

RECONCILIATION: INTERNATIONAL CASES AND LESSONS LEARNED

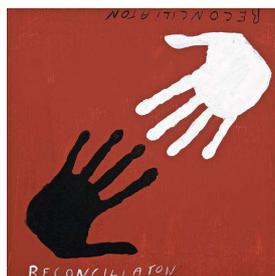
INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation is one of the most important aspects of the transition to stable peace. Definitions of reconciliation vary, but commonly center on adversaries' agreement to coexist peacefully. Other key concepts include democratic compromise and strengthening to resolve conflict, and reconciliation as the construction of positive long-term relationships between people and groups who will implement these solutions, and between perpetrators and victims. Victims of conflict often hold a negative view of reconciliation, thinking that it asks them to forget their victimization, provides impunity, and ignores suffering. It is therefore important that reconciliation initiatives do not cast justice and truth aside but rather use them to recognize past divisions and construct a shared future. By breaking the cycle of violence through conflict resolution, reconciliation can consolidate peace and form a basis for successful implementation of political and social reform.ⁱ

Although there exists controversy regarding whether reconciliation is a goal or a process, this document adheres to the view that reconciliation is a long-term process with a broad social scope. Transition to peace depends not only on national but also on local reconciliation, not only in politics but also in broader society. At the national level, reconciliation efforts can be seen in truth and reconciliation commissions, new constitutions, new political parties, and other mechanisms.¹ Local level reconciliation efforts vary, and range from local truth-telling initiatives to spaces for shared healing processes. This document will focus on reconciliation processes at the local level.ⁱⁱ

TRADITIONAL TRUTH-TELLING: UGANDA

Much recent work on transitional justice has called for more bottom-up truth-telling strategies as opposed to the more popular national-level commissions and tribunals.ⁱⁱⁱ In the Acholi region of Uganda, where widespread human rights violations took place in fighting between the Lord's Resistance Army and the military, local clans traditionally use *mato oput* to restore relationships between warring groups. This involves a period of separation of the groups from each other while testimonies are collected and the truth is established by clan representatives. Material reparation is provided to the clan that suffered, and representatives from all clans come together in a symbolic reconciliation ceremony to close the process. This mechanism has been the subject of debate between those who believe that universal justice principles must be



applied and traditional justice is not sufficient, and those who assert that local-level justice mechanisms, which observe community beliefs, are essential to reconciliation. Research revealed that victims felt *mato oput* was crucial to their recovery as it facilitated healing, forgiveness, reparation, and reconciliation. The main challenge to this mechanism was fear of retaliation against witnesses, as testimonies were provided during the conflict.^{iv}

STATE PROGRAM IN LOCAL CONTEXT: SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone's *Fambul Tok* (family talk) initiative draws on the local tradition of gathering in discussion circles to resolve community conflicts. Originally designed by the national government and now implemented by the NGO *Fambul Tok International* (FTI), *Fambul Tok* aims to promote healing and prevent renewed aggression while facilitating the reintegration of ex-combatants into society. Villages across the country are divided into regional clusters, and each cluster implements the methodology according to local context. The initiative starts with an extensive consultation by FTI in order to ascertain local concepts of reconciliation and readiness to

reconcile. Plans for implementation are then designed by FTI and the community, and training is conducted to ensure that village members are able to implement *Fambul Tok* sustainably. A community truth-telling bonfire is attended by victims and perpetrators who tell their stories and request and give forgiveness when ready. The next day, all participate in a cleansing ceremony. Finally,

FTI continues to monitor reconciliation in the community, supporting a variety of reconciliation activities from sporting events to community farms.^v FTI reports that renewed community unity through *Fambul Tok* has resulted in community-led development initiatives and revival of cultural practices. The NGO also states that local ownership and participation have been key components of the initiative's success.^{vi} An independent report found that communities sometimes show resistance to continued monitoring by FTI, wishing instead to continue their reconciliation projects alone.^{vii}

DIALOGUE, RECOGNITION, & HEALING: IRELAND

After the Good Friday Agreement was signed in April 1998, the Glenree Peace and Reconciliation Centre in Glenree, Ireland, began work that responded to the need for recognition of the suffering of victims in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Britain. The primary objective of the center's Let's Involve the Victims' Experience (LIVE) Program was to build relationships between victims of these regions. The second goal was to facilitate dialogue between victims and ex-combatants if and when both were ready. The first

¹ National-level Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are dealt with in the December 2013 Spotlight. They will therefore not be examined here.

phase of the LIVE program comprised “single identity” workshops in which victims from one region learnt about the program and discussed their victimization. The second phase included bilateral or multilateral workshops in which victims from two or three regions met to continue the trust-building process and listen to each other’s experiences of the conflict. Finally, victims could choose to participate in another stage of dialogue, this time with one ex-IRA combatant. This stage was reported to be the most effective in terms of overcoming social divisions and fostering understanding. Noteworthy lessons from the LIVE Program included: participation in reconciliation efforts must be voluntary, keeping in mind that victims often encourage each other to take part; inter-group, not one-to-one dialogue is preferable at the beginning; recognition of victimization is crucial to healing; it is important that program staff are from the same community as the participants; and all must understand that no-one has a monopoly on guilt or innocence.^{viii}

PUBLIC, PRIVATE, & LOCAL ACTION: COLOMBIA

Various reconciliation efforts have been implemented in Colombia. The national reintegration policy is worth noting for its local implementation of community service projects. Ex-combatants must participate in 80 hours of community service in environmental recovery, caring for the elderly, creating recreational spaces for children, and other activities in and with the community. Their efforts demonstrate desire to be productive members of society, and promote reconciliation with community members.

Reconciliación Colombia is a recently launched initiative that facilitates the exchange of information about regional reconciliation experiences supported by entities from international cooperation (including USAID and IOM), the Colombian Government, civil society, and the private sector, *Reconciliación Colombia* includes an online platform for information storage and exchange, as well as regional events to promote dialogue and in-person contributions to information collection. In its nascent stages at the time of writing, *Reconciliación Colombia* promises to be a crucial resource for understanding reconciliation in Colombia.^{ix}

Reconciliation projects already listed on the *Reconciliación Colombia* website include many local-level initiatives. One such effort is the *Proyecto de Reconciliación Chengue-Macayepo* in Carmen de Bolívar. The community of Macayepo was displaced due to violence in the 1990s. Due to the dense paramilitary presence in the area, the community was stigmatized and stereotyped as being sympathetic to the paramilitary cause, and supportive of their violence. When the people of Macayepo began to return to their community, the surrounding communities were scared, did not trust them, and resented their

return. The people of Macayepo therefore reached out to the closest community, Chengue, through group meetings. At first, there was resistance to the interaction but later, new relationships were formed with Chengue and then other communities in the area. Reconciliation efforts included a soccer tournament for regional communities, and a bazaar to raise money for future projects such as a paved road between Macayepo and Chengue. While distrust continues to pervade relationships with more isolated communities, plans for future projects include initiatives to promote reconciliation further afield.^x

CONCLUSION

The reconciliation process varies depending on the individual, community, and country affected by violence. The local-level efforts examined here demonstrate the importance of facilitating new relationships not only between victims and perpetrators but also between communities that have been divided. Stigmatization and distrust between individuals and groups can negatively impact the transition to lasting peace. Reconciliation

initiatives are key in laying the groundwork for the jointly implemented political and social reform upon which peace relies.

Adaptations of traditional community dialogue practices in Uganda and Sierra Leone demonstrate the importance of taking local context

into account in the implementation of reconciliation initiatives, and promoting local ownership of these efforts. The Irish case demonstrates the importance of building trust, as well as providing lessons learned on inter-group reconciliation and the nature of conducting this type of work in the community. Finally, efforts made in Colombia demonstrate the many components and actors at play in reconciliation. Those who implement these efforts can be national agencies, collaborative working groups, or local communities who are also the beneficiary population. As Colombia looks to strengthen its reconciliation efforts, it is important for the country to build on this multi-faceted base and draw on international lessons learned to consolidate lasting peace.

ⁱ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2003). *Handbook on Reconciliation after Violent Conflict*. Stockholm: IDEA. p. 11-12 and definition of the Centro Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación (CNRR)

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Hovil, L. and Lomo, Z. (2005). *Whose Justice? Perceptions of Uganda’s Amnesty Act 2000: The Potential for Conflict Resolution and Long Term Reconciliation*. Kampala: Refugee Law Project; and Justice and Reconciliation Project (2006). *Accountability, Reconciliation and the Juba Peace Talks: Beyond the Impasse*. Gulu: Justice and Reconciliation Project.

^{iv} Anyeko, K. et al (2011). *‘The Cooling of Hearts’: Community Truth-Telling in Northern Uganda*. *Human Rights Review* 13:107-124.

^v Fambul Tok Website: www.fambultok.org/

^{vi} Fambul Tok International (2010). *Community Healing in Sierra Leone and the World*. Freetown: FTI.

^{vii} Creighton, J. and Koroma, S. (2012). *Does Reconciliation Affect Conflict and Development? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Sierra Leone*. Rome: Policy Impact Toolkit.

^{viii} International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2003). *Handbook on Reconciliation after Violent Conflict*. Stockholm: IDEA. p. 89-97.

^{ix} Reconciliación Colombia Website: www.reconciliacioncolombia.com/

^x Proyecto de reconciliación Chengue-Macayepo: Reconciliación Colombia Website.

www.reconciliacioncolombia.com/iniciativas/detalle/11

