacebuilders look at the distribution of their collective efforts.

12 For example, Thania Paffenholz ed. (2010): Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment. <https://www.inclusivepeace.org/content/civil-society-and-peacebuilding-critical-assessment>. Anita Ernstorfer, Diana Chigas, and Hannah Vaughan-Lee (2015): "From Little to Large: When does Peacebuilding Add up." *Journal for Peacebuilding and Development* 10 (1): 72-77. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15423166.2015.1009323#>. VTUvX61Vikp

13 Cedric de Coning (2018): "Adaptive peacebuilding" *International Affairs*, 94 (2): 301-317. <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/94/2/301/4851911>

14 Thania Paffenholz (2009): "Summary of Results for a Comparative Research Project: Civil Society and Peacebuilding" The Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding working paper. [https://www.sfcg.org/events/pdf/CCDP\\_Working\\_Paper\\_4-1%20a.pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/events/pdf/CCDP_Working_Paper_4-1%20a.pdf)

However, assumptions around having “different approaches, but the same goal” differed among the discussants. Some pointed to the tensions that may exist between different functions or between different actors undertaking the same function. Lesley Connolly (United States) pointed out:



*“I do think that labels can be a challenge and I reflect often whether new frameworks are not just renaming existing work. ... [C]reating silos between interventions can cause more damage than good.”*

Others put the emphasis on having a common goal (peace) no matter the approach to get there. For example, Keane Matenga (Zimbabwe) said:



*“Civil society peacebuilding has different lenses but more importantly is united by one major goal, that of promoting peace. A church organization, for instance, may choose to use the bible as a guide for its peacebuilding work whereas for a youth organization peacebuilding may be taken through the provision of work and to a labour organization peacebuilding is largely put into law.”*

Participants also noted that functions must be aligned with needs and capacities in the particular context. There should be more efforts to systematise and understand experiences of peace and conflict at national and local levels.

While discussing how they relate to the different functions in this framework, some participants suggested some “missing functions” (for example: “creating alternative structures or institutions for peace”) whereas others questioned the “labelling” of peacebuilding altogether. In particular, it was emphasised that best practices—the “how” of peacebuilding—are more universally relevant than the “what” of peacebuilding functions. This suggested that key “principles and values” might be a useful complement to the functional framework.

### 3.2 Peacebuilding based on conflict stage

The specific context within which civil society peacebuilding takes place was an ongoing theme of the consultations. For example, different peacebuilding actions may be more effective during different stages of conflict. Participants discussed how timing considerations inform civil society’s role in peacebuilding, and how research and case studies on what has worked (or not) in particular situations might support strategic thinking. Some stressed the usefulness of identifying commonalities in case studies to help understand signs of success, failure or stalemate. Although stages of conflict are, in reality, not usually sequential or easily delineated, sharing these experiences can help highlight critical junctures where civil society has the opportunity to act during peace processes. Sushobha Barve (India) noted:



*“I agree about the need for categorizing phase specific research into documented evidence of what went right and what went wrong. I think we need to do such a study on the Kashmir conflict for the past 30 years, which have seen phases of violence. Although we have been fully aware of human rights violations we have not given sufficient attention and focused our efforts to address them which are a major cause for the current phase of destructive violence in Kashmir.”*

In situations where a peace agreement is signed, the work of civil society is by no means over. While formal negotiators may move on to other priorities, civil society is a critical participant in the implementation phase, with a focus on ensuring accountability and maintaining momentum. Desiree Reder, Research Fellow at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (Germany) added that:



*“What we shouldn’t forget is the role of civil society in the times after peace agreements have been signed. International actors might retreat and the former belligerents might be mainly focusing on stabilizing or increasing their power positions. So it is the function of Civil Society to advocate for peace and the soul of the peace accords.”*

Participants cautioned against a linear view of conflict, and emphasised that what local peacebuilders decide to do in certain situations is also informed by communal or personal circumstances. Many factors go into determining what is possible or necessary in a given situation. Ultimately, “lessons learned” can guide civil society on options, but should not dictate or discourage action that has emerged from local initiatives. For example, Kate Monkhouse (United Kingdom) shared that:



*“We have been surprised that our own assumptions of what can and cannot be done according to the stages of the conflict cycle have been challenged. For example,*

*one team initiated peace education in the midst of long-standing violent conflict as participants were keen to hold on to cultural values that were being threatened and in another case team-building around practical anti-poverty development prevented participation in a new cycle of violence during a new political season.”*

In general, discussants agreed that considering civil society actions during different stages of conflict can help guide critical thinking about priorities. Like the functional framework, it provides a helpful starting point for mapping out civil society roles in inclusive peace in any given context.

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## Case study: Challenges to peacebuilding and adjustments to strategies in the Philippines

By Marc Batac<sup>15</sup>

The Philippines faces two primary sub-national conflicts: first, the Bangsamoro conflict, fuelled by decades-long marginalisation of the predominantly Muslim Moro communities in the Southern island group of the Philippines. Second, the protracted armed conflict between the Government of the Philippines and the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDFP).

In 2014 a peace deal was signed between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government, but the passage of the peace deal's enabling law was botched and public support faded. With the rise of President Rodrigo Duterte, the first president from Mindanao, many had hoped and predicted that both peace processes would run smoothly under this administration. Three interconnected trends have since interfered. These are (1) the rise in violence due to the 'war on drugs,' (2) government attacks on democratic institutions and the rule of law, (3) the declaration and extension of Martial Law in Mindanao.

### Adjustments

First, peacebuilders, including the organisation I work with, the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), continue to wrestle with the tremendous changes in the country. We realise that we are working in an entirely different and fast-changing political context. We are now contending with a change in the nature of violence which affects the communities and people we work with and the overall peace and security situation we aim to transform and nurture. While before we were in the phase of "windows of opportunity for peace negotiations," today we see a sustained shift to a phase of a more violent conflict.

Second, we cannot pretend that different types of violence happen in a vacuum. That is, we have to reject the belief that we may not concern ourselves with rising cases of social violence because there are other organisations already working on this, and that these are "different" and "separate" from the conflicts that we are primarily concerned with. These violations impact the Moro and indigenous peoples' communities that we work with directly or indirectly, as well as the interests, intentions and internal dynamics of the conflict actors in the asymmetric conflicts that we primarily work on. Since last year, there have been shifts in the framing and implementation of some aspects of our Philippine programme work. If before we worked almost entirely on facilitation and advocacy for a politically negotiated settlement and on social cohesion strategies, we now also work on monitoring of human rights violations and on advocacy for protection of vulnerable communities. For this, we have partnered with law and human rights groups.

Third, the core adjustment is how we relate with the government, calibrating between dissent and dialogue. Here, we employ a resource that we have—the different platforms (or networks of different civil society organisations) that we are part of or that we lead, to shift between different voices, when discussing with the government on different issues. For example, accompanying our community partners to themselves express and expound on their opposition and the call to lift the Martial Law in Mindanao. While we only play a supporting role, it is more effective as a communication and advocacy strategy.

However, on issues of the formal peace talks there are certain elements that a facilitating actor such as IID can be more effective at. This is something we have not perfected yet, as another complication affects this strategy. The composition of these platforms at times mirrors the divisions and contradictions within the Filipino public and civil society, as to how to relate or engage with the Duterte administration. Yet, even without these alternating strategies in the messenger, there is a vast universe between absolute dissent and defeatist dialogue that we, as an individual organisation, can explore and work with.

A strong opposition stance against the Martial Law based on empirical data and well-argued principles may in the short-run risk the annoyance of the government, but in the long-run it can solidify the legitimacy of the organisation among the communities we work with. And potentially gain the respect from the same government officials who realise that we will not cower in front of intimidation of power and will duly stand our ground.

Ultimately, the shift in tones and tactics should be founded on a clear reading of the context and the behaviour of conflict actors, as well as be based on strong institutional principles of human rights and security. At the end of the day, it is the voices and collective wisdom of the peoples affected by these conflicts—and how they struggle to achieve their aspirations for self-determination, justice and peace—that will be paramount and that will eventually guide us.

<sup>15</sup> This article appeared in the first consultation and is a summary of a longer piece containing more extensive background information, available to download here: [https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/peace-insight/Marc\\_reflectionpiece%20Adaptive%20Strategies\\_long.pdf](https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/peace-insight/Marc_reflectionpiece%20Adaptive%20Strategies_long.pdf)



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## 4. Barriers and challenges to inclusive peace

The role of civil society in peacebuilding is complex, and is shaped by the diverse barriers and challenges civil society groups face in carrying out this work. During both consultations, participants readily identified obstacles they have encountered across a range of peacebuilding work in varying contexts. While this is not a comprehensive list, these structural, process and internal barriers are representative of the many hurdles that stand in the way of inclusive peace.

Importantly, these challenges do not stand alone. All of them are cross-cutting: while the shrinking democratic space is a problem in and of itself, it also affects (and is affected by) the internal challenge of co-optation of civil society agendas by political actors. Thus, assessments of peacebuilding in any context should acknowledge the fluidity of these challenges.

### 4.1 Structural barriers

#### Shrinking space for civil society

One of the primary structural barriers to civil society participation in peacebuilding is the global trend of shrinking space for civic action. In some conflict-affected societies ruling elites lack the political will to cede space and power. It is simply too dangerous, in many of these contexts, for civil society to operate. Those speaking up face risks of harassment, incarceration or physical harm. Goran Bubalo (Bosnia-Herzegovina) said:



*"The government is labeling civil society actors as international agents, traitors, mercenaries, those who would do anything to harm our beloved country for international money. [George] Soros is quite often used by government and right wings as a boogie man, [they claim] all NGOs are paid by Soros and imported (not being citizens) to destroy the country. And no matter if there is no truth in these words, it hurts a lot of organizations in their daily work or long-term campaigns."*

Participants also mentioned other indicators of this shrinking space, including tightened financial regulations and surveillance or infiltration by state agents. Mallika Joseph (India) noted that:



*"Tightening of financial regulations, especially those that permit funding from external sources, is particularly used by governments to scare civil society organisations (that are reliant on foreign funding) into silence."*

To emphasise the profound cost of this contracting democratic space, not only for civil society, but for the populace at large, she added:



*"Shrinking political space is not just a challenge for civil society participation in ongoing peace process or political transitions, but it is a precursor to future conflicts."*

#### Cultural and power dynamics

Another challenging aspect of the structural conditions in which civil society operates are the socio-cultural dynamics within each community. Particularly during and after conflict, these dynamics can make it difficult for civil society to build the bridges necessary for inclusive peace. Camila de Macedo Braga (Brazil) reflected that:



*"A society transitioning from a period of violent conflict to stable peace will preserve the social structure that gave rise to conflict in the first place: a polarized and conservative society is still in place. It is not easy to introduce change in that context..."*

The trauma of conflict or repression affects levels of trust between different groups. As part of building peace, these groups are expected to participate in collective dialogues, often facilitated by civil society. Participants noted that different cultural or political contexts may be more or less conducive to this kind of dialogue. For example, according to Benoite Martin (France):



*"Syria is a country that was long dominated by a dictatorship where people were not asked to give an opinion and share in decision-making processes. This develops a culture where people and citizens are not used to participate and do not see the need to participate. But also do not know how to participate."*

Challenging dynamics can also include those related to gender or generational differences, which can permeate governance and civil society structures. A member of WILPF (Switzerland) asserted that:



*"Eradicating arms and overcoming systems of machismo and violence will be critical to ensuring women's meaningful participation and rights and sustaining ongoing peace."*

Donor-driven requirements

Another barrier that some participants classified as systemic/structural was the nature and impact of funding mechanisms. It was felt that donors often expect huge outcomes within short programme timeframes and/or force programmes to conform to their specific agenda. When it comes to youth-driven peacebuilding efforts, for example, Mridul Upadhyay (India) pointed out:



*"It is expected [by donors] that the planned activities of youth led peacebuilding organisations are informed by evidence and that their 'theories of change' are well developed, a challenge even for the most professional and developed NGO. But most youth-led organisations operate with 97% volunteers and have low visibility. In the recent global study<sup>16</sup> for the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth Peace and Security, an in-depth study of on-ground youth-led peacebuilding organizations, half of the organisations that answered the survey operate with less than USD 5,000 per year."*

16 UNFPA (2018): The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. <https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>

4.2 Process barriers

Limited access to processes

Participants generally agreed that direct involvement of civil society in formal Track I<sup>17</sup> peace negotiations is exceedingly rare. While civil society groups can play a key role in informal processes and/or bridging between the two (as discussed in the next chapter), this is still a key barrier faced by civil society in the pursuit of inclusive peace. As Maryline Njoroge (Kenya) put it:



*"I believe the stage of negotiations on how to end immediate hostilities should be more inclusive. As is common practice, this stage is usually dominated by the government and armed groups for obvious reasons. However, including civil society is beneficial so as to update all parties on ongoing violations and also be the voice of the people on what would be needed to ensure hostilities do not continue."*

Participants also noted that, across all peacebuilding work, more needs to be done to ensure broad accessibility. For example, Amjad Saleem pointed out that:



*"If you want to engage with the hard to reach groups, you need to be able to go to them and speak their language at a time and place they are most comfortable with. It's not about inviting them to a workshop in a nice hotel, but being able to go to their village or school and sit with them, listen and talk and build relationships."*

Even in informal processes, the lack of language or facilitation skills can be a major barrier to the ability of marginalised groups to fully participate.

17 Track I processes are those negotiations conducted by official representatives of a state or state-like authority. This is distinguished from Track II, which is unofficial interactions involving conflict resolution specialists, private citizens, NGOs, or businesses.

Lack of political buy-in

Related to the issue of finite access to the peace process, participants noted that the position of decision makers (whether national leaders or international actors) can be a barrier to civil society inclusion. Where these actors do not demonstrate the political will for meaningful inclusion—or co-opt the inclusion agenda for their own ends—civil society has little recourse. For example, Mariam Salehi (Germany) raised the example of Tunisia's transitional justice process:



*"Civil society was widely consulted and representatives were involved in drafting the transitional justice law. However, parliament at some point decided to 'disempower' civil society and keep certain decisive decision competencies for itself (against the recommendation of international actors)."*

In this case, members of parliament saw themselves as the legitimate decision-making body and took action to secure that power. Whether or not the action was justified, civil society representatives who had put lots of time into the process felt resentful and disengaged. Rosarie Tucci (United States) noted similar power dynamics in her work:



*"From the groups I've talked to the on the ground, you often hear 'well, they don't listen to us anyway' or 'nothing ever changes.' The latter can lead to intensified tensions. [U]nfortunately, at the macro-level, as in peace processes, high level officials begin to dismiss the inclusion agenda because it's too hard to get everyone represented around the table – 'it slows down the process' or worse yet, 'creates gridlock.'"*

These days, civil society actors possess more research and case examples to prove the value of inclusion. Still, convincing those with decision-making power that inclusion is in their collective best interest remains a decisive challenge.

4.3 Internal barriers

Fragmentation and polarisation

Civil society does not stand apart from the dividing lines of conflict. This fragmentation is often mirrored within civil society and directly impacts how groups approach their own work and their interactions with each other. As Lucy Nusseibeh (Occupied Palestinian Territories) put it:



*"'Civil society groups' are not necessarily homogeneous, and in a fragmented society will also tend to reflect that fragmentation and thereby make the political space even smaller."*

Competing interests—and sometimes entirely opposing viewpoints on the root causes of a conflict or appropriate responses to it—make it challenging for diverse groups to push collectively for an inclusive peace process. As with any diverse sector, creating consensus on a shared agenda is extremely difficult. Angi Yoder-Maina (Kenya) related a recent example of efforts to build a unified peacebuilding platform:



*"Getting common consensus on the way forward and steps to take to try and build a constituency of peace was difficult. I think because of contextual obstacles of inclusion the group was all things yet nothing, rendering it ineffective...In the end the group continued to ask itself what its purpose was but overall could not articulate more than support peace and justice in Kenya."*

Participants considered this consensus-building especially hard to achieve after a peace agreement has been signed, when group unity can falter in the face of implementation realities.

Gatekeeping and elitism

Another common issue mentioned by participants was “gatekeeping” and elitism within civil society. In some contexts, the perception is that a few professionalised NGOs that speak English and know the “project lingo” tend to monopolise peacebuilding projects and funding. According to Mariam Salehi (Germany):



*“In Tunisia, which civil society actors were involved depended on who first “occupied” the topic and was willing and able to work within a certain predefined framework. Thus, actors who were less organized would not have access to such a process in the first place and thus would not feel represented in the process.”*

She also noted that this elitism is a self-perpetuating circle:



*“Inclusion and power within these processes come along with access to material and non-material resources and pave the way for further inclusion and power in transitional political processes more general.”*

Related to this was the delicate matter of representation. Some civil society groups claim to speak “on behalf of” certain communities, but lack the constituencies on the ground. This mislabeling of certain civil society actors as representing broad communities can lead to mistrust as well as poor situational intelligence. John Sokfa (South Africa) shared an example from Nigeria:



*“In my context, peacebuilding (often, reactive) efforts, for a long time, prioritized formal interfaith dialogues sessions, organized by the state, NGOs, and/or academics. This space was primarily for male politicians, professors, and ‘important’ religious leaders, who met in hotels, exchanged pleasantries, read papers to themselves, laughed at their jokes and moved on. It felt out of touch with reality, and often seemed to totally exclude the experience of people who were most affected by violent conflicts and the factors that led to such conflicts. It felt too high up there, but above all, ineffective.”*

Political agendas

A challenge that emerged throughout the consultations was the issue of civil society “taking sides”. The most problematic cases cited were when groups used the apparent neutrality afforded by their civil society status to represent the agendas of political actors. It was, however, argued that this may happen as a matter of survival or expediency in contexts where options for any kind of action are severely limited. According to Stephen Oola (Uganda):



*“In situations of active conflict, like in South Sudan, I have witnessed some civil society actors taking sides with either opposition or government depending on who is in control of their area of operation. I was shocked to hear a national civil society platform laying claims that they represent CSO members in opposition and in government. What is clear is that the civil society space is itself contentious and less clear in such contexts as both government and opposition seek the support of civil society and only limit space for perceived opposition voices.”*

Some participants argued that the expectation of neutrality may be misplaced. Civil society actors do, in fact, have an agenda and the impact of their work is ultimately political. Some argued that it would be helpful for civil society to be more upfront about this. Camila de Macedo Braga (Brazil) framed it as such:



*“To take a side may sound inadequate, but we are all moral human beings: in the face of ‘perceived’ injustice it is almost impossible not to take a side.”*

For many participants, the challenge also lies in how this neutrality, or lack thereof, is perceived. Even without an explicit political agenda, there may be confusion or misperception about where a civil society group stands, who they work with and for, and what their values are. This misperception, and the resulting questions of whether such groups can legitimately represent affected communities, can complicate inclusion in tangible ways.

Limited capacity

An additional internal barrier identified by participants was the lack of capacity, or in some cases, the perception of such. Sarah Smith (Sweden) noted:



*“Youth are often viewed as the beneficiaries and recipients of peace programming rather than individuals who can actively promote peace within their communities.... These cultural norms affect youth participation in political processes, the role of youth within civil society at large and the way parents perceive their engagement.”*

Insiders and outsiders

A recurring theme in the consultations was the relationship between “insiders” (those working within their own country/context) and “outsiders” (those working internationally). Consultation participants came from both groups. Thus, while sharing their insights about inclusive peace, they unpacked what it means to approach it from these differing vantage points.

In particular, participants openly discussed the power dynamics involved in relationships between insiders and outsiders. International organisations often provide financial and other resources to peacebuilding processes, and thus wield uneven decision-making power over them. Dawud Abdirahman (Somalia) posited some questions about insider-outsider partnerships:



*“Who is the boss? Who is working for whom in this relationship? Must it be one working for the other? For whom is the partnership delivering? Whose concern is being addressed? How, when and why? ... Most if not all of these questions asked of most partnerships in my context would fail the ‘litmus test.’”*

Without deep understanding of the context, outsiders may choose to work with non-representative actors, come in with predefined solutions, or define timelines and indicators of success without fully grasping local needs. For example, Tatiana Kyselova (Ukraine) noted that:

Participants acknowledged the need both to counteract misperceptions about limited capacity and to ensure that groups without the capacity for full participation are provided with the skills and resources to make up that gap. Access to tools to enable participation in inclusive building programmes was noted as a key barrier, such as the lack of translation and connectivity to online platforms. Given the barrier above related to gatekeeping and elitism, this capacity building can help facilitate broader inclusion by reducing reliance on gatekeepers and allowing groups to act more independently.



*“In Ukraine, we have experienced foreigners coming in with assumptions ... [about] Ukrainian society .... While the fact is that Ukrainian society is not based on clan or traditional structures at all, ...”*

On the positive side, outsiders can link local actors to peers in other conflict-affected settings, raise international awareness of injustices, create safe spaces for reflection and provide access to high-level actors and institutions. The most productive partnerships, according to participants, are those where positions are clear and knowledge transfer is a mutual endeavor. According to Helena Grönberg (United States):



*“It is not our place to tell anyone what they need or should do, or how to do it. What we can do is use our connections, any influence we may have, and resources to serve as bridge builders and open doors. If requested, we can also support with technical tools and expertise.”*

Participants also flagged that “outsiders” aren’t always international actors. Even within the same country, there may be some groups that play an outsider role to the communities they are working with. For example, an urban non-governmental organisation developing peace programmes for rural areas. Many of the same opportunities and challenges apply whether the outsider is within the country or not.

# 5. Strategies for effective inclusion

Greg Funnell



Despite the normative acceptance of inclusive peace, policymakers and practitioners lack clarity on what strategies will achieve that goal. To be sure, the choice of strategies depends, first and foremost, on a firm grasp of the context—both barriers and opportunities. But an understanding of the range of strategy “buckets” that might be deployed can help civil society and donors alike make informed decisions.

It should be noted that, in the process of discussing what civil society can do, participants came back time and again to the onerous barriers that prevent them from achieving impact on the scale needed to bring about sustainable peace. Despite that, throughout the online consultations, a number of strategies for effective inclusion were cited, along with specific examples of what these look like in practice.

## 5.1 Mobilising communities

Historically, civil society has played a vital role in mobilising civic action for peace, from mass protests to sit-ins to strikes. These actors have deployed creative approaches to galvanise public attention and make a clear statement to those in power. A “mobilisation or resistance strategy” is often utilised when formal avenues for inclusion are completely blocked. Kristin Cain (Netherlands) shared an example from Nepal:



*“This occurred in the context of protests against Nepal’s new constitution, between August 2015 and February 2016... Within this context, a Madhesi civil society group called Madhesi Rights Protection Committee (MASS) engaged in nonviolent resistance. MASS first provided an alternative to more common protest modes through initiating a protest program using a variety of creative methods... MASS made wide efforts through social media, individual meetings with other protest leaders, and journalism to spread the messages of peaceful protest, resistance against structural violence by the state, and harmony between communities.”*

The challenge of a shrinking democratic space makes this strategy increasingly risky. Participants discussed the potential of social media as an alternative mobilisation space, but expressed caution about how that platform is often used for purposes counter to peacebuilding. Participants also noted that there may still be room, even within a contracting civic space, for mobilisation. As Stephen Oola (Uganda) said:



*“Resistance to narrowing civil space includes public interest litigation, protests and active advocacy. Depending on the functionality or otherwise of key institutions such as the judiciary and legislature, such strategies can have huge impact in resisting the narrowing of civic space. In Uganda, the other strategy is to partner with lower level government institutions like local governments to maintain active local spaces even when the central government is increasingly hostile to civil society.”*

The risk levels for activists on the ground are, of course, of paramount importance. Since these are best assessed by local peacebuilders themselves, participants cautioned that donors and international partners should seek to protect and accompany these strategies, rather than force them.

## 5.2 Securing direct representation in formal processes

While much transformative peacebuilding work happens via community-level dialogues and social cohesion initiatives, the fact remains that most major decision-making takes place in formal, state-level processes. As Mallika Joseph (India) put it:



*“When a conflict has a predominantly political dimension (like in many conflicts in South Asia), the peace process cannot progress beyond a point unless a formal process is initiated. Civil society can play a vital role in reconciliation and work towards social cohesion; but that will have an impact only if it is situated with a political framework and formal process.”*

Unfortunately, these processes are the hardest ones for civil society to gain a foothold. Since case examples of direct (and meaningful) civil society inclusion remain rare, participants focused on the limitations and challenges of this approach. A member of WILPF (Switzerland) cited the example of the recent Geneva peace talks on Syria:



*“The Syrian Women Advisory Board’s opportunity for women’s meaningful engagement was limited, primarily due to the attempts to make women speak with one voice, and often instrumentalized, with many attempts of the Special Envoy to justify and create a better picture of the process.”*

A key assertion across the consultations was that “participation spaces don’t guarantee inclusion”. Even in situations where civil society actors are included as representatives to a process, they must be equipped with resources to enable feedback loops to their constituencies.

Flexible funding was highlighted as one way to support civil society actors to articulate needs and ensure consultative engagement over time. The disproportionate power and influence of international actors over this material support remains a cause for concern.

**How useful are international policy frameworks?** Policy and normative frameworks, such as UN Security Council Resolutions or the Sustainable Development Goals, can serve as relevant advocacy tools for civil society to claim space in peacebuilding processes and hold state actors to account. For example, María Villellas Ariño (Spain) asserted:



*“The Women Peace & Security policy and normative framework has been very useful, and has provided the women’s and feminist movement a good platform and legitimacy in very hostile contexts.”*

But she went on to say:



*“[T]here is plenty of room to improve its implementation and to reinforce women’s meaningful participation. There is also the risk, and I think it is currently happening, that states and governments use this normative framework for their own purpose rather than for truly including women in peacebuilding efforts. So civil society has to be very alert and constantly press governments to keep up with their commitments.”*

Other participants cautioned that such frameworks risk being little more than hollow statements unless they are “owned” by national stakeholders. This requires concrete plans for action and consistent involvement of civil society in implementation. Afsana Bhat (India) stated that:



*“The local recommendatory bodies anywhere across the world have failed to achieve the basic objectives they were designed for. Though these concepts are exemplary... there is need for evolving them to next level by improving on stakeholder engagements, resolving local disconnect.”*

This next step—translating high-level policies into national and local action—will require international actors to play a support role, while empowering local civil society to mold these frameworks to their unique contexts.

### 5.3 Bridging between communities and formal processes

Related to the need for consultative feedback loops between formal and informal processes is what participants in the consultations called the “bridging role” of civil society. Whether or not direct representation in peace talks is secured, civil society actors can link their local-level peacebuilding work to formal processes. For example, Lina María Jaramillo Rojas (Colombia) shared that:



*“What we have seen so far in the Colombian experience is that civil society can play three important roles...The first space is to strengthen community spaces of pedagogy for peace, because we need to create spaces to share knowledge about...the root causes of our conflicts are and why is it necessary to transform the conflict. The second space is related to accountability as civil society must find ways to organise their work to follow up on advances and difficulties around implementation processes. The third...is by promoting active mobilization around peace implementation.”*

Existing civil society work around social cohesion and reconciliation can be more strategic when situated vis-a-vis a formal political process. Civil society dialogue can unpack views on the range of issues tabled in formal negotiations, using the process as an entry point for the voices of victims and marginalised groups to be heard. In doing so, civil society also plays an important role in shaping public perception of the formal process. Sarah Smith (Sweden) noted that:



*“Case studies conducted on inclusivity and youth engagement in Burma/Myanmar showed that there is a general lack of information among grassroots populations of the political and peace processes as well as how they can contribute to and participate in peace efforts. A youth-led CSO developed an application which provided a platform for exchange between MPs and citizens by uploading discussions taking place in the Hluttaw, or parliament, on popular issues and allowing users to vote on whether they agreed or disagreed with what has been said.”*

Additionally, participants noted that in situations where formal talks are politically not an option or stalled, civil society can initiate or continue informal engagement with conflict parties.

## Adapting to changing contexts

Recognising the turbulent circumstances within which inclusive peacebuilding strategies are deployed, participants reflected on the ability of civil society to adapt to changing contexts. Projects are often designed at a certain point in the conflict cycle and tend to continue even if the context and power relations drastically change. One challenge is the lack of skills to enable civil society organisations to adapt to change. Julia Kramer (Germany) noted that:



*"[T]he identity shift of being an activist in a nonviolent resistance group to managing projects... is huge, and the impact of trauma-related challenges appears to make the process even harder. Creating spaces of reflection and taking the time that it needs to form a new group direction and working style, without losing authenticity and meaning, appears to be key."*

Adaptive ability appeared to vary depending on the type of civil society actors in question. Some participants pointed out that civil society actors working independently of institutional donor support, such as faith groups or grassroots initiatives, might be more capable of responding and mobilising in times of need. However, the challenge was still how such efforts could be proactive rather than reactive. For more project-driven organisations, a common challenge cited was the lack of space within programme cycles to update context analysis, and thus strategy. Dawud Abdirahman (Somalia) lamented that:



*"[I]t is difficult to have predictive analysis based on trends...Therefore once a change arrives, it is almost unexpected and either is ignored or too much time is spent readjusting strategies and plans and by the time plans have been recalibrated to the new situation - it is either too late or there is a new situation in need of reaction."*

On the other hand, some participants reflected that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Sometimes, the necessary analysis may already exist in some other form. According to Gesa Bent (Germany):



*"By listening to what is happening and being done, I often find that a quick analysis has been done—if not of the conflict, then of the situation at hand, which is often related...and my role then can be to recognize what has been done in relation to conflict analysis (and possibly support by bringing different pieces of analysis together)."*

Responding to these challenges, it was noted that the approach to analysis and how it is used needs to be more fluid and interactive. It was noted that the quality of conflict analysis has improved tremendously over the last decade, but the link to project implementation and overall programme goals is inadequate. Participants recognised that, to a certain extent, courageous leadership can help civil society adapt to changing needs. In Nenad Vukosavljević's (Serbia) organisation:



*"[W]e had to to reset our priorities and shift our capacities to other fields which were unknown to us, and demanded skills we did not have. It was comfortable to keep on doing what we were already recognized as good in, and we had to make the decision to jump into the cold water. ...We jumped. We defied the inertia. And we struggled learning new things, testing new things, learning from our mistakes, but evaluating them honestly and decisively."*

Greg Funnell





## Case study: Representation of women, ethnic groups and ex-combatants in the Colombian peace process<sup>18</sup>

After 52 years of conflict and years of negotiations, Colombia's peace process saw a major breakthrough in August 2016 when the Colombian state and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC-EP) signed the peace accords officially ending hostilities.

Despite this big success and the significant disarmament of the FARC-EP since September 2017, many peace activists and practitioners on the ground have raised concerns over the agreement's slow implementation. Key issues, such as political corruption, the reintegration of ex-combatants and the forced substitution of coca crops, have prevented several milestones from being reached, which risks undermining the peace process altogether.

In turn, this has resulted in limited opportunities for many Colombians to meaningfully participate in the peace process. More importantly, even though the FARC-EP have laid down their weapons, other paramilitary groups and criminal gangs are on the rise across the country. Limited access to the job market, poor infrastructure and a lack of schooling means that many rural communities are resorting to illegal coca farming just to get by.

### An international standard for inclusion

Women's organisations have fought long and hard for the peace agreement to include the principles enshrined in the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda under UNSCR 1325. Grassroots organisations' inputs during the negotiation phase led to the creation of a Gender sub-Commission, ensuring that the peace agreement has a gender focus (the first ever in history).

Similarly, an Ethnic Commission was created on behalf of several CSOs focussed on the rights of indigenous, Afro-Colombian and other ethnic groups. These local groups eventually succeeded in including a chapter of the peace agreement focused on ethnicity. These steps were taken to incorporate sustainability into the peace agreement given the traditional underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities in Colombia's political processes.

### How local organisations are fighting for inclusion in the peace process

The Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILPF) or LIMPAL (as it is known in Spanish) have been active in Colombia for the past twenty years, providing alternatives for vulnerable populations to generate sustainable peace. As part of this work, LIMPAL launched a project that helps women to learn about Colombian legislation regarding women's rights issues, measures of access to justice for victims of sexual violence and UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security. This newfound knowledge will allow them to monitor whether the peace agreement is working for women on the ground.

Likewise, Corporación Descontamina seeks to address the inability of state-led DDR (Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration) programmes to meet the basic necessities for demobilised people, such as insufficient access to psychological support. Corporación Descontamina organises local projects to promote non-violent communication and psychological support in a men's jail where ex-paramilitaries and ex-guerrillas live together. Moreover, Corporación Descontamina fulfils an important role by stepping into the DDR process, where some problems are harder to solve because of a lack of trust in the government as a former party to the conflict.

The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó consists of 500 peasant farmers who come from a war-torn region (Urabá in this case). They are faced with either confronting the daily threats made by existing guerrilla and paramilitary groups (due to the many economic interests in their land) or being co-opted into illegal coca farming. They are also learning about their human rights and are bringing cases against combatants through the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to raise awareness and discourage future attacks.

In the face of new paramilitaries competing to take over the power vacuum left by the exit of the FARC, such examples of inclusive, non-violent grassroots approaches become more pertinent than ever. Grassroots initiatives and CSOs need to be more present and supported in the implementation of peace, both at the national level and by international community. Moving from the peace deal to a stable and inclusive peace in Colombia means that an important role is reserved for those who can identify gaps in the implementation of the peace agreement. By connecting and streamlining the different existing approaches to peacebuilding and ensuring that local voices are included in national processes, it might be possible to build a peace that is more comprehensive and sustainable for all Colombians.

<sup>18</sup> Sections were written by Marthe Hiev Hamidi, a Conflict Researcher in Colombia (For the full article: <https://www.peaceinsight.org/blog/2018/11/inclusive-peacebuilding-colombia-how-can-grassroots-organizations-contribute-national-peace-process/>)

## 5.4 Creating an enabling environment for inclusion

A key strategy for inclusive peace is the creation of an enabling environment for participation. This includes supporting groups that have been marginalised in a process by, for instance, strengthening their leadership. Access to tools and resources to enable participation in capacity building programmes was noted as a key barrier, such as the lack of translation and connectivity to online platforms. At the same time, participants underlined that the existing skills and motivations of those on the receiving end of this capacity building are often insufficiently considered. Mridul Upadhyay (India) noted:



*“Young peacebuilders from all the continents, especially Asia, are showing their commitment for this shared vision of a peaceful world by taking up leadership roles in their communities...[W]hat are we doing to increase their capabilities?... How are we making sure that the young people or any other actor from the not-so-privileged background...have enough confidence and skill to communicate their learning as effectively as people from a privileged background can do?”*



*“QPI [Queens for Peace Initiative] is one of WAA [Women in Alternative Action] Cameroon's most promising programs, that brings together female traditional title holders and the wives of traditional leaders to advocate for the rights of community women for peaceful coexistence. We train and accompany them in their critical roles in enhancing respect for women's human rights and fundamental freedoms in their communities beyond strong patriarchal norms. They are emerging new power players being endowed with strong peacebuilding leaderships.”*

Whatever shape this support takes (for example, training or strategy sessions), participants agreed that it must be part of a broader and sustained partnership in order to be effective.

Another broader view on creating an enabling environment for inclusion was to work directly on addressing structural inequalities, such as economic or political marginalisation, to even out the power dynamics that foster exclusion in the first place. Justine Kwachu Kumche (Cameroon) shared one example:

**A key strategy for inclusive peace is the creation of an enabling environment for participation. This includes supporting groups that have been marginalised in a process by, for instance, strengthening their leadership.**





Kurve Wustrow

## Case study: Non-violent resistance and empowerment of Palestinian women in the West Bank

The Israeli separation wall is over 700 kilometres long and 8 metres tall. Its construction was approved by the Israeli government in 2002 as a security measure to prevent violent attacks by Palestinians in Israel during the Second Intifada. Its continuing expansion which often goes beyond the green line into Palestinian territory, coupled with an ever-increasing number of Jewish settlements

being developed inside the West Bank, has resulted in a significant reduction in the amount of land that Palestinians can access and live on. This, in turn, has created a feeling of hopelessness and isolation among many Palestinians, who feel that the barrier restricts their movement, commercial activity and access to vital resources such as water and agricultural land.

Among those most affected are Palestinian women. Many of them are expected to be homemakers as well as breadwinners within a social context where entrenched gender norms largely confined women to the private sphere. This is despite their broad contribution to society through formal or informal labour and as unpaid family carers. Hence, Palestinian women are more at risk of social isolation than their male counterparts.

In response to this, peacebuilding organisations like KURVE Wustrow<sup>19</sup> are playing a crucial role in improving the mental health of Palestinian women through the promotion of peaceful resistance. In 2017, together with the local women initiative in the village, they developed and launched the 'Sumud<sup>20</sup>-Existence is Resistance!' project in Al-Walajah<sup>21</sup>, a gardening and upcycling initiative targeting women that aims to 'challenge' their shrinking space through the development of relaxing, beautiful gardening spaces. They use litter such as spare tyres and pieces of wood to create furniture for the gardens, and these gardens are also being used as daycare centres for their children, lifting the childcare burden of many women given the shortage and lack of access to such centres in the West Bank, and making it easier for them to actually stay in the village instead of moving away.

Likewise, the Rural Women's Development Society (RWDS) is also working to promote gender equality and peaceful resistance through traditional economic empowerment and increased self-reliance of women. RWDS' cooperative farming initiative in Al-Walajah teaches women new organic farming techniques and how to turn materials into furniture so they can sell them in the marketplace. They also teach women about food diversity and healthy living, including traditional methods of food preparation to help preserve Palestinian culture. For many families, such projects have allowed them to use their garden as their main food supply, alleviating financial pressures across households and protecting Palestinian families from restrictions on their movement - particularly in the face of a high unemployment rate and other complex social challenges in the West Bank.

These innovative forms of peacebuilding allow women to participate more meaningfully in their communities through non-violent resistance. Empowering them outside of their assigned roles has led to multiple benefits. KURVE Wustrow's projects predominantly focussed on creating a more active role for women in their homes and in their communities. As a result, participants of this project not only reported increased skills and confidence but also witnessed a challenging of harmful gender norms in the home. Similarly, whilst the RWDS' work concentrated on creating livelihoods for women, it also led to Palestinian women defying strict norms around women entering the public sphere (like markets) as independent entrepreneurs and businesswomen. Increased economic participation of women in the West Bank can not only lead to positive social changes, but can ultimately strengthen their involvement as key stakeholders in the conflict.

<sup>19</sup> Kurve Wustrow was founded in 1980 in Germany with the goal of spreading non-violent forms of resistance in conflict zones.

<sup>20</sup> 'Sumud' is an Arabic expression for non-violent resistance in the face of conflict and is often used when describing the socio-cultural challenges that Palestinians are facing.

<sup>21</sup> Under, which the Oslo Accords, Al-Walajah falls into administrative areas: Section B, under a Palestinian administration and joint Israeli-Palestinian security; and Section C, under Israeli administration and joint Israeli-Palestinian security.

## 5.5 Collective impact or coalition-building

Participants cited examples of civil society alliances—where groups from different backgrounds come together to achieve collective impact—as a useful strategy for inclusive peace. Uniting different civil society constituencies together under a common agenda requires trust building and facilitation. Participants noted that facilitators must be equipped to manage expectations, acknowledge diverse perspectives and demonstrate leadership focused on the collective vision. Unified coordination may be more attainable where there is a sense of urgency or momentum, such as during a sudden outbreak of violence. But when this urgency is lacking, structural barriers can be much harder to overcome. Angi Yoder-Maina (Kenya) related that:



*“A civil society coalition in Kenya lost its way because there was no more a common vision...Perhaps if widespread violence had developed like in 2007/08 the group would have come together and been ready to stand like the Concerned Citizens for Peace did in 2007/08 and help support the national reconciliation...There was a lot of talk about needing both a personal and a national healing process, yet there was no one in the group who stood up and said, hey this is a way forward and I can help lead us as a nation there. Perhaps a smaller and less diverse group could have developed a common vision such as this.”*

A nationwide approach may be complicated by the diversity in conditions: groups from certain areas may be facing higher degrees of violence, different governance structures or other disparate dynamics. An anonymous participant noted that in Sudan women from across civil society and even from warring factions came together to successfully lobby for the start of peace negotiations:



*“The debate between women groups on representation in peace negotiation have created problems and weakened women position in advocacy...[W]omen at grassroots level believe that elitist or women in the center have dominated women participation in peace process... The situation led to a weakening of the women’s movement to lobby and advocate for peace, and accordingly women’s agenda were not addressed in peace agreements.”*

Though consensus-building is difficult, it is not impossible. Debi Parush (Israel), speaking about a cross-border Israeli and Palestinian women’s network, said:



*“We reach out to a broad base by lobbying for a peace agreement that is mutually respectful without defining the contents. Each local community has a different vision. By separating between WHAT the solution will be and THAT there must be an agreement, we broaden the consensus and strengthen our voice.”*

When civil society can unite across diverse sectors and communities around a common agenda, they can wield powerful influence over political actors. Ideally, these coalitions can funnel proposals from communities into formal negotiations (related to the bridging function mentioned above) and hold leaders accountable for inclusion.





## Case study: Women-led election monitoring in Nigeria

To this day, Nigeria is one of most deeply divided states in Africa, with a long history of corruption and insurgent movements that are challenging state legitimacy, undermining efforts at national cohesion and democratisation. These divisions are most articulated during the electoral period when candidates actively campaign along ethnic and religious lines, often leading to electoral violence. The 2015 election, albeit the most peaceful in Nigerian history, led to the deaths of 60 people as a result of mob violence, riots and terrorist attacks.

Over the past few decades, political analysts and human rights organisations across the country observed a gendered aspect of this electoral violence. Invariably, Nigerian women are targeted in both the private and public spheres to prevent them from participating in rallies, voting and/or running as candidates. Despite decreasing incidents of violence and improved transparency measures during elections, violence against women continues to be a significant threat to Nigerian democracy.

To counter this trend, the section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Nigeria has engaged in peacebuilding activities in Nigeria seeking to strengthen women's political participation and prevent instances of sexual and gender-based violence around elections.

One of their biggest successes is the 2015 Women's Situation Room (WSR), which created a women-led early warning and early response mechanism that reported and responded to all types of electoral violence. This was the fourth Women's Situation Room<sup>22</sup> established in Africa, following its launch in Liberia in 2011 and subsequent scale up in Senegal and Sierra Leone in 2012, and Kenya in 2013. Each WSR is modelled on the same goals and principles but have been adapted to fit each country's unique political context.

In the case of Nigeria, a network of 13 women's rights and feminist organisations was convened by the Nigerian Women Platform for Peaceful Elections (NWPPE).

The WSR consisted of a physical room set up in a hotel, where 40 'Incident Report Officers' received calls from the field through the WSR's toll-free number. In this room, women took part in mediation, coordination, political and legal analysis, observation of the polling process and documentation of incidents. Several elections observers were trained and deployed throughout the country and media engagement training sessions were held for over 40 practitioners. Key players in the WSR included pressure groups and youth-led peacebuilding organisations.

As with previous iterations across the continent, the WSR in Nigeria proved hugely successful, receiving 4,973 reports which were all resolved by the Independent National Electoral Commission with the help from local police. Categories in incident reports included voting complaints, violence, electoral offences, insecurity and the outbreak of violence following the announcement of results.

A reflection meeting held when the WSR completed its activities revealed that the project had enhanced the image of Nigerian women, both nationally and internationally, as peace activists. In particular, youth participants remarked how the WSR had exemplified the positive roles they could play in sustaining peace and claimed the project had helped them shed negative stereotypes about the police. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Commonwealth Foundation also highlighted how the WSR in Nigeria had widely contributed to promoting peaceful elections. Lastly, WSR reports collected invaluable data on election violence and the project gained visibility through robust media engagement.

Youth participants remarked how the WSR had exemplified the positive roles they could play in sustaining peace and claimed the project had helped them shed negative stereotypes about the police.

19 A fifth Women's Situation Room has been created in Cameroon in 2018.

5.6 Reconciliation and social cohesion initiatives

In the absence of, or alongside, formal peace talks, many civil society actors lead processes to build bridges on the community-level. These initiatives are more context-driven, and thus can offer more agency to affected groups than national-level processes (though ideally, as stated above, there are bridging mechanisms for each to feed into the other). As Sushobha Barve (India) put it:



*"[The p]eace-building community must play important role particularly when there's no formal process going on to enhance participation in and inclusivity of peace building...Our experience of Kashmir conflict has shown us that in divided societies dialogues across regional, religious, class, professionals, rural-urban groups is very important as interaction between these groups breaks down over a long period and dialogue among them can help open up communication channels to understand views on a range of issues that need to be addressed before settlement of conflict. This can help in creating understandings which in turn can help to reduce violence."*

These initiatives are particularly effective when conflict is more localised. In these contexts, the goal may be to foster inclusive peace in a single town or village. Mridul Upadhyay (India) cited one example:



*"We're an Indian CSO, providing apolitical rehabilitation support to Rohingya refugees for the last two years in Delhi. (...) Dissatisfaction is increasing among both the communities because Indian poor families (Hindus) see CSOs and UN agencies working for refugees (Muslims) and not for them, while refugee community is living under constant threat for years of being displaced from the location. We try to bring children of both the communities together; learn, play, have meals and deconstruct their biases (hate too) against the other community. (...) The basic aim is to increase their access to basic human rights and creating an environment of empathy, nonviolence and inclusion for themselves and others."*

Some participants mentioned similar initiatives to foster dialogue and reconciliation between communities and former combatants, different generations, diverse social groups, and more. There are also promising examples of strategies to scale up social cohesion initiatives to a national level. For example, Delia Mamon (Switzerland) said:



*"We signed with the Ministry of Education [in Côte d'Ivoire] in 2012 a national program to train all primary school teachers throughout the country. We trained them in what is professional peace culture education and how to bring this naturally into the classroom. (...) What did this bring? About 23,000 teachers have been trained in peace culture education."*



Case study: The success of the Baraza model in the Eastern Congo

After decades of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a culture of violence has emerged where the absence of state provisions for justice and security have led many people to take the law into their own hands. Despite huge resources from the international community, the reform of the justice system has failed and has not addressed the inaccessibility and high cost of state courts for the majority of people. Women, in particular, remain marginalised and have little recourse to justice in traditional patriarchal systems.

Foundation Chirezi, (FOCHI), which means "caregiver" in several Congolese dialects, is a civil society organisation based in South Kivu that aims to build lasting peace and to improve the living conditions of the Congolese people. Recognising that the local populace's lack of access to the state justice system and the erosion of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are sources of frustration which lead to tensions and grievances between communities, FOCIH uses a grassroots approach to solve disputes and strengthen the ability of communities to respond to conflicts in a non-violent manner.

To that end, FOCIH restored the system of 'Barazas,' semi-formal traditional community groups whose members mediate and settle disputes, make community decisions and manage community development projects, including agriculture and construction. The communities that are actively

taking part in the project currently include an all-female Baraza which puts women's concerns for their community at the fore. The management and leadership of all activities sits under the umbrella of the Baraza, including a Peace Court, which is a local, traditional mediation mechanism revived by this project.

FOCHI trains both local leaders and elected female and male volunteers in human rights, tolerance, conflict transformation and conflict resolution techniques so that they can jointly work in the Peace Courts to render fair judgement. The elected panel is totally representative of the community it serves and so is widely accepted and trusted, both for mixed courts and women-only courts, the benefit of the latter being that gender-sensitive issues can be dealt with and women's voices are heard.

The combination of mixed gender and all-female courts have had unexpected successes, encouraging behavioural change of men towards women, enhancing youth engagement and empowering women. These Peace Courts became a platform for community mobilisation, dialogue and collaboration and turned out to be one of the most efficient mechanisms to foster resilience and strengthen community cohesion. So far, 38 villages in Ruzizi Plain, Uvira, Walungu and Fizi have established Peace Courts to solve disputes, including ethnic conflicts, marital problems and private matters.



## Case study: Promoting interfaith dialogue and leadership among Pakistan's religious communities

**Qamar Jafri, Pakistan civil society researcher<sup>23</sup>**

As religion in Pakistan continues to be co-opted into extremist political agendas, influential moral and religious leaders have a vital role to play in their communities. However, many are part and parcel of the problem. Educational curricula in madrassas (Islamic religious schools), schools and colleges deal with complex issues around religious identity formation. This sometimes replicates explosive political narratives, which can lead to violence.

To counter this trend, the Peace and Education Foundation (PEF), established in 2009 in Islamabad, works across Pakistan to engage and enhance the capacity of religious leaders to develop a grassroots culture of dialogue between religious representatives.

PEF organises interfaith dialogues with religious leaders across Pakistan, including imams, madrasa teachers, Hindu pandits, priests (Catholic and Protestant) and Sikh Gyanis (congregation leaders). The dialogues create a safe space for religious leaders, where their roles and authority can be discussed openly through organised interactive sessions. They discuss the issues that they are most concerned about and work together to generate appropriate solutions. For example, they will select an ongoing conflict in a participant's community and brainstorm together to identify its causes and potential solutions. This is an effective team building tool which empowers religious leaders to foster interfaith dialogue and mediation, and it provides an opportunity to learn about conflict resolution.

From these sessions, peace champions are selected and trained in leadership and conflict resolution skills. Once they return to their communities, they conduct seminars, reflection sessions and workshops on tolerance, peace and conflict resolution. As part of this process, champions visit different places of worship to encourage social cohesion and understanding between religions. They also assist third-party

evaluators in collecting feedback from the community about their interventions.

This work has been impactful in the Pakistani context. For example, a peace champion from the programme successfully prevented a suicide bomber from joining a militant organisation in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Likewise, some champions intervened to prevent an outbreak of violence between Christian and Muslims and others acted as mediators in a dispute between two religious communities in South Punjab.

PEF's meaningful interventions have encouraged inclusive interfaith dialogue, empowering local religious representatives to use their community influence and act as agents of positive change.



<sup>23</sup> Qamar's research is supported by a Scholarship from the Australian Government Research Training Programme (RTP).

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## 5.7 Modelling inclusion within civil society

An important and overlooked strategy to help civil society more effectively pursue inclusive peace is to make sure that they model inclusion within their own organisations and structures. In other words, that they "walk the walk" and not just "talk the talk". Theodore Mbazumutima (Burundi) observed that:



*"We learnt that [in] contexts where there is no political will to involve everybody in peacebuilding, it is important for civil society organisations to build the capacity of the excluded groups to advocate for their own space. Doing it on their behalf does not work."*

Inés Soria-Donlan (United Kingdom) added that:



*"Inclusion does not only mean a shift in the way people's voices are heard and listened to in peacebuilding/political processes, but also requires a shift in the way these voices are included in the structural organization of the stakeholders who are championing for this change."*

Other participants agreed that civil society actors - both local and international - must do more to demonstrate inclusion with their own staff and board composition. This will help address some of the internal barriers mentioned earlier in this report, especially around (perception of) civil society groups as unrepresentative. What's more, inclusion of diverse perspectives (especially from conflict-affected communities) leads to better programming choices, and ultimately better outcomes.

## 5.8 Critical reflection and learning

Effective inclusion requires civil society actors to understand their context, in particular the fluid dynamics that shape conflict in any given community. However, the space that civil society groups have to reflect on strategy—and critically, to act on those reflections—is extremely limited. Threats, emergencies and the psychological burden of violent conflict all constrict this ability. For donor-dependent organisations, programming and funding frameworks compound this limitation. Thus, participants stressed that the flexibility for critical reflection and learning is an important strategy for meeting the goal of peace. John Ede (Nigeria) pointed out that:



*"In the peace-building ecosystem, there is always something new to learn as the process is ever changing and thus, learning has to be a lifelong adaptive process."*

Partnerships play a critical role in constructing this space for learning. For donor organisations, Benoit Martin (France) noted that:



*"We tend to forget to introduce the importance of reflecting to the partners and the donor-relationship plays a role in that (the partner thinks he has a duty to implement activities in a successful manner and very few are confident to admit that some weaknesses in the process was existing thinking it will endanger their funding opportunities)."*

Donors must give local partners the space to reflect on progress and communicate failure or problematic dynamics without fear of losing financial support. At the same time, participants stressed the importance of ownership and that learning must be an ongoing and integral part of organisational culture. In practice, however, institutional learning remains a challenge for civil society organisations.

A number of useful examples of reflection and learning were mentioned. For some organisations, examples included internal strategy sessions midway through programmes to reflect on activities versus results; using outcome harvesting methods or collecting feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders; or working with an external resource person to evaluate and reflect on results. Comfort Attah (Nigeria) said:



*"When we expose our learning to experts and consultants to monitor activities, they help in reviewing our past program and evaluate the strategy that worked and those that are not applicable. This learning helps improve and strengthen our program, and the strategies we learn become key to the next stage of our program. [...] Learning from the field and research, as we get feedback from the community, helped us in [identifying] key intervention gaps and how to address them effectively."*

Training and networking spaces were cited as opportunities that provide informal and regular spaces for exchange and analysis. Some participants were also experimenting with technology, social media and non-written media to support such reflections.

Research was also mentioned as a key theme for reflection and learning how to make peacebuilding more effective and inclusive. A widespread issue for participants was the sheer volume of research and analysis that exists. Most lack the time to absorb or keep track of it. While research was greatly valued by participants, notably in capturing evidence of impact, they agreed that more can be done to enhance collaboration between researchers and civil society. This coordination can help ensure that research is relevant and applicable in practice. Ideally, such partnerships are not restricted to one-off projects, but are based on long-term mutual exchange. Participants also noted that academic institutions can be more transparent about their agendas and how they select partners.



Dania Ali



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# Conclusions & Recommendations

The “Civil Society & Inclusive Peace” online consultations unearthed many insights into civil society peacebuilding initiatives. It showed that creating a shared definition on “civil society”, “peacebuilding” and “inclusion” is not always possible and can even be counterproductive. But if different actors are explicit about what they mean with these terms, it can greatly support inclusive peacebuilding.

Any effort to strengthen and advance inclusive peace must actively engage the contributions of local civil society and should ensure that inclusion is not a box-ticking exercise. Without question, national governments with support of the international community carry responsibility to prevent and stop conflict. However, as this report demonstrates, local civil society and locally-led peacebuilding approaches play a critical role in achieving this.

The contextual knowledge, diversity and breadth of civil society can be a strength that provides decision-makers with more “tools in their toolbox” and can help them to think outside of the box. Yet, civil society continues to face barriers to inclusion in formal processes. Not only is the shrinking democratic space a challenge in many countries, socio-cultural dynamics can make it difficult to build bridges. In addition, donors can expect huge outcomes within a short period of time or force programmes to conform to their agendas.

On top of that, access to the formal negotiation table remains a challenge for civil society. This can be due to a lack of political buy-in or it could be perceived to make the negotiation process too complex, leading to gridlock. Given the internal barriers civil society faces, the latter is not ungrounded and raises the question of representation. Do some civil society groups, who claim to speak on behalf of certain communities, actually do so and/or do they have their own political agendas? And we should also raise the question if civil society actors are given adequate support to meet the expectations of a representation mandate and if, on the other hand, process conveners are receptive to collaborate with diverse civil society actors.

Practical considerations in terms of capacity and resources were also highlighted as challenges for inclusive peacebuilding. In particular, access to translators, online platforms and the lack of capacity among convenors of peace processes to work with the diversity of civil society were all raised as obstacles.

To address these challenges the consultation respondents mentioned a number of strategies to reach effective inclusion. One example provided was mobilising communities to galvanise public attention, however, the shrinking democratic space poses risks for this strategy. Securing access formal processes was highlighted as vital, because major decision-making still takes place on that level. Where civil society actors have a representation mandate, this should come with feedback loops to the communities they represent. Where formal representation is not secured, civil society should still be able to find alternative ways to link their locally-led, bottom-up peacebuilding work to formal processes. Inclusion needs an enabling environment, which means tackling structural inequalities, such as economic or political marginalisation, as well as providing access to tools and resources and the space to reflect and learn.

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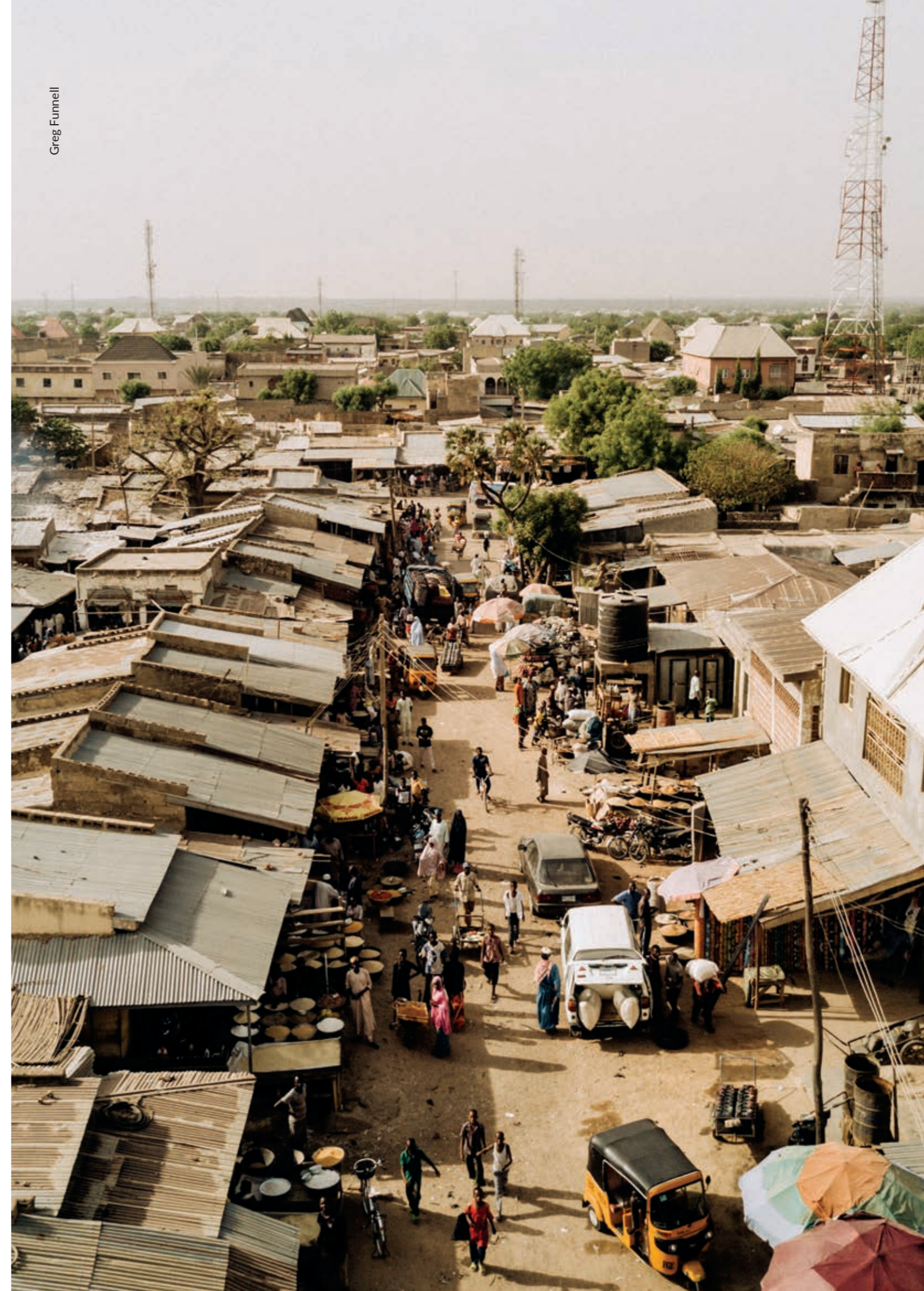
In response to these insights, Peace Direct have developed the following recommendations aimed at international donors and other actors responsible for crucial decisions related to the makeup, funding and implementation of peacebuilding efforts.

- **To secure meaningful inclusion, decision makers should undertake broad stakeholder analyses that respect the interests of all affected groups or communities.** Those in charge of convening or funding peace processes should take responsibility for ensuring that the people invited are actually connected to the groups they claim to represent.
- **Civil society should be allowed agency to influence all stages of peace processes.** In addition to formal representation, decision makers should open channels of communication with those who are not at the table to give them the chance to input into the negotiations.
- **Given the shrinking space for civil society in countries worldwide, international donors and multilateral organisations should, where possible, apply pressure on states that continue to limit free expression by civil society.**
- **Donors should incorporate unrestricted funds that can support grassroots and more informal civil society actors.** Instead of relying solely on a limited roster of professionalised NGOs, peacebuilding donors could make efforts to include informal actors without forcing them to conform to a particular concept of civil society grantees.

- **Decision makers and international donors should support accountability mechanisms and promote community mobilisation around peace implementation.** Given that peace and conflict are not linear, support for civil society initiatives must not stop at the moment when peace accords are signed.
- **The civil society peacebuilding community needs to address internal barriers by building space for reflection and learning.** For example, civil society can build partnerships with academic institutions to help capture evidence of impact; prioritise internal strategy sessions during programme implementation; work with expert facilitators; and experiment with technology and writing tools to support reflection. Well-facilitated reflection spaces that pay attention to power, diversity and solidarity amongst civil society peers are equally crucial to collective impact.

The online consultations unearthed the structural, process and internal barriers identified by participants. Yet, many innovative efforts are being implemented across the world to build sustainable, inclusive peace. We hope the outcomes of this report will lead to increased support and strengthening for those vital efforts.

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# Appendix: Participants

Below is a list of the participants who took part in the online consultation. We also acknowledge the contributions made by participants who wish to remain anonymous. The details included here represent those provided by participants at the time of the consultation, and may no longer reflect their current roles.

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## About Peace Direct

Peace Direct works with local people to stop violence and build sustainable peace. We believe that local people should lead all peacebuilding efforts, and this report is the latest in a series canvassing local views on violent conflicts around the world in an effort to highlight local capacities for peace and local expertise.

For more information on this series of reports, please contact us.

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