



Local-level implementation of peace agreements: Lessons for Colombia

INTRODUCTION

In the last month, GOC-FARC peace talks have reached their two-year anniversary and texts of the three partial agreements reached so far have been published. Although the scope and importance of the topics left to cover (victims and the end of the conflict) is great, attention is paid to challenges Colombia will face in implementing a final agreement. The GOC focus on “regional peace” and grassroots participation in the talks and post-conflict preparations highlights the importance of addressing local obstacles that could hamper implementation. Colombia’s diverse internal regional contexts and their different stages of transition require an adaptable approach that addresses the particularities of each location. It is essential that preparation for the implementation of a final peace agreement be flexible enough to allow a local approach.

International findings show that support for local peacebuilding has long-term benefits for the sustainability of peace and post-conflict development. Local capacity-building for civil society is a low-cost but efficient way to legitimize peace and sustain grassroots implementation of final agreements after international aid has gone.ⁱ This document examines cases of local peace agreement implementation and lessons for Colombia.

INDONESIA

In August 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the Indonesian government and Free Aceh Movement (GAM), ending 30 years of conflict due to tensions between Aceh region and the State. After the Aceh Monitoring Mission concluded in 2006, efforts were made to continue implementation of the MoU.ⁱⁱ



Civil society and international cooperation focused on national and local-level MoU implementation, aiming to:

- Facilitate stakeholder-Acehnese trust
- Engage civil society in peacebuilding
- Generate constructive dialogue in Aceh
- Increase local knowledge of the MoU

Two mechanisms were used to achieve these goals. The first was a roundtable of local and national stakeholders, which was successful in monitoring local implementation of the MoU and resolving differences of opinion as they arose. This mechanism was initiated by international cooperation and continued after these organizations

withdrew. The second was a network of field facilitators, who focused on reconciliation at the local level. The field facilitators were responsible for ensuring that civil society organizations in the 16 districts of Aceh were consulted in processes surrounding the implementation of the MoU. The networks drew on a range of methodologies including individual interviews, focus groups, debates, working groups, and radio programs. These mechanisms allowed Acehnese society to contribute consensus-based solutions and input from within their communities, ensuring local ownership and legitimacy of MoU implementation.ⁱⁱⁱ

SIERRA LEONE

The local impact of Sierra Leone’s conflict differed greatly from region to region. After the conflict ended in 2001, District Code of Conduct Monitoring



Committees (DMCs) were established to ensure peaceful implementation of the part of the peace accord that provided for local participation in local and national elections. The DMCs fulfilled three main functions in achieving this goal:

- 1) They showed that people from different political parties could work together, especially due to their collaboration in broadcasting elections-related radio programs
- 2) Their local knowledge meant that they were able to identify and avoid areas of potential conflict
- 3) They were local recognized and well-positioned to mediate if conflicts did occur

The DMCs had the advantage of being the only local-level mechanisms supported by national-level policy agreed upon by all stakeholders, allowing them legitimacy to incorporate all local actors in elections processes. No other credible institutions existed, so the DMCs were seen as ‘saving’ the electoral process and providing support for civil society mechanisms to resume operations.^{iv}

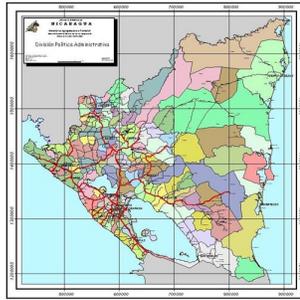
Other lessons from Sierra Leone focus on technical support provided to the DMCs first by UNDP and other aid agencies, and then by the national government. After this support decreased in 2007, the DMCs collapsed. Sustained support to local peace structures is therefore necessary, but measures must be taken to ensure that responsibility is transferred from international cooperation to national government in such a way that local operations can continue. In addition, international agencies in Sierra Leone were trusted advisors and the DMCs were

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established in such a way that they relied on agency presence. This contributed to the DMC collapse after transfer of responsibility to the national government.^v

NICARAGUA

The Esquipulas II Agreement, signed in 1987 to create the initial groundwork to eventually end the Nicaraguan conflict, created the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC). This entity had various responsibilities, including monitoring and verification of the ceasefire implemented in three areas of Nicaragua. The government asked that the NRC form an “extensive internal structure that included region-specific commissions and...local commissions.” Regional differences between commissions in the south and center-north were very acute.^{vi}



South

Commissions led by religious representatives, who negotiated conflict-free zones during war and performed mediation activities.

Church members were key in using their networks and legitimacy to form local institutions to implement peacebuilding initiatives.

Center-North

Commissions formed of peasants, overseen by the OAS. They conducted human rights verification and mediation, and promoted local reconstruction.

A lack of credibility in OAS neutrality meant the center-north commissions did not have as much success as in the south.

The difference in approaches to peace commissions in the center-north and south was attributed first to a lack of a clear national conflict-peace transition and resulting lack of planning and implementation necessary for a unified peace commission model and network structure, and second to regional differences in conflict dynamics and peacetime needs. This regional and contextual variation was key to the success of the commissions in the south, where they used religious leaders' networks and legitimacy to successfully execute verification and mediation roles, facilitating joint peacebuilding projects with opposition partners.^{vii}

COLOMBIA

Colombia's National Peace Council and its associated network of local-level councils is a mechanism that aims to facilitate local implementation of peace initiatives, and is expected to be of use in the case of a final GOC-FARC peace agreement. President Santos announced the reinstating of a National Peace Council under Law 434 in March 2014. Law 434 was issued in 1998



during the Samper government due to a need for a mechanism through which local government, ethnic minorities, unions, the church, and other civil society groups and local authorities could discuss ways to facilitate peace. The law resulted in the creation of a network of Peace Councils led by a National Peace Council, which functioned as a governmental advisory and consultation body. Peace Councils were comprised of elected representatives and held at the municipal, departmental, and national level, all complementing each other and providing input for a new state peace policy. The Peace Council has not been convened since Pastrana's administration, but met for the first time since being reinstated in October 2014. Due to the recent nature of the first meeting, the exact role of the network of Peace Councils remains unclear, but they are expected to be key mechanisms in the local-level implementation and verification of a peace agreement.

CONCLUSIONS

The current GOC focus on regional peace and the local-level implementation of a final peace agreement makes lessons learned from international and earlier national cases essential. All of the cases outlined here show the potential of networks of commissions or councils that can ensure the relevance and impact of national peace agreement strategies, overcoming challenges at the local level. In Indonesia, the field facilitators were an essential part of engaging civil society in the implementation of the MoU, and the range of methods they used to do so provides options for Colombia. In Sierra Leone, the DMCS' legitimacy and status in local communities shows the importance of drawing on existing institutions and their status in the community. The south of Nicaragua offers similar lessons, given the church's use of its networks and legitimacy to form the local institutions that implemented national-level peacebuilding strategies. Colombia already has the basis for a network of local councils, recently reactivated in the National Peace Council and its municipal-level support mechanisms. As the post-conflict approaches, these and other tools must be used to ensure the relevance and efficiency of local-level implementation of a final peace agreement.

ⁱ Pg. 3 & 19, Stedman, S.J. (2001) *Implementing Peace Agreements in Civil Wars: Lessons and Recommendations for Policymakers*. IPA Policy Paper Series on Peace Implementation. <http://bit.ly/1uOd8H2>

ⁱⁱ Interpeace website, <http://bit.ly/ZV3MhQ> and Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement. <http://bbc.in/1ww8EGQ>

ⁱⁱⁱ Interpeace website, <http://bit.ly/ZV3MhQ>

^{iv} Pg. 63-67. Odendaal, A. (2010) *An Architecture For Building Peace At The Local Level: A Comparative Study Of Local Peace Committees*. UNDP: Geneva. <http://bit.ly/1tAXekm>

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Pg. 30-33. Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.