

Civil Society Dialogue Network

Excerpted Discussion Paper

Q&A on Inclusivity in Peace Processes

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Excerpted Q&A on Inclusivity in Peace Processes

Beyond respecting rights, what else does inclusion do?

First of all, there is important value in the symbolism afforded by inclusive processes which confer status and opportunities. Such “politics of recognition”¹ (which may affirm the “right to exist”²) may well be enough to satisfy some groups. In addition, it widens the sources of information, hopefully meaning better information derived from the larger pool. Further, it creates moral obligations through the sense of ownership and shared responsibility in the outcomes (especially if groups have a stake in them).

Isn't inclusion complicated?

Yes, to some degree in design, management, conduct etc. But the apparent simplicity of exclusive processes (which may be smaller and quicker) is illusory insofar as they presume broad compliance on the part of excluded groups. In our ever more complex and inter-dependent world, the fact is that small disgruntled and determined groups (such as “the Real IRA” in the case of Northern Ireland or the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement [or MRTA, using its Spanish-language abbreviation] in Peru) are capable of substantially disturbing if not disrupting peace. It seems there is, therefore, value in managing outliers and possible spoilers by bringing them “inside the tent” rather than leaving them outside, even if this requires a bigger tent and more time for debate and to reach decisions.

It is also true that problem- and solution-matrixes for accommodating diversity, both arithmetic and geometric, are by their nature a bit more complex in terms of numbers and range of positions, to be matched with possibilities and resources including time and space. There is also the challenge of feasibility. But, at the same time, inclusive processes offer opportunities to settle differences through harmonisation, reconciliation or other negotiated outcomes which result in better governance satisfying more of the citizenry. Those are substantial gains which yield tremendous positive effects over time. Inclusive processes are, therefore, a good investment.

In insecure situations, don't inclusive processes take precious time?

Yes, sometimes inclusive processes are painstakingly slow in pace as the number and range of voices are heard and the diversity of needs, interests and aspirations considered. It is no secret that democracy takes time and requires appropriate spaces, places and other resources. By contrast, the relative simplicity of dictatorship and authoritarianism can appear attractive, especially for the powerful... The differences in the quality of decisions and in outcomes are to be compared. Appropriate processes must be designed to take account of the circumstances including constraints of time.

Are all groups equal?

While their members are each equal human beings, groups differ by numbers of members, material wealth, location and real power. They are not all equal, in democratic and material terms. There are standards which can accord or effect closer “equality” through some procedural and political techniques, such as weighting shares of seats or votes in certain fora (such as upper houses of parliament or in decision-making or consultative bodies comprising reserved seats³).

¹ On the notion and importance of this idea, see its principal proponent: Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition” (original essay of 1992), in A Gutman (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton University Press, 1994), available on-line at:

http://elplandehiram.org/documentos/JoustingNYC/Politics_of_Recognition.pdf

² See Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

³ See, e.g., the reserved seats in the Romanian Parliament for representatives of officially recognised “national minorities”.

Real power can hardly be ever fully countered (although it can be to some degree through taxation or redistributive politics), and needs to be recognised or else there will be reactions and difficulties in generating compliance on the part of the wealthy and powerful to the detriment of all not least the small and weak who are in fact most vulnerable and thus have a great interest in keeping the wealthy and powerful on board. How groups are to be accorded different weights in peace processes is a matter of design following careful situational analysis.

Does every group merit inclusion?

In the first place, prospectively included groups must be interested in and at least minimally capable of engaging in peaceful political processes... and so committed to realisable aims of some sort of governance. It is difficult to imagine inclusion of nihilists. But armed groups or political movements with militias are certainly capable to be included and, indeed, it is highly desirable to find ways to do so. At different stages of conflict, the form of inclusion may vary. E.g., in negotiating a cease-fire in the midst of violent conflict, by definition armed groups will be included. In addressing challenges where territory may be under the control of different armed groups, this too seems inescapable if one seeks to move from violent to peaceful politics. Of course, in such contexts also international humanitarian law applies, while general international law does not equate contacts or engagement with recognition carrying legal consequences (such as legitimizing claims or conferring lawful authority).⁴ So, in principle, every peaceful group (and some others) representing genuinely held views about differing legitimate needs, interests and aspirations merits to be included somehow and to some degree, including armed groups. How this is to be achieved is a matter of design with a number of options available which can evolve by stages of peace processes.

Why should we care about numerically small or weak groups?

Aside from respecting their equal rights (and noting, importantly, that the principles of mutual respect and rule of law have their own instrumental values!), we should care because: everyone learns (sometimes the smaller and weaker have generally valuable observations and insights); there may be issues about the humanity of the powerful (recalling Mahatma Gandhi's oft-cited observation that "A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members"); it establishes practices which re-assure everyone... because, depending upon changes, we may all find ourselves in some context in the position of a minority; in social-psychological terms, the dynamics of including and respecting the small and the weak can have moderating effects on the conduct of the strong, notably constraining unbridled tendencies to abuse power; and it may require creation of more balanced systems which dilute otherwise bi-lateral competitions into wider community systems. In sum, inclusion even or especially of small and weak groups has a number of valuable consequences.

Can the interests of geographically dispersed groups be accommodated?

Yes. There are various ways to accomplish this, including through grants of autonomy to cultural communities wherever they may be located. Developments in the availability and uses of technology are making such arrangements increasingly feasible. It is important not to dismiss the fact that dispersed communities still have interests and, indeed, may have additional needs because of the very challenges posed by geography. And, of course, some dispersed groups may nonetheless be powerful (e.g. in economic terms).

When in a process should interested or affected groups be included?

⁴ An example of such a case is the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in Transcaucasia established after the August 2008 armed conflict in Georgia which include the *de facto* authorities from Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In principle, as early as possible... so their voices and ideas can help shape a process, enrich the deliberations, and contribute to better decisions. Also, the earlier one can create opportunities for natural talents to emerge from individual leaders irrespective of group affiliation, the better for all; it has been observed that great leaders not infrequently come from small or weak groups that demand developed skills to advance their interests. Moreover, earlier engagements contribute to strengthen legitimacy, ownership and responsibility as well as improve compliance and, thereby, the chances for success of outcomes.

What should be avoided?

Too many vetoes... or too many “vital interests”. Instead, it is better in process design to emphasise shared interests rather than differences, to prize compromise and in effect to require alliances for decisions to be taken. Vetoes create the possibilities for impasses, or “hostage-taking” in terms of groups holding back processes from proceeding or concluding. This said, there really do exist “vital interests” for which, if need be, suspensive vetoes may be preferable which have the effect of stopping for some time a decision-making process which might be ignoring, or failing fully to consider, the legitimate concerns or rights of, and affects upon, key parties. Such suspensive vetoes buy time and may prescribe additional procedures for such matters to be more carefully considered and for better decisions to result. Autonomy arrangements function to reduce areas of conflict and in effect remove the need for vetoes.

In addition to the many considerations above, one important instrumental effect of participatory processes which include groups or communities in consocial arrangements is to recognise and deal with the facts that, on the one hand, some needs or interests can only be met through communities (e.g. radio and television broadcasting or similar major telecommunications, or provision of cultural facilities like museums or theatres), and, on the other hand, some human beings do not act on the basis of individual autonomy but depend instead on socio-cultural belonging (including hierarchies). Indeed, community identity and relations tend to predominate or intensify in conditions of insecurity and conflict⁵ when close affiliations and alliances provide physical protection and are the basis of satisfaction of basic human needs including survival. Whether considered extraordinary or abnormal conditions, such situations tend to prize belonging where community leaders often enjoy considerable power to deliver (if not compel) the compliance of members. In other words, community leaders do enjoy popular legitimacy and can act accordingly. In situations of violent conflict, processes which include such leaders may be more efficient and effective than the conduct of elections which may accentuate differences and insecurities in electoral competition and generate or perpetuate conflict without necessarily resulting in a better outcome in terms of subsequent governance arrangements. This is especially so in deeply divided societies.

Key Reflections

1. Inclusion has both normative and instrumental values for peace processes.
2. There are a number of international norms and standards which require forms and degrees of inclusion of different groups in peace processes.
3. There are many utilities to be gained from inclusive processes, although such processes add elements of complexity and include risks which need to be addressed.
4. All countries are diverse in the composition of their populations, and so it should be expected that conflicts will exist, arise and evolve.

⁵ Important lessons are to be learned from experiences such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iraq where flaws in process design resulted in reification, reinforcement and entrenchment of such tendencies ultimately perpetuating or arguably giving additional impetus to the conflicts.

5. Inclusive arrangements for governance which create spaces, places and opportunities for authentic voices in decision-making, and which maximise control over each group's needs, interests and aspirations, are important for sustainable peace and development.
6. There are many examples of successful experiences and practices of inclusion in peace processes at all stages of the conflict cycle/continuum as well as in times of peace.
7. The more arrangements and opportunities to accommodate the variety and range of existing and evolving needs, interests and aspirations, the more likely the society is to be peaceful.
8. Ultimately, inclusive processes are better processes – facilitating more informed deliberations, broader and deeper concurrence, resulting in more implementable and sustainable agreements. This allows situations to transition from violence through “negative” peace (i.e. absence of war) to “positive” peace (i.e. self-generating, resilient societies and sustainable development).