



PLURALISM IN PEACE PROCESSES

An Overview

Group-based exclusions and marginalization continue to precipitate and aggravate contemporary conflicts and hinder the ability of societies to achieve stable and sustainable peace.¹ Today more than ever, new approaches and tools are needed to address these challenges. Existing inclusion efforts are insufficient in scope and vision. There is a need for more fulsome change to peacemaking approaches. Pluralism offers a transformative approach, predicated on a valuing of diversity, as a foundation for a more durable, lasting peace.

The Global Centre for Pluralism defines pluralism as an ethic of respect for diversity rooted in two core principles: mutual recognition and belonging.

While diversity in a society is a demographic fact, pluralism refers to the actions taken to positively engage with diversity as a basis for successful and prosperous societies.

Whether diverse groups co-exist in harmony or in conflict is not pre-ordained: these outcomes result from social and institutional responses specific to the makeup and history of a country. Diversity is a reality in all societies: regardless of the size of the country, level of economic development, geography or demographic makeup, diversity exists. The positive response to diversity in society is *pluralism*. Such an approach does not seek to reduce or eliminate diversity, but to protect and celebrate it.

Building pluralist societies requires both institutional measures, such as laws and systems of governance, as well as social measures, including changes in public attitudes and perceptions, to address group-based inequalities and exclusion. These are interlinked because the rules and policies created to promote pluralism (the institutions) can only have lasting meaning when the social/cultural mind-set sustains them. We imagine this as the hardware (institutions, laws and policies)

¹ Stewart, F. (2017). *Horizontal Inequalities: Barriers to Pluralism*. Ottawa, Canada: Global Centre for Pluralism. Retrieved from <https://www.pluralism.ca/press-release/horizontal-inequalities-barriers-pluralism/>; “United Nations & World Bank (2018). *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>.

This paper launches a new publication series that explores topics related to **Pluralism in Peace Processes**. The aim of this series is to support peace practitioners and stakeholders to place pluralism at the centre of all peace processes

and the software (social/cultural mind-sets and narratives) of pluralism. This is important as this will also guide a pluralist approach to peacemaking – we need to address both the institutional and social aspects at each stage.

In situations of conflict, we see the breakdown in the treatment of diversity across these spheres in different ways, depending on the conflict in question. For example, repressive legal systems lead to exclusions that give rise to armed insurgencies, or unwillingness to accommodate different ethnic or religious groups leads to social breakdown and violent conflict. In long-term conflicts, the social fabric is further eroded by exclusionary narratives on all sides, and a deeper erosion of inter-group trust. In all cases we witness a breakdown in the ability to constructively approach difference in society. Given this common feature in conflicts around the world, understanding pluralism as a feature in society, and how it can contribute to the resolution of conflicts, needs to be more central in peacemakers' minds.

Returning to the important interplay of pluralism 'hardware' and 'software', peace processes, as they are presently constituted, do not adequately connect these two vital elements. Too often, a peace agreement – the hardware – is crafted at a distance from a society in conflict making it challenging to impact the software in the society that will be necessary to sustain the peace agreement. This disconnect is at the heart of failures of peace agreements in a range of contexts around the world, and is an element that pluralism seeks to highlight, and ultimately to help address.

What is a Pluralist Peace Process?

A pluralist peace process seeks to take the above framework and apply this lens to all elements of a peace process in order to deliver outcomes that set a course for more positive responses to diversity, in all its forms, in the agreement and the post-agreement period. A pluralist approach to peace processes differs from traditional inclusion approaches in multiple ways, taking the notion of inclusion beyond representation and consultation, to support positive responses to diversity in the process, in the substance of the outcomes and in the implementation of these agreements in the longer term. In turn, this approach can have a greater impact on the “software” – how societies view diversity in the long term, and not only establish short term “hardware” solutions.

Firstly, a pluralist approach is open-minded about “what difference matters” in the given society. All societies have specific patterns of exclusion which drive conflict that may be based on gender, race and ethnicity, religion and religious denomination, geography, class and caste, and age, among others. A pluralist approach to peace processes begins with, and is driven by, a thorough analysis of existing horizontal inequalities in the society before determining which differences should be taken into account during the negotiations and how best to do this. This explores the full societal landscape that would go deeper and broader than a traditional conflict analysis.

Second, a pluralist approach considers formal representation in peace processes important but insufficient to ensure the voices of excluded constituencies are heard. Individuals are

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often expected to “represent” a large and diverse group such as “women” or “youth,” for example, yet negotiators can be imperfect representatives of their communities. A pluralist approach recognises that certain communities may find it more difficult to make their voices heard in formal talks either because they are not listened to (despite being around the table) or are ill-equipped to present their demands in the context of formal negotiations (due to lack of education, trust or confidence, etc.). As such, pluralist peace processes place an emphasis on increasing the capacity of all constituencies to influence the outcomes of talks, through tools such as multi-modal public consultations.

Thirdly, while traditional inclusion approaches have sought to add on an element to a process – usually extra consultations with women and youth – a pluralist process seeks to embed the principle of positive response to diversity into the fabric of the decision making throughout a process.

Finally, while traditional inclusivity approaches focus on *process*, a pluralist approach seeks to ensure that final and interim *outcomes* of peace processes enshrine pluralist principles and build the foundation for pluralist systems of governance, economy, and security in the given country. This may include specific provisions to protect or secure the representation of all communities in governance structures, promote inclusive economic models, and establish legal protections for all sectors of society. It is insufficient to have consulted all sectors of society if the outcome of these consultations only serves to entrench, or perhaps create new patterns of exclusion.

Why adopt a pluralist approach?

Making peace involves complex sets of concessions and trade-offs, ephemeral opportunities requiring split-second decisions, and accounting for the vital interests of powerful stakeholders. Adding additional voices and constituencies to be consulted creates added complexity, requires time and renders the mediators’ and negotiators’ task more challenging. Given this, peace processes do not have a good track record in promoting pluralism. While understandable, this narrow approach may have significant negative consequences.

Firstly, there are strong normative arguments that suggest that constituencies have a right to participate in fundamental decisions regarding their futures, as are often decided in peace processes.

Similarly, peace processes themselves are often protracted and establish lasting patterns of inter-group interaction: these processes may either entrench exclusionary zero-sum politics or develop a culture of consultation and consensus-building.

Second, horizontal inequalities (inequalities based on markers of difference) are not only unjust, they are strongly correlated with conflict onset and political instability. Continued inequalities and exclusion are also linked to conflict resurgence.

Third, exclusion can have secondary and long-term economic, social and cultural consequences if excluded groups decide to withdraw physically or figuratively from the body politic of the nation. Exclusion can catalyse processes such as “capital flight” and “brain drain”, as witnessed in countries as diverse as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Finally, there is an argument to be made that a more inclusive peace process makes for better agreements. Delegates from diverse constituencies may have unique expertise and proposals to craft a better and more sustainable agreement.

How to adopt a pluralist approach?

A pluralistic peace process would consist of six interconnected elements: **Analysis, Guiding Principles, Representation, Consultation, Substantive Agreements/Outcomes** and **Implementation**.

ANALYSIS

An analysis of existing horizontal inequalities and understanding of inter-group relations in a society should be incorporated in the design of representation and consultation mechanisms, as well as the crafting of an agreement's provisions. Such analysis would allow parties to understand the dominant divisions and inequalities in the society, the state of pluralism through legal commitments and practices, levels of group-based inequalities and inter-group trust, and perceptions of inequality and narratives around "belonging" amongst components of society.

Such an analysis may suggest new items for inclusion on the agenda of peace talks, communities to be represented or consulted as part of the talks, and wider cross-cutting issues within the society which may form the basis for confidence-building measures or benefit from being addressed. Data-driven analysis may also help mediators and negotiators dispel myths or false narratives around marginalisation and exclusion and get to the root causes of conflict. For example, conflict parties may have common ground around the need to address the historic marginalisation of rural areas; or a conflict which manifests as an ethnic division may be discovered to have a strong inter-class dimension.

Such an analytical basis would be useful for the conflict parties themselves to engage with as they build an agenda, for the mediators to determine the approaches to the process, and for the wider sphere of players in a process at the regional or international level to critically evaluate their engagement (including military cooperation, counter-terrorism efforts, development assistance and international aid).

Establishing the recognition of and respect for diverse groups as a foundational principle to the process ensures that compromises made during the negotiations will be sought within a set of limits that would protect rather than erode pluralism.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Often, when compromises are made in the course of peace negotiations, wider principles are set aside, with the intention that there will be space for further discussion down the line. Parties focus on reaching an agreement and may plan for greater inclusion, reform, and reconciliation to come later, once a new government is in place and the violence has ended.

This does not necessarily entail the elaboration of shared views, values and political positions. A pluralist approach allows societies to manage difference, rather than trying to suppress it.

REPRESENTATION

Where possible and desirable, representatives in formal talks should reflect the diverse makeup of the society. Existing inclusion approaches have focused on increasing representation of women and youth in formal delegations. This is insufficient to ensure the views of these diverse constituencies are represented and also may neglect other important divisions within the society.

However, it is not realistic or productive for all segments of society to be equally represented in all delegations, at all stages of the talks. For example, representation for Non-State Armed Groups delegations should mainly focus on the inclusion of the principal factions within the group, as well as the populations of areas under the group's control, where possible. When Civil Society are represented formally in talks, efforts should be made to reflect the spectrum of civil society organisations, and not only those with ready access to international fora. Representation is not, however, sufficient for several reasons, as highlighted above. This is why formal representation in talks should be supplemented with broader consultation.

CONSULTATION

Engagement with different stakeholder groups in a conflict context should be guided by a commitment to consult as diverse a set of constituencies as possible. Multi-modal and multi-platform consultation processes should be conducted to avoid exclusion due to gender, socio-economic status, digital connectivity, and language, etc. These consultations should be conducted sensitively to ensure that those who are more vulnerable are able to make their voices heard in a safe environment, as, for example, some participants may feel more comfortable sharing their views in a single-sex environment or online. Broad consultation should be conducted with an intersectional lens, to better allow the diversity of views within a given group to be expressed.

Consultation may provide a means to break deadlock between parties by identifying a specific approach which enjoys overwhelming public support or generating new ideas and responses to seemingly intractable issues. However, mediators and parties should always be aware of the risks of raising expectations through consultation processes, and the dangers of ignoring the inputs they have solicited.

OUTCOMES

The outcomes of peace processes should aim to address the concerns of the whole country and support greater equity between groups. This concerns both formal outcomes such as comprehensive agreements, documents and ceasefires etc., but also secondary outcomes of the peace such as processes of inter-communal reconciliation, other transitional processes, as well as engagement by development actors in the post-conflict phase.

Statement of principles of the value of the diversity within the country or context should result in a commitment of the parties to ensure that all citizens in the country feel they belong as equal, contributing members of the society.

Power sharing agreements should prioritise creating new institutions that “reflect the whole country” and policies that support greater equity among groups.

While insufficient, power-sharing deals should contain “sunset” clauses outlining the temporary nature of any necessary power-sharing arrangement, as well as “sunrise” clauses, laying the framework for a more inclusive and democratic model of governance in the mid-term. Such transparency will mitigate opposition to the agreement and will help prevent conflict resurgence when the power-sharing model comes up for renewal.

Beyond political power-sharing, other forms of territorial, economic and security power-sharing may be considered to grant communities a say over the way in which they are governed. This may take the form of administrative or fiscal decentralisation, for example. However, such mechanisms should be carefully constructed to avoid the marginalisation of minorities within devolved entities.

Ceasefire monitoring provisions provide an opportunity to include all components of the society and members of a community, rather than simply engaging the conflict parties. All components of society should be provided with the opportunity to denounce violations of the ceasefire and included in monitoring and verification bodies. More constructively, as international ceasefire monitors are deployed less often, monitors may be drawn from “neutral” elements within the society. In Libya, for example, the local ceasefire in Sabha was monitored by women from all local communities who established a “tent of peace” at the boundary between the neighbourhoods occupied by the warring factions.

SSR and DDR processes should understand the social makeup of the security forces and consider what inequalities might lie therein and calibrate reintegration processes to address these. As well as demobilisation, such measures may require the recruitment of personnel from communities traditionally excluded from the security services, and/or the formal training of members of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). Given the entrenched, hierarchical and often quasi-hereditary nature of security forces this is an especially sensitive and difficult area, requiring political commitment and leadership.

SSR processes may also need to address issues pertaining to the mandate, role and culture of the security forces. For example, security forces may need to transform their role from one of promoting national security, viewing opposition and alternative views as a threat, to promoting the human security of all citizens. Exclusionary symbols and practices may need to be reassessed in light of the emerging pluralistic ambitions of the state.

Economic measures should be used to address issues of economic inequality between communities, groups or regions, or lack of economic opportunities, which may be at the heart of the conflict or fuel recruitment and/or support to armed groups. Economic measures are often linked to territorial power-sharing, such as decentralisation, in peace processes. This allows communities to have a say over the use of their predetermined share of state resources.

Analysis of existing horizontal inequalities may ensure economic provisions do not risk reigniting conflict. For example, Annex 7 of the Dayton Accords concerns the return of Refugees and IDPs to Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, provisions on return of refugee property have been criticized for attempting to re-establish conditions of economic inequality and unfair land distribution which partly contributed to the onset of the conflict in the first place.

Accountability and transitional justice processes. A holistic approach to reparations and to the process of consultation with victims should look at how accountability will build onto a sense of reconciliation and belonging of victims in the wider society and creation of connections between groups. Processes should be culturally sensitive and appropriate, drawing on indigenous traditions of reconciliation where relevant. The Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition in Colombia, for example, drawing on indigenous traditions of reconciliation, is reconstructing the history, memory and truth of the conflict by not only acknowledging harm to individual victimized people, but also to communities as a collective and to the “territory,” as a subject of rights.

Protections for minorities and minority rights, such as language rights, should be considered.

Engagement of experts in minority rights during a peace process and offering examples and options to this end are important. The Guatemalan peace accords created institutions to end discrimination, had provisions on the promotion of the use of indigenous languages and the training of bilingual judges and court interpreters. Use of analytical tools, such as the *Global Pluralism Monitor* and others to better understand the breadth of issues related to minorities in a given context can deepen the ability of a process to constructively engage with these issues.

IMPLEMENTATION PROVISIONS

peace agreements should include implementation provisions to ensure agreements are respected and conflicts can be resolved without violence. Implementation mechanisms may use existing or newly created domestic, international or mixed-bodies, such as Independent National Human Rights Institutions (INHRI), Ombudsman Institutions (OIs), equality and anti-discrimination commissions, and specialised courts and tribunals. Given the enduring challenges to implementation provisions, other long-term efforts to monitor impacts of peace agreements on pluralism, such as the Global Pluralism Monitor, may also be useful.

Conclusion

Integrating pluralism in peace processes may be challenging, but mediators and parties to conflicts should see such measures as essential to crafting better processes and more sustainable peace agreements. This does not mean including an exhaustive list of the country's different segments around the negotiating table during all stages of talks. Rather, it means first having a data-driven understanding of the relevant horizontal inequalities in a given society, attempting to ensure that key groups which have been marginalised and/or excluded are able to contribute to finding a durable solution to the country's challenges, and ensuring that the outcomes of a peace process improve or at least do not accentuate, existing inequalities, building the foundations for a prosperous society which respects and celebrates its inherent diversity. Such processes will inevitably be long-term and incremental, but it is only through striving that progress can be achieved.

The Global Centre for Pluralism will be developing more detailed papers on the above thematic areas in the coming year, in an effort to support peacemakers and those supporting mediation efforts to apply a pluralism lens.

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