

Civil Society Dialogue Network Discussion Paper No. 13

Peace Stories

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Civil Society Dialogue Network

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Preface

On International Day of Peace 2018, it is important to remind ourselves that there is no one more dedicated to peace than the people who find themselves stuck living through violence and conflict. There are individuals, communities and organisations working to prevent violence and address conflict every day.

Our safety and security depends on the relationships with the people in our neighbourhood, our province, our country, our region and between governments across the world. How we choose to manage those relationships and the investment we are willing to make in understanding and connecting with each other will mean the difference between escalating insecurity and shifting the dynamics toward peace.

Peace isn't all about politicians and armed groups. It isn't about getting a short-term deal. And it isn't about 'convincing' the other side that you are right. Peace is about the delicate art of building relationships and trust in a complex reality. That is the message from the collection of stories published by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office on #peaceday2018. The stories come from EU-funded projects implemented by members of the EPLO network and showcase the ideas, challenges and determination of people building peace around the world.

Partners Bulgaria

GOOD NEIGHBOURS: COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN LEBANON MANAGING CONFLICT WITH CONCILIATION

From the west coast of the United States to the northern border of Lebanon, training people from local communities to resolve conflict and build relationships in their own neighbourhoods is a powerful tool for peace.

Akkar, situated in northern Lebanon, has long been a forgotten periphery where economic deprivation combines with a feudal system of land ownership and tenancy to fuel inequality and resentment. It is home to an eclectic mix of Lebanese Sunni and Shia Muslims, Greek Orthodox and Maronite Christians and the largest population of Alawites in the country. Sitting just across the border from Syria, 80 kilometres from Homs, families live on both sides of the divide and ties to Syria can run deeper than those to Beirut. Strong historical and family links made Akkar an obvious choice for many Syrians needing to flee the violence.

But as the number of people seeking refuge in Akkar grew, the already struggling region saw polarisation increase as divisions escalated among communities affiliated with either support to the Syrian regime or to the Free Syrian Army, and long-standing sectarian rifts in Lebanese national politics were sharpened at the local level.

In 2013, the Partners Network teamed up with the Lebanese consultancy, Peace Labz, with the idea to train local conciliators to work within their own neighbourhoods to resolve disputes and conflicts.

“The connection came through another member of the Partners Network” recalls Daniela Kolarova, Director of Partners Bulgaria. Partners Jordan suggested reaching out to Peace Labz, who had been working all over Lebanon to diffuse tensions around aid delivery, meeting with people in homes, schools, and cultural centres. “They knew the local issues and communities”. So, when EU funding to support non-state actors in conflict prevention and peace became available, the project fell into place. They did their joint planning over a series of Skype calls and Akkar emerged as the prime candidate.

The Partners approach springs from a community mediation programme established in the 1970s on the other side of the world in California. The founder, Raymond Shonholtz, set up ‘Community Boards’ to work on peaceful resolution of disputes and neighbourhood conflicts. At the end of the Cold War, the idea to support local, grassroots initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe was born. Partners Bulgaria, having seen the positive effects in many ethnic communities in Bulgaria in the late nineties and early 2000s, started working to train others to do the same.

To get started, they needed to reach out to communities, conducting focus groups in community centres and schools around Akkar. Kolarova remembers the scepticism from local residents in those first meetings: “People were friendly, but you could see they had misgivings. They’ve seen projects come and go. When you’re an outsider, you have to be modest about what you can do”. Rather than taking on the role of mediator, it is a more sustainable model, training local people in conciliation skills, which they can then use to work on local conflicts directly.

Finding a trusted group of people willing to act as local conciliators was not straightforward. To work, it needed people from all backgrounds and experiences that people could trust and relate to. It took more than six months to find a good mix of women and men, people of different education levels, in and out of employment, young and old who fitted the criteria. They had to push through favouritism and the inevitable trap of ending up with the usual suspects but, eventually, they found the right candidates.

Conciliation, unlike, negotiation is not about getting a deal, but about the delicate art of building relationships and trust. The 'Local Conflict Conciliators' facing the people in conflict had the toughest job, sometimes even just to get people in the same room. They were the ones dealing with the emotions and the tensions.

"People can see results when they unite around something that's important for all of them", says Kolarova. The project's success relied on maintaining open channels of communication to avoid misinformation. They reached out to local newspapers, sent out communications materials and kept in contact with religious leaders and local officials. Most importantly, the 10-person 'Supervisory Committee' in every locality meant that community members felt confident about accountability.

The Local Conflict Conciliators project was sufficiently popular and successful that it inspired the establishment of Partners Lebanon, a new member of the Partners Network. Partners Lebanon now works with children from refugee and local communities to strengthen ties between families and communities through music.

Kolarova is convinced that what she saw working in Bulgaria, especially in communities with Roma and Turkish populations, can work in all neighbourhoods, with the right approach and understanding of the context.

"People forget that they often already have the strategies to solve issues. But living in a situation of conflict has created the feeling of being stuck. Our role is to offer them the framework and techniques to move them forward. In a volatile and sensitive situation, having community teams ready and able to respond to manage the conflicts that arise makes it much less likely that they will escalate into violence".

Conciliation Resources

LINE OF CONTROL: THE OTHER SIDE OF CONFLICT IN KASHMIR

While the story of conflict in Kashmir might be familiar, the story of how women have experienced the conflict is not. A more complete picture starts by challenging the assumption that peace and security – and ideas on how to manage them – can be framed and discussed by a limited demographic of men.

Both Ezabir Ali and Atia Anwar are researchers, by profession and by vocation. Ali has been documenting and publishing on the psychosocial impact of conflict on women in Kashmir for decades. Likewise Anwar, having grown up in a village along the line of control, returned to conduct research on women's perspectives of living on the front line of conflict. But despite the fact that women are by no means immune to the conflict, managing security is still seen as a male-only domain.

Now, these two women are seeking to change this, with support from an EU-funded project and in collaboration with UK-based peacebuilding NGO, Conciliation Resources.

After seventy years and three wars between India and Pakistan, the disputed Kashmir region is still a byword for conflict. Decades of events, decisions, developments and setbacks have touched multiple generations. Women, men, young, old, rural, urban, financially stable and financially insecure, people in Kashmir have experienced conflict and violence in a multitude of ways. The push for greater inclusion in prevention and peace efforts rests on the realisation that conflict, with its many sides and side effects in society, is a relative experience.

Ali and Anwar work in parallel on either side of the line of control, tailoring their action to the different conflict issues facing women in each context.

Ali works in the valley of Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh in Indian-administered Kashmir. She works with women living near the line of control and international border, including directly affected women, such as 'half-widows' (i.e. women whose husbands disappeared as a result of the conflict and who live without knowing whether their husbands are dead or alive). Over the past three decades, an estimated 8,000 men have disappeared and the combination of the disappearance and the precarious social standing of women mean that 'half-widows' not only lose their partners, but also the rights to their homes, the right to re-marry and with it, the possibility of planning for their future.

Meanwhile, in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Anwar is building a network of women leaders for peace. She has witnessed countless examples of men centring their own voices in discussions about the conflict. "He could be a computer scientist, but he is still confident in putting forward his opinion on what has happened and what should be done about it" says Anwar. It starts early. Young women are less likely to be taught or talked to about the history of the conflict, which is compounded by their absence from policy- and decision-making, almost guaranteeing that women's contribution to peacemaking is missing.

Their approaches, like their issues, are different and context-dependent.

For Ali, working with religious scholars to raise and address the rights of 'half-widows' in

relation to property ownership and remarriage was a necessity. The backlash they might have faced from conservative members of the community was mitigated because of this. Likewise, the foresight to reach out to separatist leaders to advocate for the issue avoided making political enemies. Their private diplomacy and relationship-building paid off. In the summer of 2017, religious scholars representing a variety of sects issued a fatwa recognising the property rights of half-widows and separatist leaders made public statements in support of groups working for the rights of ‘half widows’. Despite different views on faith and politics, Ali’s group had succeeded in gaining endorsement from different stakeholders in the conflict.

On the other side of the line of control, Anwar organised a series of workshops that eventually reached around 150 women, to train them in how to break down conflict dynamics, analyse the interests of conflict stakeholders and use this to advocate for peaceful conflict resolution within their own communities. But, even finding participants was a challenge. There was the fact that many women automatically discounted themselves from an initiative focused on peace and security and the fact that – because it involved travel – it was necessary to reach out to husbands and in-laws to alleviate concerns about respectability. It also meant accommodating provisions for childcare or chaperones and a general willingness to take on the logistics necessary to include people who are typically overlooked.

At a peace convention organised in May this year, Anwar watched the tables being turned as four young women from her leadership group sat on a panel to present their analysis and recommendations to an audience of (male) policy-makers and politicians. “This was unimaginable before. Normally politicians come, give their pre-prepared speech and leave.” For once, they really listened to their side of the story.

For the women involved progress is real. On everyday issues, for everyday conflicts, women in Kashmir are now finding ways to challenge the default to violence, and in doing so, “they feel like peace-makers”, says Ali.

Changing mind-sets will not happen overnight, but by pursuing a more inclusive picture of the conflict in Kashmir, the project helped to uncover more partners in peace.

Institute for Integrated Transitions

THE POWER OF A ROAD TRIP: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF ‘NO’ AFTER THE REJECTION OF THE COLOMBIA PEACE DEAL

Nine campaigners against the Government-FARC peace deal, Irish paramilitary groups, visa issues, a rental van, and the risk of intractable polarisation hanging over Colombia’s transition to peace.

For over 50 years, Colombians lived with violence that cut short the lives of a quarter million people and displaced five million others. After three failed efforts, representatives of the Colombian government and the FARC rebel group began a negotiation process that led to a peace deal in 2016. The final decision was put to a plebiscite that asked a single question: ‘Do you support the final agreement to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace?’

In the run-up to voting, polling was showing a comfortable 60% in support. But on 2 October, twenty minutes after the polls closed, it was over. By a razor-thin margin, the answer was in and it was: ‘No’.

“The poll result was a shock. It felt like our Brexit in a lot of ways” says Andrés García Trujillo, an Associate at the Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT), an international NGO that had served as an independent advisor to the Government of Colombia during the Havana talks.

Initially, the country seemed to come together: the government sat down with the most visible leaders of the ‘No’ side to hear their concerns, before returning to Havana to incorporate most of them into a revised agreement. But the revised deal was then pushed through Congress, provoking outrage from many ‘No’ supporters. The possibility of reconciliation, or even co-operation, between the ideological tribes that had been formed suddenly looked more distant than ever.

At IFIT, staff were mulling over where to start in dealing with the fallout from the plebiscite. Juanita Goebertus, the then Deputy Director of IFIT, began informal contact with key leaders who had opposed the agreement or had qualms about its implementation. At the same time, Ireland—a key donor for IFIT—reached out to propose a visit to draw lessons and inspiration from its own ongoing reconciliation process in Northern Ireland.

By autumn 2017, with the 2018 presidential elections looming, a group of prominent ‘No’ leaders had been brought together with members of the ‘Brain Trust for the Colombian Transition’—a group created by IFIT and made up of top government advisers from the negotiations—to plan a one-week visit to Northern Ireland to meet and talk with supporters and opponents of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and to see, first-hand, how despite great divisions, they have been managing the difficult and thankless task of implementing the peace over the last 20 years.

From the officious visa processes for the Ireland-UK land crossing to the real reputational risks that the ‘No’ campaigners were exposing themselves to, the project was not without its challenges. But with attentive shepherding from the Irish foreign ministry and Irish embassy in Mexico City and financial support from the EU Trust Fund for Colombia, on a Sunday in late November, the group landed at Dublin airport and by Monday afternoon had set off in a

rented minivan across the border to Belfast.

It was “like a school trip”, says García, with a senior advisor from the Irish MFA standing in as the dynamic and trusted teacher with a penchant for punctuality. That week, the group met with ex-combatants, victims, police, civil society and communities on both sides. It was a hectic agenda of scheduled and unscheduled moments of reflection in between shared meals, in-jokes and poignant moments of observing reconciliation in real time.

Hearing ‘reformed’ ex-combatants from the IRA and loyalist groups, now colleagues at a tour company, twenty years later, still unable to entirely disengage from their own versions of events, was a confronting reminder of how conflict embeds itself into our psyche. Later, watching the same two colleagues greet each other with a hug as they crossed over shifts only reinforced the truth that peace, in real life, will never be about ‘convincing’ the other side of your own righteousness.

The experience of the visit stuck. After the trip, one of the group from the leaders of the ‘No’ campaign commented, “the lessons from Ireland are huge. Reconciliation is a long process, but at least sitting down to talk with that one that thinks differently is crucial. It’s been a great experience”.

There are still some voices in Colombia fixed on the cycle of opposition and rejection and even some of those that voted ‘Yes’ are uncertain that reconciliation can work. But there is a constituency for peace. The thousands that joined the candle-lit march of silence that took place in Bogotá in the aftermath of the referendum was a show of unity around peace despite political differences.

The dialogue with leaders from the “No” campaign has continued, deepened, and matured. The IFIT project is a concrete way to show that reconciliation is possible by creating a space away from the limelight where those with opposing views can, nonetheless, remain open to exchange and prepared to seek common ground.

For García, the need for dialogue is clear. “If we can talk with the FARC, then surely we are able to talk to those who view the path to peace in Colombia differently”.

Life & Peace Institute

WHEN A ROAD IS NOT JUST A ROAD: RESTORING RELATIONS THROUGH DIALOGUE IN SOMALIA

Violent conflict not only destroys lives, but also the friendships, marriages, families, and livelihoods that tie communities together. For two clans that had been divided by violence, re-opening a road marked their moment of reconciliation.

Galgadud state in Somalia has a reputation as a flashpoint for inter-clan conflict, and it has been the scene of some of the longest running clan disputes. As conflict and isolation between communities have persisted, opportunities to use traditional systems of reconciliation also faded. For communities from the Marehan and Dir clans, it reached the point where nearly every family had lost something or someone. “Both sides knew they were losing,” says Adan Kabelo, the Country Manager for the Life & Peace Institute (LPI) in Somalia. “But it also sparked a new impetus for peace, pushing people to question: How many more?”

The town of Herale, primarily home to members of the Dir clan in Galgadud state, is a well-situated rest stop for travellers, halfway between Balanbale and Abudwak. But disputes between Marehan and Dir clans over pastoral land, borders and water had contributed to years of violence, leading to mutual fear and suspicion between the two communities. This meant the smallest of individual slights was often interpreted as a group transgression requiring revenge. The formation of clan militias expanded the conflict into attacks on settlements, which ensured more and more families were drawn into the cycle of animosity.

In 2003, the road through Herale became impassable because of inter-clan violence. It remained closed for 14 years.

Zamzam Foundation (ZZF) is a well-known local NGO that had been doing humanitarian work in the area and had a reputation for providing much-needed assistance for communities, while LPI, a peacebuilding organisation with a head office in Uppsala in Sweden, had over 35 years of experience supporting conflict transformation programmes in a variety of countries. In August 2012, with funding from the European Commission and co-funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), LPI and ZZF came together to canvass communities on their experiences and perceptions of the violence and their ideas for peace.

Ten years after the road closed, the two partners decided to explore the possibilities of bringing the communities back together through dialogue with clan elders and community groups, in particular women, young men and women, and more marginalised clans.

They conducted a baseline study and found that, although there was no contact between them, the two clans were both feeling the pain of being divided and the road through Herale was a tangible symbol of that separation. This was an opportunity. ZZF and LPI set to work.

Residents like Ahmed, a local taxi driver, knew the importance of working on reconciliation: “Most of my mother’s family is in Herale, but we hadn’t met for the past 14 years. Imagine, these were the people I grew up with and who took care of me.”

Ahmed used to generate his livelihood by taking passengers between Balanbale and Abudwak. When the road closed he, like other drivers, was forced to take a lengthy detour along a poorly maintained road close to the Ethiopian border.

Reconciliation was not a simple process. In line with tradition, the two clans had to consult internally through a series of dialogues where leaders and sub-clans came together first in order to agree and take ownership of the wrongs they had committed, which is an important step in the process to accept responsibility before facing the other side.

By 2015, Dir and Marehan elders were sitting together under an Acacia, the tree of peace, in Inagibilee to discuss their conflict. The dialogue continued for several weeks, each side taking turns to raise and discuss their concerns.

There were risks. After the violence on both sides and years of virtual isolation, inter-marriages between the two communities were damaged, families split and there were those whose grief made the prospect of reconciliation unthinkable; and those who might be willing to sacrifice reconciliation for revenge.

It was testament to the determination of the people participating and the experience of the local staff, who themselves came from the two clans, that they were able to overcome historical memories of wrongdoing and grievances, as well as security risks, to make sure the dialogues went ahead.

After four inter-clan dialogues between Marehan and Dir over the course of four years, a milestone was reached. In October 2017, the two clans signed a peace agreement and the road through Herale reopened. It was one of the largest ever dialogue meetings under the project, with 223 clan members from the two sides.

Now, vehicles from Balanbale pass through Herale every day. Ahmed is finally back to ferrying fares between Balanbale and Abudwak, but there's been one unexpected side effect: "Sometimes, they'll find a long lost relative and get so excited and emotional that I have to wait for a long time."

The re-opening of the road is about more than a transport link. It has revived Herale and opened up possibilities to transport goods, services and to establish development programmes in the area. But more than that, taking time to talk led to a concrete outcome for peace.

Saferworld

DOOR-TO-DOOR DISARMAMENT: COMMUNITIES IN YEMEN BUILDING SAFETY AND SECURITY FROM THE GROUND UP

People in Yemen are often portrayed as passive observers of the violence that is racking their country. But there are communities challenging this perception and working to increase their own day-to-day safety and security.

A 60-year old Yemeni woman goes door-to-door in her community, encouraging people to turn in their weapons. She can be found talking to young armed people from the neighbourhood in the popular spots where they hang out. She is called on to help when there are issues between families. She has even taken her disarmament campaign home, confiscating weapons from family members serving in the military when they come from work and returning them before their next shift. She is walking proof that there are no more dedicated peacebuilders than people who have found themselves stuck living in a protracted situation of violence.

Awfa Al-Naami manages the EU-funded project on community safety and enhancing women's role in peace and security that trained the woman in question and she is convinced that it will take a groundswell of grassroots local action and support for peace to bring an end to Yemen's devastating violence. "Even without the large-scale fighting, there is still conflict. We can't resolve conflicts only at higher level if the same root causes and issues remain. Decisions from up high won't resolve this. Peace has to happen at all levels," says Al Naami, Country Manager for Saferworld in Yemen.

Aden is a case in point. Airstrikes may have ceased and Houthi fighters may have withdrawn to the north but residents are still living with assassinations, bombings and the tug-of-war for control of the city. The economic situation is dire. There is little work, save for enlistment in the military. The lack of agency can be demoralizing and demotivating. People get more and more dependent on the authorities and others to solve their issues. When Saferworld set up the project, the spirit of volunteerism was low. But even after the first training session, they saw a 180 degree change, with participants describing 'no longer feeling invisible' and fired up with ideas on how be more active to help their communities.

The project also worked in Ibb, over 200 kilometres inland from Aden. This region faces a different type of security problem. There are high numbers of internally-displaced persons (IDPs). As the economy failed, even those that continued to work in some cases had not been paid for almost nine months. And, like Aden, the desperate economic situation has pushed some to join armed groups to be able to earn a salary or just have something to do.

The idea for the project was the result of collaboration between the UK conflict prevention and peacebuilding NGO, Saferworld, and two Yemeni humanitarian organisations: Wugood, based in Aden and the National Foundation for Development and Humanitarian Response, working all over the north of Yemen. To fine tune the design of the project and make it as relevant for residents as possible, the partners worked with the Yemen Polling Centre to do pre-project surveys and focus groups.

Community groups in Aden and Ibb took part in training seminars on everything from problem analysis and conflict sensitivity to finance management and gender awareness and

after a series of workshops, the groups of mixed ages, genders, education levels and backgrounds worked together to identify and prioritise the local security issues they wanted to tackle. The disarmament campaign that inspired the 60-year old former activist was one such initiative. The group planned and organised a whole campaign of activities in their local community to advocate for disarmament, even making a short video.

The scarce funding for local community initiatives can be a real obstacle. Because peace is not something that can be ‘delivered’, initiatives often face scepticism from those more familiar with goods and services provided by humanitarian aid.

“Some people in the local authorities couldn’t envisage how you could do a peace project during war, but peace is more of a seed, an investment in the community. It takes time to lay the groundwork and yield impact,” says Al-Naami.

She knows what it’s like to have life plans derailed by conflict. She studied architecture at university, took Japanese classes on the side and, after graduating, joined the Japan International Cooperation Agency working on development programming. That all ended when the conflict broke out. But, undeterred, she left to pursue an MBA in Hyderabad, India to get the job skills to return and work with NGOs.

“It’s the people that keep me optimistic. It’s not easy, but you see how much you’re doing, being able to spark a change in this person or that person. It gives you the motivation to go on. As a Yemeni, right now this is the only thing I’m able to give to my country. If I weren’t doing this, I’d be really frustrated.”

Crisis Management Initiative

LIBYA'S WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF PEACE

Across the world, the norm of having almost all of the politics shaped by only half of the population is being challenged. But when it comes to the politics of building peace, women are still being confined to the margins.

In a country whose deadly civil war has revived divisions along regional, political and societal fault lines, working to ensure that all Libyans have a say in shaping the future vision and direction of their country should not be a radical proposition. Yet, this is still the case when it comes to advancing greater participation for women. Despite the active political role that women in Libya played in the revolution of 2011 that brought down the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, in the chaos of transition, their political space is being closed, their presence rejected, and their voices silenced.

“Many women have become disillusioned, as the spaces women gained have been lost”, says Dr Elisa Tarnaala, Advisor to the Women in Peacemaking team, from the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), an organisation founded by former President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, and working on preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding.

The past six years has seen the situation in Libya deteriorate into a holding pattern of insecurity and violence. During that time, the numerous high-profile security interventions – from which women have been largely absent – have, so far, not been able to effect positive changes in people's day-to-day security.

CMI had been organising various informal platforms for dialogue between Libyan politicians, political party members, civil society actors, tribal representatives, academics, and people from minority groups since 2014. Bringing people around the same table was yielding real gains in terms of trust and tentative friendships. Nonetheless, more widespread participation of women in politics and peace outside of the dialogue platforms was not materialising. At the start of 2017, a group of women who had been participating in the dialogues were invited by CMI to look at how to change this.

At their first gathering in Tunis in January 2017, the women resolved to establish a group dedicated to finding – and, if not, creating – opportunities for women to shape the transition. The first order of business for the Women's Working Group (WWG) was the idea for a national-level consultation to uncover the key issues for women's peacemaking and political participation.

Being able to relate to the different lives and experiences being lived by women across Libya was crucial. This meant ensuring that the WWG itself represented a variety of regions, professions, generations, education levels and political views; including women active in politics and civil society to shatter the myth that women could not and would not take on the responsibilities of a role in politics.

A national-level consultation was ambitious, but with funding from the Finnish and Swedish foreign ministries and the Wihuri Foundation, CMI was able to recruit a coordinator to maintain momentum for the group and drive forward the consultation process.

The task of planning the schedule, managing logistics, keeping up with the WWG's online group chat, and keeping the women connected was taken on by Ghemera Krekshi, a former social worker working in the Prime Minister's office, who splits her time between coordinating the WWG and working on psychosocial effects suffered by refugees. She talks with enthusiasm about repurposing her skills to advance the project and draw up the questionnaire that would frame the consultations. "My background in social work certainly came in handy to get us started" says Krekshi.

In the spring of 2017, the WWG met to discuss the draft. Thirty women travelled to Tripoli from across the country for one afternoon, filling the hall of a local cultural club, a last-minute venue sourced through "someone who knew someone who knew a place that could host us". By May, the questionnaire had been finalised and the consultation had been launched.

Members crisscrossed the country to survey over 500 women. They made contact through friends, at family gatherings, and during weddings and other social events to reach those that are usually left out of politics, in particular women living in rural villages and isolated desert communities.

These consultations were the first of their kind and uncovered previously hidden insights into how women in Libya viewed their roles during and after 2011 and, more importantly, how they saw their future engagement in national reconciliation.

By December 2017, the survey was wrapped up and the WWG came back together to take stock and strategise on how to use the results to advance women's participation in a peaceful transition.

One spin off has been the group's activities around the elections that are due to take place in December 2018. Demand for the workshops where they have been publicising the results from the consultation is high. They are busy working with women's representatives to develop political advocacy skills and meanwhile, five out of the twelve WWG members are, themselves, standing for office.

Not everyone in Libya is ready to welcome the greater involvement of women in politics, peace and security. The heightened state of insecurity and violence across the country means that anyone who speaks up can incur more than social or professional repercussions.

Undeterred, the WWG keep going with extraordinary energy and courage, managing jobs, studies, family lives and the demanding work of advocating for the freedoms, safety and meaningful participation of women as part of a peaceful future for Libya.

European Institute of Peace

A FIRST AFGHAN PEACE DEAL: A PILOT FOR A PATH OUT OF CONFLICT?

After 40 years of conflicts in Afghanistan, seeking out a partner and taking a step toward ending the violence takes courage. There have been precious few moments that held out the prospect of peace but, since September 2016, one has arisen.

The experience of living with and through violent conflict is counted in decades rather than years in Afghanistan. People have had no choice but to shape their lives around conflict and insecurity. For this reason, when the first ever peace agreement in Afghanistan was announced in September 2016, it was viewed as a pivotal moment; a chance to show that there might be another—difficult, but ultimately more peaceful—path out of conflict.

In early 2016, the idea of pursuing a peace deal was being floated behind closed doors by senior officials inside the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It was never going to be straightforward. There's a long list of armed groups operating outside of the Government's control; groups whose fighters and leaders are also Afghans and whose actions and positions cannot be neatly and easily extricated from their relationships with a wider network of families, communities, peers, and followers in the country. The agreement with Hizb-e Islami, under the leadership of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was the first of its kind.

It was—and still is—seen as a test case; a signal that it was possible to reach an agreement with groups that are opposed to the Government. Hizb-e Islami agreed to break ties with terror organisations and to respect the Afghan constitution, including equal rights for men and women, in return for immunity, amnesty, full political rights, the release of prisoners, and the integration of its fighters into the national defence and security forces.

The contentious agreement was a risk to almost everyone involved. It left President Ashraf Ghani open to public and political accusations of championing impunity. For those in the international community supporting the deal, it risked undermining their broader advocacy agendas on justice and human rights; and for Hizb-e Islami, it required a very public reversal of their red line against the continued presence of international troops in the country. It took political courage on all sides.

But getting an agreement was just the start. It's one thing to enter into a deal and quite another to translate intentions into new processes, relationships, and actions. The ambiguity of language necessary to make a peace deal possible is often the same characteristic that makes its implementation so precarious. And that is before factoring in the administrative, technical and human resources that have to be found to take on the additional work of operationalising what was agreed in a text.

In order to give the agreement the best possible chance, in 2017, the European Union provided funding for the 'Afghanistan Peace Support Initiative' (APSI), comprised of the European Institute of Peace and swisspeace together with Afghan national partners. Those partners brought national expertise and sound political knowledge while the EIP and swisspeace contributed their wide experience with peace processes and mediation from across the world. Since 2017, the consortium has served as the go-to hub for technical advice and operational planning for the Afghan authorities involved in implementing the Hizb-e Islami Agreement and searching for ways to bring others into a peace process. "After 40

years of war, people are tired,” says Ryan Grist, from APSI, as we spoke over the phone from an office in Kabul. “They are literally calling out for peace.”

The members of the APSI team have been welcomed by the civil servants in the High Peace Council (HPC) and the Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) who are facing the long and delicate task of leading the implementation of the Agreement. The APSI tracks down the experts and expertise requested by the JIC and the HPC, which can range from how to reintegrate armed fighters into security services to how to begin the process of dealing with the past and exploring ways to heal old wounds.

The success and sustainability of this and any future peace agreements rests on securing acceptance from among Afghan society. This is why, in addition to the technical implementation, the JIC and the HPC have carved out time to work with the APSI to help to rectify some of the deficiencies of the agreement by reaching out to young Afghans, women’s groups, groups representing minority communities and civil society across the regions in order to canvass their opinions and ideas on the implementation of the Agreement and other avenues for peace.

It’s easy to be dismissive when it comes to peace efforts in a context like Afghanistan. Protracted periods of destruction and trauma—the inevitable by-products of the use of force—are not easily forgotten. But neither is the farsightedness and courage that it takes to try for pockets of peace after decades of war.

Rahim Khurram, a former architect and now Project Officer for the APSI, is in his fifties. He has spent most of his life in Kabul and, like many Afghans, has witnessed violence and conflict throughout. But he has also witnessed the determination and resilience of its citizens. “I still believe that with that positive energy and courage, we can rebuild this country into the pleasant and peaceful place that I remember from my childhood,” he says.

International Crisis Group

STARTING WITH THE STORY—COVERING THE POLITICS OF PEACE AND CONFLICT IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

What we know is what we see, what we hear and what we read, so when it comes to responding to violent conflict, how the conflict is portrayed can be the difference between grasping and overlooking opportunities to prevent violence.

International Crisis Group was founded in 1995 to get the right analysis into the right hands at the right time to try to prevent impending conflict. The challenge is not necessarily that analysis is difficult to find. There are numerous types of analysis being penned by security officers, academics, journalists and (geo)political pundits. The difficulty lies in finding analysis that provides the kind of depth and nuance that does justice to the complexity of a conflict. In other words, analysis that does not start and end with developments happening in a capital or the centres of economic and political power. A Crisis Group report can take 5–6 months of investigation, research, networking, travel, interviews, writing and editing to produce. All this requires a wide network of analysts, living and working in 29 countries all over the world.

Over the course of 15 years, Crisis Group in Latin America and the Caribbean has produced 36 reports and briefings, 91 op-eds and commentaries, and organised/held over 500 advocacy meetings on Colombia, with stakeholders from the Colombian government to the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Its work has won praise from politicians such as the, former Vice President of Colombia, Angelino Garzón, and the current President, Iván Duque Márquez. On his first official visit to Europe, President Marquez had a meeting with Crisis Group to discuss the FARC, negotiations with the rebel National Liberation Army (ELN), and regional challenges. He recognised that the organisation had made “important contributions to address the peace process and the Venezuelan crisis”.

“No intelligence analyst, no journalist is able to do this,” says Ivan Briscoe, Program Director for the Latin America and Caribbean region.

Readers expecting a straightforward story of two countries, two political opponents or two communities battling it out will be disappointed. Instead, Crisis Group’s analysis of violence and instability in the region paints a picture of conflict in all its complexity. It weaves together problems such as, misguided deportation strategies, a militarised style of policing that undermines public confidence, economically-neglected neighbourhoods, and a political preference for being seen as ‘tough’ rather than effective on gang violence. Not settling for the easiest narrative of a conflict has become part of its trademark and the popularity of its reports contradicts the idea that all analysis and policy advice has to be simplified and bite-sized.

Covering conflict events and developments for Latin America and the Caribbean comes with the extra challenge of overcoming outdated stereotypes about conflict. Conflicts in this region vary significantly and do not fit the front page narrative of ‘war’ that is fixed in the public imagination.

“It’s not the traditional interstate violence that most people are familiar with. It’s fragmented, complicated, highly criminalised, and inextricably linked with illicit revenues,” observes

Briscoe. “It confuses people. You have a situation where, on the one hand, Acapulco is one of the most violent cities in Mexico and, on the other, it is also a popular tourist destination.”

Criminal gangs in Latin America and the Caribbean are adept at keeping the violence sufficiently low-key to stay out of international headlines while still creating a climate of constant violence and insecurity that shapes politics and people’s daily lives. Those outside the region would be surprised that more people have been murdered in the small Central American country of El Salvador in the last four years than have died in the conflicts in Libya over the same period.

Crisis Group’s analysts see themselves as producers of public goods with a responsibility to their contacts and their readers. “We don’t just do a report and then move on; we have to stay engaged” says Briscoe. In June, Crisis Group brought together all the victims groups operating in the state of Veracruz, Mexico to discuss how the state and foreign donors could respond more effectively to their needs. There were 16 groups around the table; families of those who’ve been disappeared, people who spend their weekends searching clandestine grave sites to try to find their loved ones. For the team, it was a labour of love.

The fact that the organisation is supported through a mix of government and private donations allows its analysts to invest in relationships like these and to place independence over pleasing clients. For national and international decision-makers, a detailed analysis of the conflict stakeholders, relationships and trajectories that is not driven by mainstream media attention or by one country’s foreign policy interests is invaluable. Diverse funding and a model of partnerships with organisations such as the EU make it easier to connect with policymakers and representatives in countries and in capitals. Those partnerships build the trust and create the openings that enable Crisis Group analysts to put forward viable policy solutions.

Pursuing context, history, and multiple sides of the story is more than just good analysis. It can also reduce the risk of reductive responses to conflict and encourage a more sophisticated blend of preventive engagement.

And, while Crisis Group might be best known for its reports, it is not all about analysis. In Briscoe’s words, “It’s our way of trying to prevent human suffering and loss of life.”

PAX

SPEAKING ‘YOUTH’ TO POWER: IRAQ’S YOUNG AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE

Iraq’s millennials are casting off the limiting stereotypes about ‘youth’ to forge ahead with their ideas and visions of the country they want to see.

A significant part of Iraq’s population has come of age during a tumultuous period in the country’s history. An era in which Iraq’s story has been punctuated by the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the presence of international troops, political conflict, violence inflicted by the self-proclaimed Islamic State and tenuous state-building. In the context of insecurity, international discourse on young people has tended to veer towards either ‘victims’ to be protected or ‘risks’ to be neutralised. While, within their communities and families, the default deference toward older people has meant that young adults have found themselves rooted in childhood roles of being ‘dutiful’ or ‘disobedient’.

One young person from Qaraqosh, Vanda, felt that there were too few opportunities to be involved in civil activism and a lot of young people weren’t getting the chance to work on improving their own situation.

Young people in Iraq are negotiating the same challenges as everyone else of their generation: how to build a career or a livelihood, how and when to start a family, where to live, how to find their place in society and plan for the future. As if that isn’t enough, this generation will also be responsible for steering the long-term reconciliation and reconstruction of a country after decades of war. Despite the enormity of this task, young women and men have been given very few opportunities to learn the ropes of decision-making or participate in systems of governance. The 60 percent of Iraq’s population that is under 24 years old constitutes a majority without agency, but there are some initiatives out there that have sought to change this.

In 2013, We are all Citizens was launched by Al-Mesalla Organization For Human Resources Development, al-Tahrir al Nuzumujiyya, Free Press Unlimited, and Independent Media Center Kurdistan in co-operation with PAX, a peace NGO from the Netherlands. With funds from the European Commission’s development co-operation arm, the project aimed to support the efforts of local people committed to alternatives to sectarianism politics in Iraq.

While the size of the reconciliation and reconstruction project in Iraq demands a country-wide effort, stratification in social, political, cultural and economic life has made co-operation across sectarian lines difficult and dangerous. The protracted period of insecurity combined with some incompetent and underhanded politicisation of identities means that people’s safety and prosperity is ever more reliant on a small and trusted in-group. As a result, young people have been brought up to be well aware of the fact that how and where they will live, work and fit into society will depend largely on connections within their own identity group.

For the young people involved in the project, breaking out of a sectarian mind-set was a breath of fresh air and, for many, it was the first chance to connect and reflect on the future of their country with their peers. The project started from the basics of event logistics, network-building, communications, conflict resolution, data collection and analysis and advocacy

skills. It also required an investment of time and patience to mentor people who'd never been given any responsibilities, and to manage the inevitable miscommunication and disagreements that played out in the Facebook group. But after four years, the network of young citizenship 'Ambassadors' located across Iraq had consolidated and expanded; the young people involved were meeting with government representatives and other policy-makers to lobby on issues facing local citizens and to try to shape policy. "It really triggered a spirit of civic activism," said Vanda.

In Basra, young activists campaigned for the restoration of a local church. In Dohuk, they lobbied for the rights of a family whose land had been grabbed, even getting the case to court. And, when the self-proclaimed Islamic State took over Ninewa province and some of the group found themselves displaced and stuck in camps, they were quick to organise and communicate their frustration to their representatives who had managed to settle themselves in houses. They organised a 'Shout Out from the Youth' conference and invited the Head of the Provincial Council to talk about youth-specific side-effects of displacement, like the disruption of schooling. By the end, they were invited to form a youth committee that would go on to become an institutionalised advisory body to the Council. Even in moments of crisis, the young leaders from the project were able to turn them deftly into moments of opportunity.

Two years on, the stories of the young activists and what they have gone on to do are still coming back; stories of people setting up NGOs to work on the role of youth in peacebuilding and LGBT rights, and starting careers in journalism, others who took up official positions in government, and one young woman who even became mayor of a town. Despite—or perhaps even because of—the experience of coming of age in a country racked by war and insecurity, young people who had long been locked out of governance are now following their own paths and making a contribution to the vision of a more peaceful future for Iraq.