

8 Practitioners' Reflections

“The question for me is, if we don’t sit down and talk, if we don’t have these mechanisms, what happens?”



8.1 Introduction

This section presents and compares the personal reflections of practitioners on case studies, based on four in-depth interviews with GPPAC regional representatives in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan), Eastern & Central Africa (Kenya), the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. They have all have been centrally engaged within their organisations and through domestic and international networks in promoting, developing and participating in different types of multi-stakeholder processes aimed at preventing conflict or the recurrence of conflict. **While the interviews took place in 2013 and some of the specific events described have moved on, the reflections and challenges remain of broader significance.**

The starting point for each interview was a series of open-ended questions aimed at providing a framework for comparison across the particular experiences. The interviews showed that while there are many similarities of experience, the differences within this small sample are equally noteworthy. Defining the uses and constraints on multi-stakeholder processes is obviously heavily influenced by national and regional political contexts, individual and organisational experiences and capacities:

- In the days just prior to a potentially explosive national election, the focus in **Kenya** was on how different actors could work together (and independently) to persuade politicians and their followers not to use violence to try to win power. In the circumstances, overlapping and functionally linked networks and institutions, including a range of state security, justice and electoral agencies, had more or less well-developed working relationships, plans and capacities to act to deflect political events.
- In the **Kyrgyz** context, in the absence of an imminent crucial election or another overarching threat to human security, the main challenge was working cooperatively on national level action, where stakeholder conflict prevention and mitigation processes were used with varying degrees of effectiveness at the local and region levels.
- In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, the objective was to develop a working relationship between civil society and intergovernmental organisations with common interests in the prevention of armed violence. This was particularly difficult because, though social and criminal violence were of greater concern to ordinary people than organised political violence, it was not considered to have reached crisis proportions.
- In post-coup **Fiji**, the two multi-stakeholder processes discussed are aimed at enabling a return to democracy, while on a regional level the **Pacific** Islands Forum provided a venue for broad-based security discussions between government officials and civil society groups, in this case networks advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Initiator or joiner

The different cases show some clear distinctions between experiences of trying to initiate a multi-stakeholder process or joining one designed and convened by others as an invited participant. In none of the cases did an individual CSO or even a CSO network successfully design, initiate and take the political lead in a multi-stakeholder process, where government was one of the main participants. At best, NGOs, former officials and diplomats and religious leaders have formed purpose-built processes, for example, Kenya's Concerned Citizens for Peace, which then reached out to state actors, opposition politicians and other sectors.

More common were processes initiated and facilitated by the UNDP, in which governments agreed to participate with civil society actors and others who were invited into the process by the convener. For CSO joiners to processes developed and facilitated by intergovernmental institutions, opportunities to shape the process can depend to a large extent on the convener and the convener's willingness and ability to encourage and negotiate contributions of structural issues and procedural ideas from all participants.

Participation

Regarding participation in these processes, the two main categories of participants were CSOs involved in peacebuilding, human rights monitoring or in faith-based activities who engage with government politicians and officials with governance and security responsibilities.

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In all four case studies, the UNDP and other intergovernmental organisations at times played central or key supporting roles in different processes. Three-legged initiatives—CSOs, national government bodies and intergovernmental entities—can represent wide-ranging interests and can justifiably be labelled multi-stakeholder processes. At the same time, they may ignore or purposefully not directly engage with other potentially important sectors such as business leaders, legal political opposition groups, extra-legal opposition groups, minority groups and others.

The multi-stakeholder processes discussed in the interviews all appeared to involve relatively high-profile individuals representing well-established national institutions, whether civil society organisations, government agencies, religious institutions, the media, the private sector or the security sector—in effect, members of national elite groups.

Some of the processes had concrete links with grassroots organisations and could be said to indirectly represent them. Some interacted with external groups to try to influence their behaviour, such as youth gangs or militias, but did not necessarily seek to represent those groups. None of the cases suggested that a primary function of a process be to include difficult or belligerent oppositional groups, but certainly to interact with them as necessary and when possible.

8.2 Towards Infrastructures for Peace in Kyrgyzstan

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Context

In Kyrgyzstan we have interethnic tensions, even bloody clashes, regularly. We have regionalism, the South versus the North. We have tensions within Islam, between the so-called moderate Muslims and the so-called non-moderate Muslims. We have tensions on the language issue. There are nationalists who want to force everybody to speak and write in Kyrgyz, the state language. Another conflict driver is corruption. These issues fragment the population, and everything is politicised. The way people express their agreement or disagreement always holds the danger of becoming violent.

In areas where we have had interethnic clashes, the representatives from minority groups are now afraid to express themselves. This is a national problem. After violent clashes broke out in June 2010, the leaders of the Uzbek minority were imprisoned, and there are no new leaders who can express the needs of this minority. The language issue has become so politicised that ethnic minorities are afraid to address it openly. People try not to talk about it, or if they do, it is in conflictual, aggressive ways.

Defining multi-stakeholder processes

In this context, we have a national understanding that multi-stakeholder processes are necessary, that they provide opportunities to represent gender diversity, age diversity, and various sectors, to hear different views and to see different priorities, on how to work with

conflict. We recognise that we need to have capacity on various levels, in different sectors, to understand conflict, to learn about the Do No Harm conflict sensitivity approach, and the need for systematic monitoring and analysis. We have also discussed national and local mechanisms known as infrastructures for peace.

Process components

We have multi-stakeholder processes at the national, regional and grassroots levels. These processes involve representatives of NGOs and civil society, representatives of state agencies with mandates to deal with conflict, representatives of international organisations, and community residents, who are the ultimate beneficiaries.

These are the groups that are influential and can convince and motivate people.

At the grassroots level, we involve women's peace committees, councils of elders, youth councils, local NGOs, media, business structures, as well as religious leaders (especially the southern part of the country is very religious). These are the groups that are influential and can convince and motivate people. Government usually has a representative from the Governor's Office or from the Deputy Governor, who is responsible for security issues.

The Oblasts are our seven administrative regions. The Oblast Advisory Committees are multi-stakeholder groups that come together more or less monthly to analyse conflict situations. Field monitoring is done by NGOs. Early warning reports are discussed by the Oblast Advisory Committees, with recommendations on what should be done, and by whom. And then implementation activities are mostly carried out using donors' funds, so the implementation process is project-oriented and financed by the donors.

On the national level, we didn't have a structure until recently. In fact, we had lost all hope after months of lobbying Members of Parliament, analysts, politicians, famous people. Then, at the beginning of December 2012, President Almazbek Atambaev established the position of Advisor on Inter-Ethnic Issues, mandated to set up a structure in the government to coordinate peacebuilding. This advisor has an office within the Presidential Office, and staff.

Origins and development

Kyrgyzstan is a dynamic state where civil society is pretty strong and vocal, and both the business sector and NGOs are quite active. Opposition was always strong at different times. That's why we have had two revolutions (2005 and 2010). Both the President and the Prime Minister have expressed that to have stability we all need to work together. We also have the understanding that conflict prevention and peacebuilding cannot happen in an ad-hoc way. This is such a complicated field that without joint efforts we will never be successful. The UNDP has also supported these processes, and not only financially. They understood that civil society and state organisations should definitely be involved.

CSOs insisted that it should include a national strategy on conflict prevention, peacebuilding, or national coherence.

Some six years ago, a Country Development Strategy was adopted—a huge national programme supported by the international organisations and financial institutions. Unfortunately, it was mostly focused on economic development. CSOs insisted that it should include a national

strategy on conflict prevention, peacebuilding, or national coherence. But with a corrupt government in place, the strategy was not implemented. So after the 2010 revolution, we again insisted on such a national peacebuilding strategy.

We [NGOs] tried to convince our government that within their structure there should be units responsible for early warning and early response. Secondly, that we needed capacity building at all levels, especially involving state employees and CSOs, to understand conflict and how to work on it. Thirdly, we wanted national deliberations on issues that were in the national interest, such as civic identity and language. We insisted that some topics should be discussed all over the country, and that the government should support that national discussion both financially and politically. Eventually, in January 2013, the national country development programme was adopted [by the government]; it was the result of more than five years of work. The components about human rights, interethnic development, and the state language—these came from civil society. Of course, our recommendations were not taken up fully, but we are pleased that some pieces are now part of this national strategy.

Process objectives

For us as the Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), working with the UNDP, the objective is to set up a systematic process and structures where the government is responsible for peace, and where it invests funds and is not dependent on international donors. By government structures, we mean multi-stakeholder structures supported by government, because what happens today is that government has left all the responsibility to international organisations. The research, the early warning reports, the monitoring are mostly done by NGOs, financed by intergovernmental donors. We want our government to invest funds from the national budget in Oblast Advisory Committees, and for this national unit to be responsible for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Participation

Representatives on the Oblast Advisory Committees are chosen based on criteria developed by us at FTI and the UNDP's Peace and Development Programme, and presented to the governors or deputy governors for their approval. Each region in Kyrgyzstan has its own conflict areas and conflict issues. Depending on the conflict issues, we have criteria for participation. For example, if language is a big issue, then we need somebody from our governmental Language Council. If ethnic issues are conflictual in an area, we need somebody from the government who is responsible for ethnic issues. We also have criteria for gender, age, ethnic and issue balance.

We asked the CSOs and the business community who they should be represented by. One of the criteria was their capacity in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; that, at least, they had participated in workshops on conflict prevention. Still, the legitimacy of the committees is questionable because to have all NGOs from a region participate in selecting representatives is not realistic. To get all the business organisations to select one representative is also just not possible. But it is problematic because there are different voices saying, "Why is this NGO part of this? Why not the other one?" or "Why not me?"

Different members of the Working Group have different understandings of conflict prevention and peacebuilding...

Power and process

We have some difficulties within the newly formed national working group; some tensions between agencies and between some people. NGO representatives see things differently than, for example, representatives from the Defence Council, who tend to define the issues as being just about borders. We want to table other tough national issues—religious matters, regional voices. Different members of the Working Group have different understandings of conflict prevention

and peacebuilding, of what this group should do, and what results we want to get. There are no structures like this in neighbouring countries, so we have just been using our intuition.

Actions and outcomes

As part of their early response activities, some Oblast Advisory Committees do research on concrete issues, like wearing of the hijab, which led to conflict in some northern secondary schools over students being punished by secular teachers for wearing headscarves. It led to a multi-stakeholder conference involving parents, police, the national Department on Ethnic and Religious Policies, school personnel, imams and others.

Another response was in Osh in the South, where committee members did research on micro-credit companies. People were going to micro-credit companies to get quick money, and then losing their houses and ending up in the street because of non-payment. The research found that the interest rates the companies were charging were very high, documents were only in Russian, which many Kyrgyz are not able to read, and even for Russian speakers the language was very technical and very hard to understand. Following the research, an Oblast Committee letter to Members of Parliament led to a discussion in Parliament on the micro-credit companies and how they should work.

Action plans

Each of the seven Oblast Advisory Committees has an action plan. Each is slightly different, depending on the needs of the particular Oblast. On early warning, some do regular daily, weekly or monthly monitoring according to the situation. Actual conflict situations or different types of tensions monitored include border incidents or religious tensions, tensions over drinking or irrigation water, or fighting at markets.

Main challenges

I think the problem is that the conflict is so complicated and so broad. There is something very strange in this country. There are so many donors, there is so much money, there are so many NGOs working on human rights and conflict prevention and so on. There are so many trainings, so many conferences, so many multi-stakeholder activities. And yet there is still no stability and there is still a big threat of violence. As citizens, we do not see that there is capacity in the country, or that there are structures in the country that are able to prevent violence.

Pre-conditions for success

You need to work on public awareness and publish a hundred articles and get on TV as many times as you can. You need a small group of like-minded people who believe that conflict prevention and peacebuilding require a systemic approach and systematic, sustained work. Training and materials for advocacy and lobbying are needed, as well as proposal writing and fundraising skills to avoid running out of money and interrupting the work every few years.

As non-governmental leaders, we have our own networks in the country and we share what we learn. We support each other.

Kyrgyzstan was lucky to have many international donors who worked with us as real partners. That's why I think the capacities of national NGOs are pretty strong in terms of doing advocacy, to be able to express ourselves, to be on the same level with government structures. Another reason for that is that we are members of international networks. For example, FTI being part of GPPAC has helped grow my personal expertise. I have learned how my partners from other parts of the world speak, what they do and how they do it in their own countries. And it's not only me. Other NGO colleagues have gained experience from other parts of the world. As non-governmental leaders, we have our own networks in the country and we share what we learn. We support each other.

Critical mistakes

After the bloodshed in June 2010, [a bilateral donor] financed a national multi-stakeholder process focused on the need for Kyrgyz and Uzbeks to live together. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful. There were about 30 people—the leaders of leading political parties, representatives from among the Uzbeks, from the Kyrgyz and other ethnicities. We met several times and nothing happened. Despite the donor and all the experts, we could not agree on goals and objectives, on why we needed to meet together, what we should discuss, and what to expect from all our meetings.

Another problem was when we first introduced the idea of Infrastructures for Peace using a graphic triangle.⁵⁶ On the top of the triangle was a national body, and on the bottom, the local organisations at the village level. I think we were wrong in presenting it like that, because it was understood by local level and mid-level government authorities as presenting the hierarchy. Local government authorities complained that, because of the (governance) hierarchy, it was very difficult to do something at the local- and mid-level. And then others at the regional level, Oblast governors started complaining that they could not do much because that higher level, such as a National Peace Council, did not exist.

Another mistake was [an international organisation] putting big money into Oblast Advisory Committees, and appointing particular NGOs to run the committees' secretariats and establishing the protocols for those NGOs' work. This created jealousy and a lack of support from the NGOs that weren't chosen. It also actually created a barrier between communities where signals of tension were apparent, which government officials should have been responding to. Officials could say, "Let the NGOs do it, they have the money", instead of assuming their responsibilities.

Guidance and tools

Guidance for NGOs on setting our own goals and objectives would have been helpful, because we have lacked that capacity. Also guidance on the evaluation of results of processes, goals and objectives, and on how to write proposals, working with logical framework analysis and so on. We have been using intuition rather than political skills. On establishing Infrastructures for Peace, I would like to have something that sets out various steps in the process and contains options. Visits to countries where organisations have been successful at establishing these types of structures would also help, to see and talk with the people who have been involved.

8.3 Fiji and the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

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Context

In Fiji, as we respond to the military coup of December 2006, we are mindful of the underlying issues like governance, constitution and power structures, which stem from the first coup of 1987. A lot of historical issues have to be understood, including the role of the military, how the military perceives different non-state actors, in particular faith leaders. The military have always been vulnerable to exploitation by different institutions, which they now say is a rationale for the coup. There is also an interconnection between church, state and traditional government structures, which makes it hard to identify the multiple roles played by individuals.

At the regional level in the Pacific, it has often been very difficult to engage directly with the national officials in the four countries that we're working in—Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Papua New Guinea.

⁵⁶ See Lederach's 'Peace Triangle' in Section 2.3.

Defining multi-stakeholder processes

A multi-stakeholder process is one that can be both public and private, depending on the situation, but I believe it enables a diverse representation of society to inform and define the process and issues to be discussed. I see it as a long-term process of building understanding of the different perspectives on the causes of the conflict, as an opportunity to enter into dialogue, particularly to discuss peacebuilding strategies. It [The multi-stakeholder process] is a critical non-violent response to conflicts.

Process components

In the context of Fiji, a series of different tracks of dialogue and engagement are enabling some level of engagement with the state and government officials at a time when there are constraints and limitations on personal freedoms. It has been about bringing actors together, about who you trust to allow you to come together, and articulating the connection between peace and development.

At the regional level, the adoption of the Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security demonstrates what is possible when civil society organisations are able to collaborate with the UN, regional intergovernmental organisations and government officials. This was a particular kind of multi-stakeholder process, which was about being able to engage with government officials, who meet as the Regional Security Committee of the Pacific Islands Forum. Our collaboration brought together government officials, political advisors, representatives of regional entities, as well as UN agencies and development partners.

Origins and development

Due to Fiji's political crisis, a process we have been involved in is the Track 2 government-civil society dialogue underway since 2010 around peace and development, known as CPAD (Strengthening Capacities for Peace and Development in the Pacific). There has also been a Track 1.5 roundtable dialogue bringing together civil society players, political parties, the private sector, as well as government representatives in a series of conversations using the Chatham House Rule to discuss some of the ways forward around the return to parliamentary democracy in Fiji.

A key initiator and facilitator for both these processes has been the UNDP. Governments feel comfortable, I guess, when it is the UN, because government and military can get nervous when civil society invites them. In the Fiji context, there is also a struggle within civil society to even think about engaging with the state. So the UNDP's country and regional offices have assisted in convening the high-level roundtable. They have a good understanding of the context and from talking to organisations like FemLINK, asking about the idea of coming together and having these conversations.

Regionally, we have been involved in advocacy for the Women, Peace and Security agenda framed by the UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325. While working on this, we became aware of the Pacific Islands Forum's Regional Security Committee. To feed into the committee's work, we collaborated with the UNDP and Forum's secretariat to convene the initial high-level gender, conflict, peace and security discussion with committee officials and then a larger women, peace and human security consultation. This fed into an even broader civil society and officials' meeting. Then a number of us participated in the first civil society-officials' dialogue during the Forum's actual Regional Security Committee meeting.

The question for me is, if we don't sit down and talk, if we don't have these mechanisms, what happens?

Process objectives

At the level of the Pacific Islands Forum Peace and Security Committee discussions, our objective has been to demonstrate that having women at the table is necessary because we have a stake in regional peace and security. As women we have mobilised during times of conflict, yet we are often not part of the formal process. At the Regional Security Committee, we were able to present our perspectives through the 1325 lens on women's participation in preventive action, in the protection of women's rights, and with GPPAC presenting the conflict prevention work as well.

In Fiji, the high-level dialogue has very much been about the resurgence of violent conflict that we have experienced over time. The question for me is, if we don't sit down and talk, if we don't have these mechanisms, what happens? The dialogue process is about being able to communicate that we are collectively trying to prevent the resurgence of violence. When we talk to the military, they say that they are trying to do the same thing. But we also say to them that by stifling people and violating human rights, by entrenching a militaristic approach, there are things festering that can explode. I see the peace and development dialogue as the building of the seawall. While political players can come and go, if we're not building the foundations of long-term peace, we're not going to have it. It will be washed away.

Participation

For the CPAD process in Fiji, the UNDP was looking at peacebuilding organisations, faith-based organisations, trade unions, and the private sector. Since civil society is well engaged, it was fairly easy for them to identify would-be participants, but we certainly had input through a kind of informal referencing. The UNDP were building on existing networks. They put out calls for expressions of interest, and we made sure that our partner organisations submitted applications. We were able to ensure that organisations that weren't visible [for the work they were doing at the national level] were participating.

Those who attend the meetings are representative of those of us, key NGOs, who are working on the democratisation of Fiji at a very broad level. A few of the organisations are doing peacebuilding work, and one in particular is very human rights and women's rights oriented. The participation does represent the kinds of coalitions we have within civil society. While it's not trickling down to inviting grassroots people, it does focus on those organisations that are working at national level, but that clearly have rural connections. The umbrella private sector organisations get invited more to the higher-level roundtable rather than the peace and development programme activities.

For the women's meeting at the regional level, we used the model of not just convening women's civil society representatives, but included counterparts from government. We didn't want it just to be seen as a women's civil society agenda from the outside, but really integrated into the regional peace and security architecture.

Power and process

The issue has been about how civil society engages with that power from the state. Whether you are a public servant or you are a military officer taking part in the dialogue process, you represent this illegal state, this illegal regime. The power is in their hands and it is power that has been taken through a coup and not as a result of elections or democratic process. That's our political reality.

For several months after the military coup in December 2006, there were arbitrary arrests and detentions, and physical assaults on different civil society leaders and others. The human rights violations clearly affected the way women and youth leaders participated in the dialogue processes later. Some civil society leaders were unwilling to go into the dialogue space because of this. For those who did participate in the early meetings, some were very cautious, physically present but not saying too much. Others, myself included, felt that if we weren't in that room having conversations with government officials we wouldn't be able to say, "I'm here, I'm going to state my issues, I'm going to talk it through, I'm going to utilise this process."

More generally, having a military coup certainly exacerbates the already patriarchal or traditional power structures in our country and in the Pacific context, where male leadership is seen to be where the power decisions are made. The move for gender equality, for engaging with young people and ensuring equity in that process, is still part of the struggle. I think I've been quite lucky because of the peacebuilding approach to engagement and communication. But for a lot of people, sometimes they would just sit there and not say anything.

Actions and outcomes

I think that you can attribute the easing of Fiji's public emergency regulation at the highest level, to being able to talk to state officials who can then influence the decision to amend that regulation. In January 2012, the state revised its decree, which meant that we didn't have to apply for permits to have community-level meetings. Where I see some progress is in the willingness of government officials to remain engaged and to receive information, policy briefs and advice on key issues, such as the gender agenda.

We recognise that there are certain decisions by the state, given the political reality, that they will go ahead and make. But the onus is also on us to stay engaged in the spirit of goodwill. We need to take advantage of the process, recognising that the fear is not just among civilians or civil society, but there is also a lot of fear amidst state officials, because they are also working within a certain framework that is a result of the coup.

On the regional level, the security agenda has always been focused on traditional security issues, post-conflict or border patrol issues and has not included peacebuilding or peace practitioners' perspectives. Prior to 2006, there was no formal and regular engagement by civil society at all around regional security issues in the Pacific region. Now, twice yearly, there are Pacific Islands Forum Political Division consultations with civil society, where we are able to raise issues, present policy papers or just interact leading up to the Regional Security Committee meeting, and then afterwards the Forum leaders' meeting.⁵⁷

Action plans

As civil society, we have had to tacitly agree with the state's strategic framework for change, what they refer to as the People's Charter, as one of their non-negotiables. The military say that they are working towards their exit strategy, the elections, and that it's all in the strategic framework for change. So, we've had to say, "Okay, that's your framework, that's the government's agenda."

On the civil society side, the approach has been reactive. The Women's Forum came up with a set of priorities that we wanted to see advanced as part of the democratisation process—an electoral system that includes temporary special measures, a process towards security sector reform, upholding human rights, principles and issues. This is probably the only grouping within civil society that has some kind of four-point plan that we talk about in public spaces. Otherwise, it's the individual civil society groups and their own priority areas that come up.

Main challenges

In Fiji, while some of us have a willingness to engage because we see this as an important piece of peacebuilding and preventive work, it is not seen as such by all civil society partners. Some are taking a very hard stand and saying, "I'm not going to engage." Secondly, it has been six years since the military coup,⁵⁸ which is quite a protracted period of time, and we are still trying to have some public agreement on issues. We recognise that dialogue is important, but we are not seeing change in the way the state is approaching things. Participants want to see immediate change. Sometimes the onus is on us to be able to keep things moving and communicating. Dealing with all the different people and personalities saying, "It's not working. Why should we go back?" can be very frustrating.

57 Editorial note: There were no PIFS-CSO dialogues formally convened in 2013; there is however now a Reference Group on Women, Peace and Security

58 At the time of the interview.

Some are taking a very hard stand and saying, "I'm not going to engage."

We have been discussing how to take the dialogue process up one notch. We need to continue these different tracks of dialogue, but we also need to see them played out in the public space, so that the citizens can see that there is diversity of opinion. But there is also the coming together to discuss and dialogue. How do we demonstrate that public dialogue and discussion is taking place, when under the media regulation, state officials can say things but there is no right of reply?

Another challenge is that in all of this there is still the assumption that just one or two women in the room will do, that and—just because they are women—they will all agree, rather than have different political viewpoints.

Pre-conditions for success

One pre-condition is the investment in the preparation of all the key parties, so that we all understand what has happened or where we're coming from; that we can agree to disagree, but we also agree that we must be in this space for dialogue. Quite often you don't find that, and some of that baggage then comes into the room as well. In light of the kinds of state controls that can be exercised, another pre-condition would be that participants won't be victimised afterwards for the opinions they share. Goodwill in going into a dialogue and talking about some very difficult issues should not result in intimidation afterwards. Communication and styles of communication are also important. And it is also about how to utilise peacebuilding skills and language.

Critical mistakes

I think one mistake is simply saying, "We need to have women in the room;" you can put people in the room who may not be conducive to the process. Another mistake would be lack of preparation, where facilitators work with the participants to get to understand the agenda, the process and work through the kinds of issues that they might want to talk about, so when they are going into the room, they are not just going in really angry in a "I'm just going to tell them" mode. Confidentiality of discussions is another issue. There was a lot of concern that information got out of the room, which almost meant that we didn't have a subsequent session. Some of the civil society participants were saying, "I'm not going back into the room. Things being discussed get leaked."

Guidance and tools

External facilitators certainly help in bringing external viewpoints. Sometimes if you have local facilitators there is a question of what their political position is, and this may not necessarily help the process.

8.4 Mobilising Early Response in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Context

In our region, we generally don't have situations of traditional violent conflict between two parties who are fighting each other on a domestic or international level. What we have is social violence, high levels of criminality and citizen insecurity, and interpersonal violence. In spite of this, there isn't a widespread perception that this has reached crisis levels, so there is no general reaction of the public, of civil society, to get involved. There are only specific situations where civil society is working with the police or other state agencies to deal with citizen insecurity. The problem in Latin America is that almost everything is done by the state. In the last 10–15 years, there has been a comeback of the state, with all its weaknesses, as the main actor.

Defining multi-stakeholder processes

For us, an MSP is a process where we involve different actors in a coordinated way and try to develop joint working plans to deal with conflict prevention. What we are trying to show is that civil society organisations are able and well prepared to deal with some issues, and governments should have some kind of partnership with those CSOs. My impression is that this works marvellously in the books. But in reality, it can be very difficult to develop this approach, with some exceptions.

But although there might be initial commitments and political will, obstacles appear along the way, which makes collaboration difficult.

Process components

You have the ideal picture of what we want to do. For instance, we want to join forces with the Organization of American States (OAS), the Central American Integration System (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana—SICA), and governments to prevent conflict. But although there might be initial commitments and political will, obstacles appear along the way, which makes collaboration difficult. Drawing from experience, in other cases there are some actors who are keen to be part of collective processes, even with their own agendas—as in the case of the UNDP in Central America—but they have been the exception.

To build a multi-stakeholder approach takes lots of energy, time and resource investment, and sometimes the results are not what you are expecting or at the level of what should be done in terms of conflict prevention. You can have a very democratic formal approach of, “let's listen to everybody, let's give the ownership to everybody”, but it doesn't happen. One of the key components is that some of the actors have enough political will and commitment to lead the coordination of the process. You need some kind of leadership in terms of moving the process forward.

Origins and development

We developed the Mobilising Early Response Project (MERP) for Central America following a discussion in the Preventive Action Working Group within GPPAC. The initiative was about analysing the conflict foci and actors in Central America, to inform a regional action plan for conflict prevention. A team of regional experts conducted the research, which was presented and discussed in a multi-stakeholder process. Afterwards, an Action Plan was drafted. We started this as a test case, but it was a pity and particularly disappointing when we didn't have sufficient financial resources to follow through, in the sense of implementing the action plan.

A more successful initiative was TACE (Taller Academico Cuba-Estados Unidos), the academic dialogue workshops between Cuba and the United States, where the process was initially restricted to two specific sectors: former diplomats and government officials on the one hand, and academics and think tank representatives on the other. CRIES convened the process from 2009 onwards, and worked together with National Co-ordinators in the respective countries. It has been a very focused process; no governments were involved until we started promoting the recommendations. So you have two groups of goodwill that you coordinate and work with to influence the governments.

...the objective was to pull the efforts of different actors in one direction in a joint, coordinated way...

Process objectives

For the MERP project, the objective was to pull the efforts of different actors in one direction in a joint, coordinated way to develop a preventive strategy on a sub-regional level. Ultimately, it aimed to provide the basis for an Early Action Plan for Conflict Prevention in Central America promoted by and through civil society.

For TACE, as a citizen's diplomacy initiative, the goal was to develop trust and to collectively produce a series of recommendations on how to advance cooperation in areas of mutual interest. These could in turn be a useful tool to influence decision-makers in both countries on foreign policy issues especially related to the bilateral agenda.

Participation

As the state assumes that it is legitimate, because it is democratically elected by the people, there is often no space for civil society. The attitude is, "Why should we give some space to civil society when we are the representatives of the people?" In some cases, the state is able to deal with crises on its own, for example, in El Salvador, where the government came to an agreement with criminal gangs through dialogues with the leaders who were in prison. But it was the state mainly acting unilaterally.

Other sets of participants can also be very difficult to involve in Latin America. For example, the military have a completely different logic, and it is practically impossible to have some kind of joint initiative that somehow reconciles their goals and logic with ours. The private sector generally avoids being involved in sensitive issues. If they commit to philanthropy, it is mostly 'giving some money to the poor'. On working with the opponents of states, this is very sensitive. If you don't have a clear assessment of the political situation, it is absolutely impossible to get involved in these kinds of polarised and, ultimately, very violent settings like in Colombia or Venezuela.

From our experience in the region, the best way of choosing participants is to find a champion within a regional organisation who wants to work with civil society, and then develop a Memorandum of Understanding with this organisation through the champion. That's the ideal picture. In reality, how we choose partners is often by chance and following opportunities. For example, we had a window of opportunity with the UNDP and it worked, but then we tried to do things with [some of the regional and sub-regional organisations], and after several years of investing in it, it still didn't work.

Ultimately, partners need to be chosen—whenever possible—according to their potential impact on the conflict situation. Some actors might have a positive impact on certain settings, but a negative one in others. In Latin America there are examples of inter-governmental interventions that resulted in negative outcomes from the perspective of local actors, who are deeply suspicious of foreign intervention.

With TACE, we involved people who had had government experience or who had worked closely with government officials in the past. Their involvement had the tacit approval of key government officials, who were kept informed of the process. The National Co-coordinators helped select and invite the participants, following a set of criteria: capacities, area of expertise and knowledge; political reach, and representation among the academic and political community. The list of potential participants from one side had to be approved by the other side, as part of the trust building.

..we involved people who had had government experience or who had worked closely with government officials in the past.

Power and process

Intergovernmental organisations reflect the interests of their member states, so if governments are not interested, this is also reflected at that level. Even if they express publicly the wish to involve civil society, regional organisations are reluctant to accept an equal partnership with civil society. Several years ago, we finally reached a point where we were able to have a conference with the secretariats of the regional organisations and civil society to discuss a multi-stakeholder approach to violence in Latin America. We invested two years in dealing with the different departments to align them and push this idea. When finalising the conference programme, they told us that we couldn't put the civil society logos at the same level as theirs. It's silly, but an illustration of how they see civil society.

The problem in Latin America is that the officials rarely understand that they are public servants and that they owe something to civil society. A high-level political affairs officer once told me, "I don't believe in civil society. If you were representing a political party and were voted in, everything would be OK. But who do you represent?" This is a problem we encounter regularly.

Actions and outcomes

The main result of the MERP project was a preliminary conflict assessment published in 2009.⁵⁹ However, with the Central American Action Plan, while it was conceived as a multi-stakeholder effort with input from governments and inter-governmental organisations, it ended up a document proposing how to strengthen civil society's capacities for conflict prevention. It was presented to SICA, which at various times had expressed willingness to develop a joint project to crystallise the actions suggested. But as in many other meetings, commitments were made, but no actions were taken, leaving the partnership adrift.

The TACE dialogue has been the most successful experience for us in recent years. We are reaching the point of making several recommendations to the governments, and we expect it will be successful in reaching a certain level of decision-makers.⁶⁰ TACE delivered the first joint document of recommendations elaborated by academia and diplomats from both countries in over fifty years.⁶¹ The process was successful because it focused on only two types of actors.

Action plans

We had been working on an Action Plan for the region since 2004, and then we redesigned that plan for the Central American case. The problem is that you can have a beautiful plan, but if you don't have the financial resources there is no way of doing anything. For the TACE process, an Action Plan was built around the group's emerging common agenda and the recommendations as a next stage in the process. Recommendations were divided into short and long-term implementation clusters, and the group found common ground for visibility and advocacy

59 D. Matul and others, Conflict and Foci of Conflict in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador: A Preliminary Assessment (CRIES, 2009).

60 See more in Ana Bourse and others, Creating Spaces for Dialogue – A Role for Civil Society, ed. by Zahid Movlazedeh, GPPAC Dialogue and Mediation Series, 1 (The Hague: The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, 2015).

61 Opportunities for US-Cuban Relations: Proposals for Cooperation in Areas of Mutual Interests, Cuban-United States Academic Workshop (TACE) (Buenos Aires: CRIES, 2012).

actions, including a series of events, presentations, and bilateral meetings across the region. At that point, the process moved from a bilateral approach to the multilateral arena.

Main challenges

In addition to the challenge of mobilising conflict prevention in response to social violence, the second main challenge is the lack of sustainable funding for anything that we start. People get frustrated and feel that those leading the process made them invest a lot of time and energy in something that was not going to happen. From the CRIES perspective, we now only start programmes and processes when it's clear that we have diversified financial resources.

On a political level, beyond the frequent reluctance of governments and intergovernmental organisations to engage with civil society, the idea of coordination is not well understood. Even the governments of the region have difficulties coordinating their actions within their multilateral organisations. From an institutional point of view, they are weak, and in most cases avoid having clear rules about how to act collectively. Equating the intergovernmental experience to what is going on with civil society and other actors, you have to multiply the coordination difficulties.

Pre-conditions for success

Historically, in Latin America, the most appropriate circumstances for a multi-stakeholder approach are when we have a general crisis, as we had in Argentina in 2001. When the state is not able to deal with [a political crisis], a number of actors pool their efforts to try to stabilise the situation. In Argentina in 2001, civil society, the UNDP and the Catholic Church practically pushed the political actors to stop the instability and rebuild the capacity of the state to deal with the issues driving the crisis. The triggers for civil society involvement are the crisis itself and the inability of the state to respond. Political crisis generates a pull towards the idea of multi-stakeholder process.

The main pre-condition is having somebody willing to negotiate a multi-stakeholder approach with you. To accomplish that, you have to establish good relationships or have previous experience of working together with some of the stakeholders. You have to recognise that not all of them are going to respond favourably, and eventually there will be a need to smooth out the differences between some of the different agendas.

The main pre-condition is having somebody willing to negotiate a multi-stakeholder approach with you.

Complementarity is another key component, as MSPs can contribute to avoiding overlapping actions and wasting valuable resources in the field. Stakeholders need to recognise the added value of each other's involvement, and be able to take advantage of each other's capacities. This could lead to avoiding competition and focusing efforts towards achieving a common goal; and to reducing asymmetries in power within the partnership, as each stakeholder involved is recognised for the resources and know-how for which they are most valued.

Consensus on the most relevant aspects of the conflict, and on the key issues to be addressed, must be built from the outset of the process.

A shared conflict analysis could lead to a road map to follow. It is important to be realistic about what can possibly be achieved through collective action. This prevents discouragement and helps determine a realistic cost estimate of the financial and human resources needed. Finally, champions within governments or international organisations are needed to advocate for the multi-stakeholder approach and conflict prevention/peacebuilding strategies.

Critical mistakes

The first big mistake is to apply things from the book to the realities of our region, not understanding that reality is more dynamic. Perhaps what is being prescribed is completely inadaptable to what we should do in terms of conflict prevention in the region. We can bring the idea of a multi-stakeholder approach to Latin America, but we need to adapt it to our reality. Another mistake has been to rely on single sources of funding. If you start a process and then you cut it off for any reason—budgetary or political or whatever—the level of disappointment and disengagement of the organisations involved is very high.

Guidance and tools

There is no one partnership fits all formula. Different dynamics and characteristics change from one sub-region to another, and from country to country. Violence erupts or emerges from a complex combination of social, political, economic, environmental and cultural factors, which also requires strategies at different levels and involving different fields. We are learning from our own experiences and the tools we are developing are based on these experiences.

8.5 Preventing Electoral Violence in Kenya

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Context

Since the early nineties, Kenya has witnessed election-related violence with the worst case being 2007–2008. As we approached the 2013 general elections, there were fears that violence might break out again. The elections were heavily contested and more complex, because we were voting for a devolved government system. In this context, a multi-stakeholder process was necessary to provide various platforms for continuous constructive engagement among citizens and with politicians on their manifestos; as well as initiatives on peaceful elections from the national to the grassroots levels.

Defining multi-stakeholder processes

Since an MSP process involves different actors and groups with varied expertise aimed at a common goal, it can unfold in many ways and take different approaches. To ensure continuous information sharing about each actor's progress and challenges, meetings take place regularly. In this process, individuals from different sectors use their comparative advantages to be able to reach this shared objective of peaceful elections in Kenya.

Process components

At the national level, there was the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NSC) established by the government. In its efforts to build a national Infrastructure for Peace, the NSC came up with District Peace Committees (DPCs).⁶² These committees bring together women and men of integrity selected from the communities to be voices of reason or insider mediators in case of any signs that could lead to violent conflict. These committees work with civil society and the security sector. There was also the Uwiano Platform for Peace ('uwiano' means cohesion in Kiswahili), which sought to coordinate numerous peace activities carried out by different sectors.⁶³ This platform relies on the use of social media.

The religious leaders led civic education initiatives in the churches and mosques, while the business community launched the Mkenya Daima initiative to promote cohesion among Kenyans by sponsoring messages of peace through the media. Urai (Kiswahili word for citizenship) was another platform that contributed to peaceful elections by using print media in accessible language and format.

⁶² In line with the new government administrative units based on the Constitution, the DPCs were gradually being replaced by County Peace Forums.

⁶³ Uwiano Peace Platform Project (UN Development Programme).

Among civil society, there were initiatives that cut across all levels. At the high-level, you had the Concerned Kenyans Initiative that engaged with the presidential candidates. We also had the high women panel supported by UN women. Other initiatives were on elections observation; civic education; monitoring electoral gender based violence, and human rights violations. All these initiatives were going on simultaneously with occasional information sharing gatherings.

Among civil society, there were initiatives that cut across all levels.

Origins and development

In the late 1990s, when there was agitation for multi-party politics, affected citizens had also started calling for the release of political prisoners detained illegally. Sit-ins took place at Uhuru Park in central Nairobi at a spot now called the 'freedom corner' to put pressure on the government. Incrementally, human rights activities and concerned Kenyans joined the sit-ins while some religious leaders voiced out the injustices. The solidarity demonstrated by various actors in these times of agitation for change in the political system gave impetus to citizens rallying together to demand for change on issues they felt were unjust.

Before the 1997 general elections, the Partnership for Peace Forum comprised of peacebuilding CSOs, the police and the media was established. Its aim was to foster peace before and during the elections. This same model of bringing together strategic actors on a common goal was replicated in 2008 but on a larger scale under the banner of the Concerned Citizens for Peace (CCP) initiative. CCP was a movement that rallied Kenyans from all walks of life with an agenda to restore order and peace in society, while seeking solutions to the long-term issues that generated the chaos (see Example 10). The human rights CSOs led an initiative called Kenyans for Peace, Truth and Justice (KPTJ) that emphasised the importance of observing justice in the concluded presidential elections for the peace to be genuine and lasting.



See more on the CCP initiative in Example 9, Section 5.

Process objectives

In the 2013 situation, the main objective of the various stakeholders was to have peaceful elections that are credible, transparent and fair. For this to happen, the activities taking place had to be strategic, wide reaching and coordinated for maximum impact where possible.

Participation

Wide participation by citizens is crucial for purposes of ownership and legitimacy of outcomes. In almost all of the initiatives for peaceful elections, participation involved many different individuals, depending on the focus of the initiative and the comparative advantage of the actors or institutions.

Some initiatives had a core group of five to ten professionals, who were credible and represented the face of Kenya—meaning they were from different ethnic groups—and who had the ears of Kenyans. There were also technical teams, comprised of people from the media, the private sector, peace and human rights organisations, manufacturers association, who added value to the analysis and helped find solutions. If there was a need to broker peace, you had people who had the right information regarding the issues and actors, and therefore knew the right channels to use and who should be approached.

Many actors need to prove to their immediate constituency that they are engaged

Power and process

The key thing for actors in an MSP is to appreciate the synergy experienced when each actor compliments the collective efforts of the whole, using their comparative advantage. But you will find that different actors also have vested interest in the process. For instance, for some stakeholders visibility becomes critical. Many actors need to prove to their immediate constituency that they are engaged and doing something about peaceful elections. So when selecting individuals to represent all stakeholders, there can be a bit of jostling for positions. Spokespersons for multi-stakeholder processes need to be selected wisely to avoid the messenger blocking the message.

Another issue is inevitably the funding. Well-funded initiatives such as the Mkenya Daima initiative by the private sector has had a wide reaching effect and took the lead in the campaign for peaceful elections. They partnered with the National Cohesion and Integration Commission to seek accountability from the politicians on the elections. Donors contributed substantively to numerous organisations in support for the elections. To avoid duplication of efforts and scrambling for limited finances, actors need to be more strategic in their planning including the donors. There needs to be coordination on this matter to avoid money-related power struggles that easily overshadow the bigger goal of the funding purposes.

Actions and outcomes

Civil society interacted closely with the Independent Election and Boundaries Commission on civic education required during the election and pointing out anomalies that could happen. A biometric voter registration system was used for the first time, so one of the things we did was to visit the chairperson and discuss the challenges that could come with that. There were also groups meeting with the political aspirants to have them commit to peaceful elections.

The Mkenya Daima initiative organised a conference that brought together the Members of Parliament and political aspirants to sign a charter and commit to peace. Others assembled traditional elders to defuse tensions within their communities, or worked with youth militias to educate and create awareness of the futility of being used by political operators to intimidate opponents.

The Uwiano platform established the early warning and early response mechanism with monitors posted all over the country to collect information and feed it to a situation room for analysis. Through Uwiano, the National Cohesion and Reintegration Commission was listening to what the politicians were saying in their campaigns, monitoring messages going out across social media and the mainstream media to ensure anyone making inflammatory remarks was arrayed in court. The platform worked closely with the security forces, in case there was need for enforcing peace.

Media houses organised Kenya's first televised presidential debates, in which all the contenders committed themselves to peace. Among many other uses of the media to promote peace were the adverts during the Africa Cup of Nations, running the tag 'Just peaceful elections for Kenya'. With the Ministry of Education there was a peace torch going to every county, with schoolchildren composing poems and songs for the gatherings around the peace torch. Peace caravans traversed across the country with key personalities giving talks on the importance of peace. Musicians composed and recorded songs, organised concerts and vigil activities with the youth to also promote the message of peaceful elections. There was a real web of connected activities.

Obviously in this kind of process it is difficult to have military precision in coordination.

Action plans

The different actors and institutions each had their own action plans. These action plans were sometimes revised when coalitions are formed to incorporate collective ideas. Since the elections covered the whole country, there were numerous activities at community, county and national level. These activities are context specific and are sometimes reinforced when there is coordination. For instance, the Peace and Development Network Trust—an umbrella organisation for all the local peace organisations in Kenya—has a wide constituency across the country. In collaboration with the Partnership for Peace and Security network, they are able to coordinate their work across the country.

However, there is still a need to improve more systematic coordination that will provide a place where people can come and share information so you know who is working on what. Obviously in this kind of process it is difficult to have military precision in coordination. The best one can hope for is that information will be shared, and a common platform where this information can be found is available. Perfect coordination is an ideal we all aspire for.

Main challenges

There can be tensions and misunderstandings with regard to emphasis. For instance, during the 2008 crisis, some groups criticised Concerned Citizens for Peace because they felt the emphasis was on peace at the expense of justice. The human rights groups came out very strongly that they wanted justice to be done so that peace could prevail. Approaches to a common goal can vary. The various actors also have to guard against unhealthy competition and territorial behaviour that excludes others.

Another challenge is collaboration, as the number of groups and institutions working on peace has mushroomed—at the universities, in government, within the judiciary, civil society, among artists, the private sector. The established ones that have longer experience and are more seasoned, see the need for collaboration. The ones that have newly emerged are trying to make a name for themselves and don't want to lose their identity.

A challenge confronting actors on a daily basis is how to respond in a timely manner to inflammatory remarks made by the politicians. If you are part of a network/partnership or coalition, it takes time to consult everyone before issuing a statement. The release of rapid funds for intervention is also a challenge at times. Those in remote areas need to be given airtime for communication in order for them to provide updates.

...Kenya's strategic location and our influence in the region is unique.

Pre-conditions for success

Actors have to be agreed on a common purpose and goal for the good of the country. Our common vision is peaceful elections. How actors relate with each other in support of this common vision is critical to avoid sending out conflicting messages. Regular meetings where each group gets the opportunity to chair or host the fora is important for information sharing and getting updates on where different processes are at, and where reinforcement is needed. You need to do your groundwork well in order to manage the group and process dynamics without losing focus of the goal.

I think Kenya's strategic location and our influence in the region is unique. The international institutions present here add to the dynamics. Kenyan civil society is very knowledgeable and vibrant, and so is the private sector. The vibrancy of the various sectors goes all the way to the grassroots—people's awareness of what kind of leadership they want, and how they want to be governed. We are still very ethnic-oriented in our choice of leaders, but there is also a level of growth towards constructive politics as demonstrated during the presidential debates.

The growth in our information technology sector and inventions like the Ushahidi (incident reporting) platform and the use of phone messaging to promote peace are welcomed initiatives. There have been lots of ideas and creativity in support of peaceful elections. It has been an interesting time to be in Kenya and to witness the changes taking place.

Critical mistakes

Sometimes MSPs can start without clear objectives of the process and omitting the importance of ownership and inclusivity. Another mistake is not having a technical team dealing with the facts of the matter, able to substantiate and frame those facts in a way that does not create more division. This partly involves having a wide enough network that is open to diverse groups, having wide representation and collecting information in an objective manner. Quality information helps in assessing situations and making appropriate recommendations.

Overlooking scenario building of possible outcomes, and putting the necessary measures in place is another critical mistake that can happen. It is important to reflect on options of interventions, and not leaving things to chance. It is contemplating on questions such as: 'What if there is a rerun? How do you keep the country united, because that would be a very, very emotive period, there would be a lot of tension in the country?'

Guidance and tools

I think resources are key, not only in terms of money, but also in terms of people with knowledge, technical and people skills to support the processes. You might have people of integrity who are influential, but without the necessary skills to be mediators or facilitators of dialogue processes. Having expertise available to accompany some of these processes is important. Developing a database of experts in electoral processes or the issue at hand is a must. The need to document the various initiatives and processes helps generate new knowledge and lessons for the future. **Accountability:** the acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for actions, decisions and policies. Accountability describes a relationship between the person or organisation, and those they are accountable to.