

# Challenging the Conventional: Making Post-Violence Reconciliation Succeed

The present summary includes the core chapters of the report *Challenging the Conventional: Making Post-Violence Reconciliation Succeed*, as well as a brief overview of the four case studies on reconciliation in Guatemala, Northern Ireland, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa. The full version of the case studies can be found in the original report, which can be found at: [https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2018/11/25a06115-181102\\_kaf\\_reconciliation\\_report\\_web\\_v1.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2018/11/25a06115-181102_kaf_reconciliation_report_web_v1.pdf)



# Contents

---

---

<b>5</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>
<b>5</b>	<a href="#">About The Kofi Annan Foundation</a>
<b>5</b>	<a href="#">About Interpeace</a>

---

<b>7</b>	<b>In memoriam: Kofi Annan – A relentless peacebuilder</b>
----------	--

---

<b>9</b>	<b>Foreword</b>
----------	-----------------

---

<b>11</b>	<b>Preface: Understanding Reconciliation</b>
<b>11</b>	<a href="#">An increasingly critical process which remains poorly understood</a>
<b>11</b>	<a href="#">Successful reconciliation depends on wise guidance; not prescriptive rules</a>
<b>12</b>	<a href="#">Four stories from three continents deliver plenty of lessons</a>
<b>12</b>	<a href="#">Productive discourse has raised critical questions</a>
<b>13</b>	<a href="#">The start of a productive journey</a>

---

<b>15</b>	<b>Key Take-Away Messages</b>
-----------	-------------------------------

---

<b>17</b>	<b>Reconciliation in Action: An Analytical Framework</b>
<b>17</b>	<a href="#">Introduction: Four stories of hard-won change</a>
<b>18</b>	<a href="#">Identifying common parameters</a>
<b>18</b>	<a href="#">The changing nature and objectives of reconciliation at different points in the peace and conflict cycle</a>
<b>19</b>	<a href="#">Reconciliation for Peace, Peace for Reconciliation</a>
<b>21</b>	<a href="#">The State as an obstacle</a>
<b>22</b>	<a href="#">Reconciliation cannot be sustained without socio-political leadership</a>
<b>23</b>	<a href="#">Reconciliation as an ongoing challenge in every society</a>
<b>24</b>	<a href="#">The secondary role of the international community</a>

---

<b>26</b>	<b>How Reconciliation Can Restore the Social Fabric and Prevent Future Violence: Key Findings</b>
<b>26</b>	<a href="#">Reconciliation is an expansive and evolving process</a>
<b>28</b>	<a href="#">Choosing the right approach to reconciliation: timing, sequencing, and longevity</a>
<b>28</b>	<a href="#">Involving the right stakeholders</a>
<b>30</b>	<a href="#">At what levels of society should reconciliation efforts be implemented?</a>

---

<b>33</b>	<b>The importance of coalitions to successful reconciliation</b>
<b>36</b>	<b>Institution-building must be part of the transformation</b>
<b>38</b>	<b>The international community must tread carefully with solid local knowledge</b>
<hr/>	
<b>40</b>	<b>Guidance for Peace Practitioners</b>
<b>41</b>	<b>What are we trying to achieve with reconciliation in this particular context?</b>
<b>41</b>	<b>When and for how long should support be offered?</b>
<b>42</b>	<b>Where should reconciliation efforts be implemented – at what levels of society and in which geographic locations?</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>Who should be involved?</b>
<b>44</b>	<b>How to advance reconciliation – with which approaches, tools and methodologies?</b>
<hr/>	
<b>47</b>	<b>Four Stories of Hard-Won Change</b>
<b>47</b>	<b>Case Study Summary: Guatemala</b>
<b>51</b>	<b>Case Study Summary: Northern Ireland</b>
<b>53</b>	<b>Case Study Summary: Democratic Republic of the Congo</b>
<b>56</b>	<b>Case Study Summary: South Africa</b>

# Acknowledgements

---

The Kofi Annan Foundation and Interpeace acknowledge the generous contribution of the Government of Finland and the Robert Bosch Stiftung to support the symposium “Challenging the Conventional: Can Post-Violence Reconciliation Succeed?” and the research that provided the basis for discussions. We would like to thank the authors of the case studies and the symposium participants who generously shared their time and experience and provided valuable contributions for the purposes of this debate. We are indebted to Bernardo Arévalo de León, Anum Farhan and Maud Roure who prepared this report. We are also grateful to Graeme Simpson for his reviews and to Charlotte Davies for her editorial work.

## About The Kofi Annan Foundation

Located in Switzerland and founded by Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Kofi Annan Foundation is working to achieve a fairer and more peaceful world by mobilizing political will and technical expertise to tackle fundamental challenges to peace, development and human rights. The Foundation focusses on mediation and conflict resolution, the strengthening of democracy and electoral integrity, Promoting Youth Leadership and Combatting Hunger in Africa.

For more information, visit <http://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/>

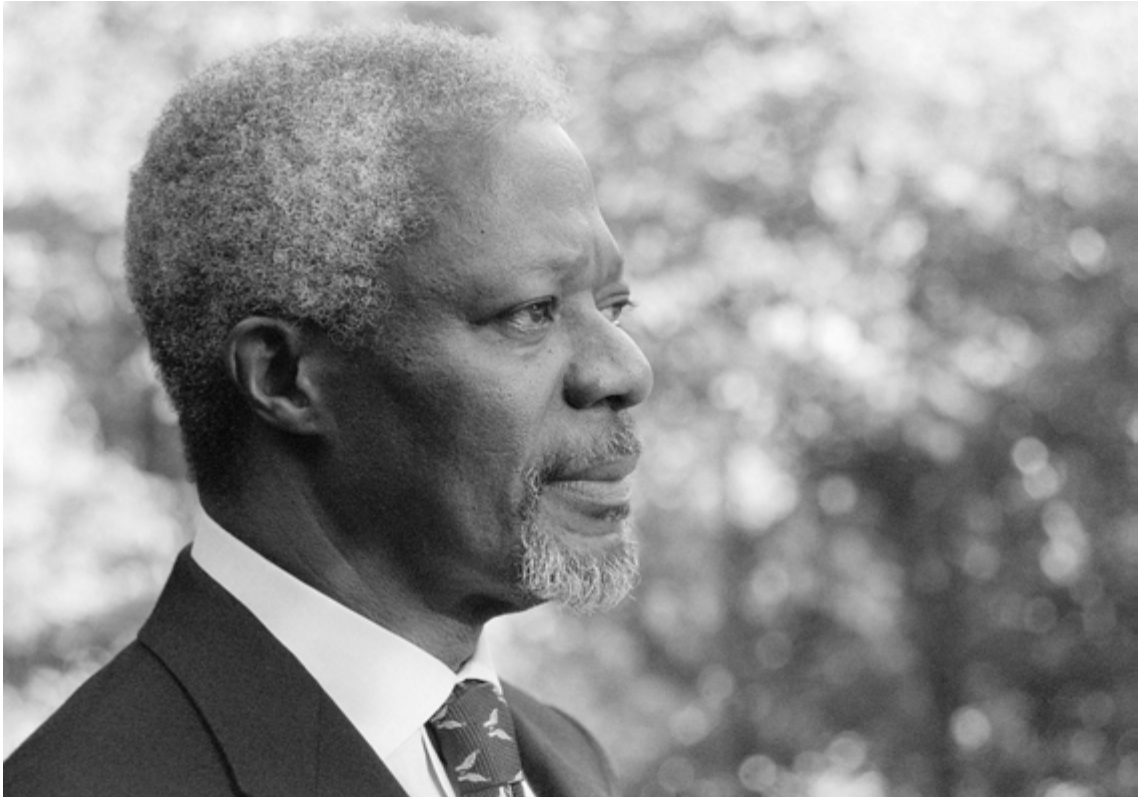
## About Interpeace

Interpeace is an international organization for peacebuilding headquartered in Geneva. Founded in 1994, Interpeace is dedicated to Building Lasting Peace by reinforcing the capacities of societies to overcome deep divisions and to address conflict in non-violent ways. Interpeace is rooted in local realities, drawing strength from an alliance of national teams with a long-term commitment to building peace in their own societies. The organization believes in the wisdom of listening, the power of participation and the strength of informed dialogue to build understanding and trust – the foundations of peacebuilding. Interpeace supports locally led peacebuilding initiatives in more than 21 countries in Latin America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. For more information, visit <http://www.interpeace.org/>

Kindly supported by



Robert Bosch **Stiftung**



# In memoriam: Kofi Annan – A relentless peacebuilder

---

The present report “Challenging the Conventional: Making Post-Violence Reconciliation Succeed” would not have been possible without the leadership of Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, Nobel Peace Laureate and Chair of the Kofi Annan Foundation.

Sadly, his sudden death on 18 August lends particular significance to the address he gave at the high-level symposium “Challenging the Conventional: Can Post-violence Reconciliation Succeed” held in Bogota last year. As a tireless advocate for peace, Mr. Annan reminded us that “Reconciliation is a long-term process, not an event. For it to succeed, everyone must be committed. If it is not promoted with sincere intentions or if complicated realities are reduced to sensational headlines, the process is doomed to fail.”

As we seek to promote and advance reconciliation, his wisdom and experience will be sorely missed. We need to draw inspiration from his life-long commitment to making the world more peaceful and keep in mind his strong belief that “enmity between people does not, and cannot, last forever.”

Mr. Annan was a man of great personal integrity and a remarkable world leader. He was ‘an idealist without illusions’, looking forward with his ‘stubborn optimism’ to how we could live and work together to make the world a better place for all. We can best honour his memory and nurture his legacy by embracing reconciliation as an indispensable step towards lasting peace.



Alan Doss

*President of the Kofi Annan Foundation*





# Foreword

---

Ending violence and sustaining peace is a major challenge of our time. In this endeavour, reconciliation is an essential tool. Reconciliation is both retrospective and proactive: it addresses the causes and consequences of conflict and prevents its recurrence. Given that half of post-war countries lapse back into conflict in the first decade after the end of fighting, the preventative dimension of reconciliation is of utmost importance. However, there is a lack of understanding of what actually works in advancing reconciliation even though reconciliation is an element in almost all peace agreements.

Contemporary peace-building offers a vast variety of reconciliation experiences, at the interpersonal, community and national levels. It involves a range of tools and processes, such as reparation programmes, inter-group dialogue and legal or constitutional reform. Reconciliation also occurs at different moments in the peace and conflict cycle. It is not reserved purely for a post-conflict context. Some early intervention models, even in the midst of violent conflicts, have proved impressive in building bridges and repairing damaged relationships at the local level.

Reconciliation is expected to transform relationships, contribute to the establishment of a social contract between the state and the people, and address economic inequality and structural fault lines. But the gap between popular expectations and realistic achievement does sometimes lead to disappointment or even disillusionment. It is therefore essential to develop policies and practices that can make reconciliation more effective.

Analysing past experiences and investigating how reconciliation can restore the social fabric and prevent future violence was the objective of the symposium **“Challenging the Conventional: Can Post-Violence Reconciliation Succeed?”** organized by the Kofi Annan Foundation and Interpeace in October 2017 in Bogota, Colombia. The event allowed for a dialogue between practitioners, policy-makers and scholars, who examined lessons from past experience and sought to develop more reflective programming on reconciliation. The findings of the symposium, together with the case studies, are captured in the present report, which will, I hope, help guide future reconciliation initiatives.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of Finland and the Bosch Foundation for their generous support. I also want to thank the staff of Interpeace and the Foundation, led respectively by Scott Weber and Alan Doss, for their great work on this project.

Finally, I wish to give my sincere thanks to all participants in the symposium for their expert contributions and critical review of current reconciliation practice. The present publication is the result of their in-depth reflections and of their first-hand experience.



**Kofi Annan**

*Former Secretary-General of the United Nations*

*Founder of the Kofi Annan foundation*



# Preface: Understanding Reconciliation

---

## **An increasingly critical process which remains poorly understood**

Reconciliation is a deeply complex process, which has gained increasing prominence on the agenda of post-violence peacebuilding. Yet reconciliation remains a contested and highly context-specific notion. In fact, there is considerable debate among scholars, experts and practitioners on the concept and practice of reconciliation, and how to best assess the achievements or limitations of reconciliation processes, especially in contexts where there are risks of re-emerging or transformed patterns and typologies of violence. Consequently, evidence is often lacking or disputed about interventions that are 'successful' in fostering reconciliation from the perspective of the people experiencing these processes.

The Kofi Annan Foundation and Interpeace have collaborated to address this need for a deeper understanding on reconciliation. Reconciliation is a profoundly transformative tool which, if effectively applied, has the potential to transform individuals from victims into survivors, and chaotic and violent societies into productive and hopeful environments. Reconciliation may include elements of peacebuilding, development, post-violence reconstruction and transitional justice.

## **Successful reconciliation depends on wise guidance; not prescriptive rules**

As a result, an increase in individuals and states involved in reconciliation processes requires a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of what reconciliation means in societies emerging from war, genocide, dictatorships and oppression; the diverse forms it can take in different moments and places; and the different programmatic approaches through which it can be pursued to ensure it is most effectively advanced. Our joint efforts are not aimed at developing a set of prescriptive rules of the game, but rather highlighting relevant and effective policies and practices that can guide reconciliation in order to secure stability and democratic governance in countries emerging from violent conflict.

In particular, this publication identifies the key questions and issues practitioners and policy-makers should pay attention to when designing and implementing reconciliation processes. It critically captures the essential parameters for reconciliation processes, innovative practice, and lessons learned from past experience, through research, knowledge-sharing and policy dialogue.

It promotes the importance of continued learning, horizontal exchange and exploration of innovation in approaches to reconciliation, in different contexts, at different levels in societies, and in different phases of the peace and conflict continuum.

It challenges actors from national reconciliation processes; mediators and negotiators at peace processes; peacemaking and international transitional justice experts; policymakers including members of the United Nations, regional bodies, diplomatic and donor communities; and relevant international and national civil society actors, engaged or willing to engage in reconciliation efforts, to think deeply about the rich and diverse issues to consider at each stage of a reconciliation process – rightly focusing on the future as much as on the past – to implement more effective and successful reconciliation processes.

## Four stories from three continents deliver plenty of lessons

Our findings are drawn from four case studies conducted by local actors and entities in Guatemala, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Northern Ireland. These case studies illuminate many of the practical and policy-level realities of implementing reconciliation processes in contexts separated by where they stand on the peace/conflict continuum, the characteristics associated with the nature of the conflict, violence and transition in these different contexts, and the specific cultural setting in which reconciliation takes place.

Importantly, these studies demonstrate the prevalence of reconciliation in a wide variety of processes and activities at different levels. Moreover, a comparative approach illustrates how the priorities, vision and levels of engagement in reconciliation processes take very different forms in different societies, and the variety of motivations, interests and experiences diverse stakeholders in society have over these processes. Notions of ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of reconciliation strategies and approaches therefore ought not to be viewed as simplistic or binary outcomes.

## Productive discourse has raised critical questions

Interpeace and the Kofi Annan Foundation further developed this conversation by bringing together local and national practitioners, policy-makers and scholars to a symposium organised in Bogota, Colombia in October 2017. The symposium promoted frank and honest dialogue to encourage participants to consider reconciliation through a new prism and develop more reflective and nuanced programming on reconciliation processes.

Some of the questions discussed throughout the symposium included:

- How do the objectives and nature of reconciliation evolve based on the features of conflict and where the country is in the peacebuilding process?
- Can reconciliation processes focussimultaneously on intergroup relationships and state-society relationships?
- At what levels of society shall reconciliation efforts be implemented and how can they reinforce each other?
- What role can institutional reform play in fostering reconciliation?
- How can a gender lens help to better understand the issues of victimisation and transgenerational trauma?
- What roles can the international community assume to support reconciliation, and how should these change and evolve during a process?
- What implications are there for countries where reconciliation is needed?

## The start of a productive journey

In sum, this report intends to discuss some of the difficulties and dilemmas societies and the international community have encountered throughout reconciliation processes. It seeks to raise critical questions about how these issues can be addressed at different levels and by different actors, and what guiding principles are needed to ensure that mechanisms created to address these issues do not obstruct or contradict each other.

Significantly, this publication is by no means an exhaustive set of guidelines on reconciliation. Our intent is to foster a conversation through a thoughtful comparative process more rooted in 'bottom-up' learning and reflection than in 'top-down' analysis and guidance. We hope that the ideas and experiences shared will stimulate renewed commitment and cooperation among practitioners, policymakers, mediators, donors and other key players in the international community to help guide future reconciliation initiatives.



**Alan Doss**

*President, Kofi Annan Foundation*



**Scott Weber**

*President, Interpeace*





# Key Take-Away Messages

---

There are many valuable insights that have emerged from our research. Here, we outline what we consider to be the most important messages related to understanding reconciliation.

- **Reconciliation is more important than ever.** Ending violence in a durable way is a major challenge of our time as half of post-war countries lapse back into conflict in the first decade after the end of fighting. We therefore need to improve how we terminate violence and sustain peace. By addressing the deep-rooted causes of violence, reconciliation processes may break the recurrent cycle of conflict.
- **Reconciliation is an on-going process,** with an often-overlooked strong preventative dimension. It not only addresses the causes and consequences of conflict, but it also prevents countries from relapsing into war. In order to be successful, the objectives of reconciliation need to be revisited on a regular basis, as society's needs and expectations evolve on the road to sustainable peace.
- **A powerful desire to end violence is not enough.** The desire to end violence can be a powerful uniting force, however it is much more difficult to nurture and maintain the shared willingness required to address the myriad of hard efforts necessary for sustainable peace. There is a required collective effort to rebuild relationships damaged by violent conflict, between both people and groups in society and also between the people and their institutions; uncover the truth; fight impunity; banish corruption; and build a well-functioning state through democratic processes.
- **Coalitions for reconciliation are necessary to keep the momentum.** Past experiences have shown that leadership and the building of coalitions for reconciliation are crucial elements of success. Reconciliation is a long-term effort that cannot depend on the changeable priorities of political actors, thus ensuring that stakeholders involved in reconciliation at all levels of society join strong coalitions is a powerful way to sustain a shared vision for reconciliation across political and social divides. While the role of the state is critical, as it ensures that a reconciliation agenda is implemented after the peace agreement is signed, effective reconciliation takes place on different levels of society. This ranges from grassroots initiatives focused on interpersonal and community relationships, to education efforts aimed at addressing group inequalities, and to national reparation programs and constitutional reforms. For these efforts to be successful, synergies must be built between these different stakeholders and initiatives.
- **Women and youth to bridge differences.** The importance of women and youth as key constituencies and components of 'strong' coalitions for reconciliation is a critical and insufficiently explored factor. Simplistic approaches that fail to recognize the complexity of these constituencies are to be avoided: neither women nor youth are homogenous groups that can be automatically assumed to share a positive vision and platform for reconciliation, nor are they always free from participation in the destructive dynamics of socio-political polarization. And yet, the inclusion of women and youth groups helps the peace process focus on issues that go beyond those brought up by the armed groups and allows for greater ownership of its outcome.

The precise potential of both youth and women as social constituencies is that they exist as common identities across other social divides and therefore provide a strategic entry point to bridge differences. Young people can become vehicles for positive change whose energy can be harnessed to constructively challenge the

entrenched beliefs and positions of their seniors and demand the transformation of their society. Given their role in the transmission of values and culture, women can be instrumental in changing mindsets and the way 'others' are perceived within their families and communities. Therefore, fostering their convergence around a shared vision for reconciliation can have a huge potential impact on society.

- **The roles of the International Community.** The International Community role is mainly to support the development of a local-led reconciliation process. The added value provided by the International Community is its ability to foster synergies between the multiple initiatives for reconciliation that are conducted at the different levels of society. It can also make sure that key stakeholders who tend to be excluded from reconciliation efforts – such as women, youth, victims and human rights defenders – are included and protected.





# Reconciliation in Action: An Analytical Framework

---

## Introduction: Four stories of hard-won change

The case studies presented below show that even after two decades of relative peace, it is not yet possible to speak of 'reconciled societies' that have overcome the divisions leading to and resulting from violent conflict. The case studies suggest that while the realization of a truly reconciled society is still a distant objective for Guatemalans, South Africans and the Northern Irish, the changes brought by the peace accords have been significant enough to transform the pattern of social and political interactions in society. Even in the DRC, where state weakness and geographic vastness generated a disparate landscape of post-violence and ongoing-violence realities, the achievements of local peace processes, whilst limited, have contributed to the redefinition of social relations. These four case studies defined some common threads and highlight different questions, challenges and opportunities which are crucial for national and international actors to reflect upon when considering guiding effective efforts in support of reconciliation.

The authors of the four case studies have been invited to reflect on the meaning, experience, and scope of reconciliation in their societies, observing around two decades of 'post-conflict' reality in Guatemala, Northern Ireland, and South Africa – where the political agreements resulting from peace processes effectively closed the cycle of political violence – and fifteen years of a 'post-agreement' reality in the DRC, where central-level political agreements have not ended regional-level conflicts.

In each case, peace-making efforts carried out with different levels of agency from their own societies and support from the international community succeeded in moving the parties engaged in armed confrontation – in both state and society – to lay down their arms and commit to democratic politics. While in the DRC the political agreements have only partially held with conflicts continuing at a regional level, reconciliation continues to be pursued in the context of on-going political violence, certainly in the Eastern provinces. In the other three cases, political violence effectively ended as a defining trait of the political system: political adversaries no longer use guns to pursue their objectives; the state no longer uses armed violence against those that question its politics. And yet, even in these cases, our researchers have found that after two decades of 'peace' – which in two of the cases has meant the transmutation of violence, not its end – it is not yet possible to speak of 'reconciled societies' which have overcome the divisions leading to and resulting from violent conflict. This creates a forged a shared future that is bonded through relationships of trust between the different social groups and the political institutions of the state.

Instead, individuals, communities, and institutions in these societies interact in complex patterns of relationships marked by varying degrees of trust and violence, tensions and agreement, hope and despair, that cannot be reduced to a simple case of negative versus positive coexistence. The case studies suggest that **while the realization of a truly reconciled society is still a distant objective for Guatemalans, South Africans and the Northern Irish, the changes brought by the peace accords have been significant enough to transform the pattern of social and political interactions in society.**

New actors and discourses, new issues and agendas that no longer – or not exclusively – respond to the pre-agreement socio-political dynamics emerge and combine with those that constitute the legacy of violent conflict. **Even in the DRC, where state weakness and geographic vastness generated a disparate landscape of post-violence and ongoing-violence realities, the achievements of the national and regional peace processes, whilst limited, have contributed to the redefinition of social relations.** This has enabled social and political actors to persevere in their effort to bring an end to violence and foster non-violent relationships between different groups in society, and between them and political authority. But it is not enough.

## Identifying common parameters

Based on the analysis brought forward in this report and the combined experience and insight of participants at the symposium, we aim to:

1. **Map out critical challenges and opportunities for context-specific reconciliation practice.** This should help generate for stakeholders a clear agenda of relevant issues and questions that should be embedded into the process early on.
2. **Contribute – at a wider level – to the development of a ‘policy and research’ agenda** that addresses the critical issues at the crux of reconciliation and peacebuilding practice and which merits further research and reflection through the exploration and comparative analysis of cases.

In this spirit, we would like to highlight what we believe are **key substantive ‘common threads’ running through the cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Northern Ireland and South Africa.** These common threads give rise to different paradoxes, challenges and opportunities, and raise important questions that merit more effective national and international action in support of reconciliation.

## The changing nature and objectives of reconciliation at different points in the peace and conflict cycle

The term ‘Reconciliation’ – or its equivalent in different languages – is used frequently today in relation to the ‘healing’ or ‘fixing’ of broken relationships at both the micro (interpersonal) and macro (international) levels. It cuts across domains – philosophical, religious, psycho-social, and political. Its meaning – how people understand it shifts in line with major changes in temporal, political and cultural contexts. As a result, most pieces of scholarly research and policy on reconciliation begin with an introduction discussing what we could term the ‘conceptual field’ of reconciliation, and then select an operational definition to guide their work.

Our own research rests on a definition that views reconciliation as a process of building or rebuilding relationships damaged by violent conflict, not only between people and groups in society (horizontal reconciliation), but also between the people and their social institutions (vertical reconciliation).

It's important to note that independently of academic and policy definitions, individuals and communities develop different and sometimes contrasting ideas of reconciliation, used in everyday life with meanings and goals that vary considerably. This diversity of interpretation often interacts with other concepts that refer to the fundamental question of how relationships develop, transform and change in society, such as love, peace, trust, hope, conflict, justice, etc. This generates contested definitions of reconciliation that reflect the contrasting interests and expectations held by different stakeholders in the socio-political process.

Reconciliation is not an elusive context, for it has a strong, constant core relating to the mending of relationships; but its shape, perimeters and nuances shift and adapt to the contour of socio-political relationships at any given time. It receives multiple interpretations corresponding to the social, cultural and political background of the stakeholder: it will always be there, but it might carry different and perhaps contested meanings.

In addition, reconciliation is an 'interactive' concept and not just a 'reactive' one. Purposeful use of the concept through concrete definitions has the power to shape social discourse and practice in societies emerging from the destructive dynamics of violence. Religion and politics have always been aware of the mobilizing power of notions that bank on the imagery of hope: the possibility of different, better futures. Reconciliation discourse has the potential to muster this power. For 'peace work', the key question is how to navigate the space between reconciliation as 'shaped' by social discourse and action. Therefore, reconciliation is applied to 'shape' social discourse and action, in order to effectively harness the mobilizing and transformational potential of the concept for the development of constructive relationships in society.

## Reconciliation for Peace, Peace for Reconciliation

As a result, it is clear from the case studies that we must distinguish between the two critical moments in how reconciliation is interpreted and then applied in order to foster positive change in both relationships between different individuals and groups (horizontal) and relationships between individuals and institutions (vertical): on the road to peace and consolidation.

- **'Reconciliation for Peace'** marks the period in which reconciliation is used as a concept to mobilize parties engaged in violent confrontation to agree on continuing the pursuit of their differences through non-violent means.
- **'Peace for Reconciliation'** marks the point at which the absence of political violence enables society to imagine a future beyond mere tolerance and engage in the building or re-building of relationships to make peace sustainable.

## The challenge lies in the shift from one to the other.

It's clear in all four cases that as *Reconciliation for Peace*, the socio-political agency – reflected in social discourse and in political action – focuses on reaching a political agreement in order to bring an end to armed violence. The harsh cost of political violence in conflicted societies generates a shared will that unites political energy with that of societal groups towards a reconciliation process focused on the urgent need to reach a peace agreement.

This convergence of will has been, in the cases of Guatemala, Northern Ireland, and South Africa, a critical element that enables societies to find their path out of violence. It is also what mobilizes civil society actors to sustain peace-making and mediation efforts in the eastern provinces of the DRC.

At this point, most stakeholders seem to have simply assumed that 'political peace' by itself would address the legacy of violence. In other words, that the rebuilding or construction of democratic polity, as defined in new political agreements or constitutional arrangements, would guarantee the societal relationships of trust for peace to be sustained. This optimism, whilst essential in the united push to put an end to violence, has at the same time obscured the real challenges that the legacy of violence poses for the social fabric of societies.

Consideration about what we term *Peace for Reconciliation* – how the absence of violence enables the building or rebuilding of relationships of trust that make it sustainable – usually came late on the road to a political arrangement and was deferred to the post-agreement phase. It may be that ignoring or deferring such issues was necessary to maintain a clear focus on negotiations and the pursuit of a political agreement. However, the fact remains that the shared will critical to the successful pursuit of an end to violence dissipated once the agreement was achieved. Social agency for peace 'fizzled out' with different stakeholders in state and society developing divergent (although not necessarily contradictory) post-conflict visions, needs, and expectations, in addition to getting 'distracted' from the urgent need to continue building peace through the evolution of political agreements.

In the Kivus, as conflict still rages on, social agency for peace remains in the *Reconciliation for Peace* phase, with the effort focused on bringing political violence to an end. But in Guatemala, Northern Ireland and South Africa, where the peace agreements have led to new political realities, the lack of an effective strategy to maintain enthusiasm for peace 'building', bridge differences and foster the development of a new, shared vision of post-violence reconciliation, inhibit further progress. Society has 'run out of steam' on the long journey towards 'positive co-existence' which is the basis of sustainable peace and dependent on transformed relationships of trust. The *Peace for Reconciliation* phase is faltering: societies are neither effectively reconciled, nor is reconciliation effectively used to shape social discourse and action towards 'positive coexistence'. The state's failure to follow through has significant consequences.

# The State as an obstacle

In the attempt to understand why successful peace agreements often lead to unsuccessful reconciliation processes, it is impossible to ignore the role of the state.

**In each of the three case studies where the end to political violence has been followed by democratic politics, it is in the limitations of the emerging state - in its functions, its capacities, and its contradictions - where the biggest obstacles to the development of functional horizontal and vertical relationships of trust lie:**

- In Guatemala, democratic enfranchisement and the end of state violence has not been enough to transform a political order whose poor pre-conflict socio-economic foundations remain in place.
- In Northern Ireland, the power-sharing arrangements may have ended the cycle of inter-communal violence in the province. But they have failed to transform the ethno-nationalist dynamics of society and resolve fundamental questions about its autonomy as a political order.
- In South Africa, the end of Apartheid implied the demise of the old racist political order and all it stood for. Yet the arrival of a new, democratic order is failing to transform the socio-economic relationships developed under the old regime.

What emerges clearly from these experiences is that commitments assumed in the political agreements or inscribed into political constitutions do not themselves mobilize the political agency necessary to forge the new 'social contracts' that can effectively re-constitute the political order in society, although there seems to have been some sort of implicit assumption that they would.

The failure of the emerging political order to 'act upon' peace, develop and deliver the coherent set of policies required to translate political commitments into better lives for citizens, becomes the biggest obstacle for the re-definition of relationships of trust in society.

In the cases of Guatemala and South Africa, the state's inability to address critical legacies of discrimination and exclusion is betraying the hope for a better future in most of their populations. The persistence of social and economic gaps and the perception that 'the system' is not responding to their hopes for a better future, foster the development of tensions and conflicts between different groups in society, as well as between political institutions. Violence, eradicated from the sphere of political competition, transmutes and reappears in different forms - i.e. criminal violence, youth violence, domestic violence - permeating social life to the point at which perceptions of post-conflict insecurity render peace as a paradox.

In Northern Ireland, violence has been contained and peace has delivered effective socio-economic dividends, reducing the sources of friction and resentment in society. Undoubtedly, better availability of technical, economic and political resources has enabled state institutions to perform better in terms of addressing historical development exclusions and deficits.

But even here, the incapacity of public institutions to purposefully address entrenched ethno-nationalist dynamics prevents these assets from contributing to the dissolution of the historical barriers of inter-communal mistrust, fostering a more cohesive redefinition of society.

In fact, it is beyond the realm of state and politics where we find examples of reconciliation efforts successfully building trust. In Guatemala, Northern Ireland, and South Africa the researchers point to a positive agency for peace within civil society and communities, driven by a combination of need and conviction that often operates without institutional support from the state. These successful interventions exist at the local level as well as within institutional ‘pockets’ within the state. In the absence of an integrated policy, they remain scattered with a transformative potential that is neither explored nor exploited. This is aptly exemplified in the case of the DRC, where civil society efforts to mediate between conflicting parties are made vital by the state’s incapacity to provide basic security to the population and to establish a presence in the provinces. The challenge is therefore to find mechanisms that can enable existing capacities for reconciliation catalyze a wider ‘agency for reconciliation’ that succeeds in mobilizing not just the state, but society as a whole, into a transformative dynamic of horizontal and vertical relationships of trust.

## Reconciliation cannot be sustained without socio-political leadership

The political agreements underpinning peace processes and resulting from the vision of *Reconciliation for Peace* were fundamentally a decision to renounce the language of violence in the pursuit of political interests, not a renouncement of such interests. A new political compact is therefore required to pursue the more ambitious redefinition of social and political relationships necessary for the effective societal transformation related to *Peace for Reconciliation*.

This has not happened in the observed cases. The political parties and state bureaucracies responsible for the implementation of commitments made as part of peace agreements have been unable, for various reasons, to deliver them. They have also failed to foster further reconciliation in general.

These reasons range from competitive partisanship to a failure to change poor inter-communal dynamics to the pursuit of ‘egoistic’ and even corrupt interests, and finally, sheer incompetence. Peace for Reconciliation is therefore held back by the limitations of the political actors at work within varying democratic contexts. Whilst the political leadership involved in reconciliation is weakened by partisan politics, the social leadership for reconciliation fails to coalesce into a force capable of moving the state into action.

In each one of the cases analyzed, civil society appears as one of the few resources for positive agency for reconciliation in society: engaging in mediation and conflict prevention in the absence of effective state presence in the DRC; fighting for justice and political reform and rebuilding communal life in Guatemala; fostering inter-communal reconciliation through collaboration and integration in Northern Ireland; and preventing marginalization of reconciliation and reparation challenges in public policy in South Africa.

Most of the successful efforts in rebuilding trusting relationships in these societies occur thanks to the work of these dedicated citizens and organizations. But whilst they are an important component, they can only achieve so much in the face of both a lack of interest from the political class and the indifference of much of society. Their impact on political discourse and the action of the many different stakeholders that constitute society therefore remains sadly limited.

Without a shared vision for a reconciled society that can recognize and integrate the needs, interests, and expectations of the different groups, the state cannot create public policies that address both historical and new issues of exclusion and injustice. And without such a vision, it cannot purposefully engage in shaping and reshaping social discourse and action towards a reconciled society and sustainable peace.

Fostering socio-economic transformations, promoting cultural and attitudinal change, building and rebuilding relationships of horizontal and vertical trust and, fundamentally, addressing the tensions inherent to the legacy of violence in society – effectively ‘dealing with the past’ – become almost insurmountable obstacles.

**The success of reconciliation therefore lies in the capacity of the stakeholders involved to integrate reconciliation initiatives into a coherent whole that joins the forces at play and harnesses social agency for horizontal and vertical trust.**

## Reconciliation as an ongoing challenge in every society

The problems we see as a result of weak states, divided societies and irresponsible political elites, normally emerge when the peace process interacts with the process of state formation. **The problems that arise in these countries are not so much related to the peace process itself, but to the common challenge of state formation and the problem of building trust in democratic societies, all around the world.**

One need only look at neighboring countries such as Honduras, Kenya, and Belgium that do not have either violent conflicts or peace processes in their recent past to see similar patterns of problematic relationships at the horizontal and vertical levels. Nor do societies reach some sort of political ‘threshold’ after which they can consider matters of trust and social cohesion to be resolved and take them for granted. The texture of social and political discourse in the United States today makes evident the vulnerability of horizontal and vertical relationships of trust to destructive political dynamics in what has usually been considered a paradigmatically ‘consolidated’ society.

Reconciliation as ‘positive coexistence’ is, therefore, the fundamental problem of political order in plural societies:

- How do you sustain socio-political cohesion in the context of a changing and complex world?
- How do you anchor co-existence in relationships of horizontal and vertical trust that can make them more resilient to the tensions and contradictions inherent to social life?

It is therefore wise to stop considering the challenges facing post-political violence countries as exclusively an expression of a recent past of violent politics and ‘less than successful’ peace processes and agreements. Rather, we should understand them in reference to the wider common challenge of effective state formation. In this context, the politics of peace and reconciliation are ‘critical junctures’ that can help societies make a positive turn towards social cohesion in the universal and cyclical challenge of developing and maintaining effective states.

## The secondary role of the international community

Although researchers were asked to consider the role of the international community in reconciliation processes, it is not by chance that this factor does not figure prominently in their analyses.

Local stakeholders in state and society couch their efforts to transcend violent conflict and pursue functional societies on their own terms. This tends to happen regardless of the intellectual and policy discussions taking place amongst international actors in reference to their interventions in peace processes. However, depending on the international context of a country, external categorizations and actions can influence the nature of national and local definitions and approaches to various degrees.

The role of International intervention in providing political and operational support to the peace accord and its implementation is acknowledged either implicitly or explicitly, as well as the importance of technical and financial support to actors in state and society engaged in reconciliation efforts.

Most of the work carried out at the community level in the four case studies – usually initiatives undertaken by communities or civil society organizations – is supported by international funding. Official bodies tasked with fostering peace and reconciliation are key recipients of international technical and financial assistance. Nevertheless, when considering the ‘sociology’ of reconciliation, it seems evident that the critical factors that can catalyze the existing capacity into transformative impact lie in the realm of the political capacity for collaborative, collective action. The development of a new ‘social contract’ that, fostering an agreement on the nature of future coexistence, can enhance the possibility of constructively dealing with the past.

The recognition that the problem lies at the systemic level does not mean that there is a need to adopt a state-centric approach and top-down operational avenues to address the issue. Whilst the problem may come from the limitations and constraints of political institutions, actors, and processes, the solution might rest in effectively fostering and channeling capacities for reconciliation already existing in society.

**The most effective route towards effective international assistance for reconciliation therefore seems to lie in improving conditions for the development of healthy state/society and inter-community relations:** strengthening national and local capacities for ‘political’ collaboration; fostering processes that build inclusive and collaborative interaction; developing key capacities in key actors in state and society to build stronger and more effective coalitions; developing a plural and inclusive leadership that can effectively guide political; and social sectors into effective collaboration.





# How Reconciliation Can Restore the Social Fabric and Prevent Future Violence: Key Findings

---

## Reconciliation is an expansive and evolving process

### Reconciliation for what purpose?

Reconciliation not only entails 'mending' the negative effect of violent conflict on relationships or addressing the legacy of mistrust between those who exercised violence and those who suffered it, it also involves tackling the ongoing challenge of developing and sustaining trusting relationships in society, between the different individuals and communities that constitute it, as well as between people and political institutions.<sup>1</sup> Often, this process requires a transformation of social relationships that goes well beyond 'repairing' or 'reconstructing' the relationships that were affected by violence, as they often were part of the conditions leading to violent conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Reconciliation is about re-defining the relationships of trust between people and between people and political institutions in a deeply transformative way: it is not just about enabling negative coexistence –defined as the capacity to sustain relationships of mistrust without violence – but also about fostering the development of relationships of trust as the basis for harmonious and positive coexistence.

Building trust is an issue that needs to be addressed throughout different phases of the peace process. Although establishing trust can be a critical issue within certain political moments, such as in the aftermath of a peace agreement, it should be regarded as a cyclical process that needs continual attention.<sup>3</sup> This is evident in countries with no recent conflict such as the United States, where racial injustice today is undermining positive coexistence.

The definition of reconciliation and the strategies for achieving it in different situations within different contexts will vary significantly. Where a country stands on the peacebuilding/conflict continuum or its political transition; the nature and terms of how violence is ending or transmuting; or the specific cultural context in which reconciliation is taking place, all contribute to the uniqueness of each effort. Reconciliation can involve:

---

1 Graeme Simpson, Reconciliation Beyond Conceptual Debates, in USIP Insights Newsletter, Fall 2014: State of the Art – Reconciliation.

2 Alexander Ramsbotham and Zahbia Yousuf, Making peace with the past: transforming broken relationships, in ACCORD Insight n°3, Transforming broken relationships: Making peace with the past, Conciliation Resources 2016, pp.7-11.

3 Beristain, Carlos. Reconciliación y democratización en América Latina: un análisis regional. In IIDH-IDEA. Verdad, Justicia y Reparación: Desafíos para democracia y la convivencia. 2005.

- The generation of enough trust between key political actors, enabling them to agree on non-violent mechanisms to pursue their differences: reconciliation to enable the end of political violence.
- The trust that citizens have in political institutions necessary for 'positive' coexistence: reconciliation as civic trust.
- The redefinition of social relationships between communities separated by communal identities: reconciliation as social coexistence.

Reconciliation can be all these things and more, both sequentially and at the same time. There are many needs and opportunities for reconciliation that change and take place at different levels of social and political life.

## Understanding local interpretations

The case studies clearly exemplify that such trust-building efforts are not necessarily understood by local actors in the same way that the concept of 'reconciliation' is understood by the international community.<sup>4</sup> Instead, labels and concepts that respond to local dynamics and considerations take on greater significance.

A clear example of such a locally driven definition is the case of Northern Ireland, where actors working to enhance inter-communal peaceful coexistence utilize the term 'community relations' rather than 'reconciliation', due to local political sensitivities that make it inadvisable to use that term.

The needs, goals, actors, and definitions of reconciliation change as social processes develop. Therefore, the most relevant aspect of reconciliation processes is not 'when?' but 'how?' and these are the critical questions that should be posed:

- What are the specific needs and opportunities for reconciliation at a given historical moment, and how can these be addressed?
- How can the concrete, specific needs for trust and reconciliation at the moment contribute to the overall, holistic needs of a reconciled and trusting society?
- In a post-conflict setting, how can the specific needs of victims of violence be reconciled with those of society in general?
- How can reconciliation interventions not only address the needs of societies immediately after the signature of the peace agreement but also tackle the underlying fault lines that led to the conflict?

---

<sup>4</sup> Viaene, Lieselotte, The internal logic of the cosmos as 'justice' and 'reconciliation': Micro-level perceptions in post-conflict Guatemala. In *Critique of Anthropology* 30(3) 287–312, 2010.

## Choosing the right approach to reconciliation: timing, sequencing, and longevity

Reconciliation needs to be understood beyond simple dichotomies that limit interventions to post-conflict moments, or to victim-perpetrator dynamics. For example, the DRC's experience demonstrates that innovative reconciliation processes are not reserved purely for post-conflict situations: early intervention models even amid violent conflict have proved impressive in building bridges and repairing damaged relationships at the local level. Issues should not be oversimplified to make them a question of 'either/or', because this risks framing these issues as a matter of exclusive or hierarchical alternatives.

In Mindanao, the victim/perpetrator dichotomy has proved unhelpful as victim-centered interventions became irrelevant when victims started defending themselves against claimed abuses. Moving beyond such a dichotomy of victims and perpetrators is also necessary if reconciliation is to be regarded as a shared responsibility by all sectors of society.<sup>5</sup> The deep and transformational impact reconciliation should have on interpersonal and social relationships can only be achieved through balancing the 'retrospective' need to mend relationships of trust between those directly involved in inflicting and suffering violence, with the 'proactive' need to sustain societal and socio-political trust at a general level.

## Involving the right stakeholders

### Fair representation of victims and ordinary citizens is critical

It is important to note that the reconciliation needs and interests of those driving violent conflict, including state and non-state armed groups, are often over-prioritized. But the process of compromise and pressure that goes into producing a peace agreement requires a very different skill-set to that required to build reconciliation and trust within society.

This begs the question of whether the state and armed groups are the right stakeholders to push the reconciliation agenda after the peace accord is signed. The increased attention and power that is given to those carrying arms to determine the post-conflict political and social fabric of a state tends to obscure and marginalize the critical agency for peace that resides in other stakeholders in society during peace negotiations.

Notably, when victims arrived in Havana during the Colombian peace negotiations, the agenda expanded from discussing economic issues pertinent to the government and armed forces, such as corruption and agrarian reform, to victims' issues important to the wider population.

It is significant to note that the inclusion of all relevant actors in defining the agenda during a reconciliation or peace process is critical to strengthening the durability and effectiveness of such processes.

---

<sup>5</sup> Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, Grounding reconciliation: transforming relationships in Mindanao, in ACCORD Insight n°3, Transforming broken relationships: Making peace with the past, Conciliation Resources 2016, pp.30-36

In addition, 'grievance-driven' approaches focusing on the legacy of particularly violent periods risk obscuring the critical importance of systemic mistrust and injustice in society that often pre-dates and transcends violent crisis. The challenge with such a heavy emphasis on the legacies of conflict is that it may prevent the transformative action at the structural level, which is necessary for reconciliation as a positive coexistence. A more holistic approach was used in Mindanao in the Philippines.

#### **The Mindanao 'Listening Project'**

The transitional justice and reconciliation agendas were developed through an inclusive consultative process called a 'listening project'. Mandated by the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, researchers collected the experiences and narratives of 3,000 community members and local officials in the various regions of Mindanao. This bottom-up method sought to prevent reconciliation efforts from focusing exclusively on victim-perpetrator dynamics that could unintentionally reinforce historical gaps and perpetuate cycles of violence. It also allowed for the perspectives of the conflict-affected communities to help shape the reconciliation process.

**Reconciliation is a matter of balance and complementarity, identifying and acknowledging the different needs for 'trust' - interpersonal, intercommunal, societal, political - that exist in a society at any given moment, and 'weaving' them into operational strategies that recognize all are necessary to underpin transformed, collaborative and trustful relationships.** However, this does not mean sacrificing the rights, needs and interests of victims to the 'systemic' needs of society and institutions, as such an approach would render any attempt at reconciliation not only unjust, but ineffective.

## **Psycho-social healing can play a critical role in building a strong base for lasting peace**

The importance of psycho-social healing for national reconciliation is illustrated by numerous examples, such as Tunisia, South Africa, Colombia and Rwanda. Psycho-social healing is "a process to promote psychological and social health of individuals, families and community groups<sup>6</sup>". This approach is based on the understanding that in a post-conflict situation where social fabrics have been torn apart by violence, the rebuilding of the human interactions that allow the society to function requires the healing of psychological and social wounds of individuals and society.

Because trauma does not occur in a social vacuum, the healing process can only take place in the context of relationships. Psycho-social healing programs therefore use support groups and facilitated discussion to heal individuals in the context of a group.

---

<sup>6</sup> P. Gutlove, G. Thompson, Psychosocial healing and post-conflict social reconstruction in the former Yugoslavia, in *Medicine, Conflict and Survival Journal*, 2004 Apr-Jun; 20(2):136-50

### Truth seeking and healing in Rwanda

In the latter, reconciliation for many people meant bringing together survivors and perpetrators. But the implementation of truth and justice strategies through *Gacaca*<sup>7</sup> courts without attention to individual and collective healing needs was problematic and seen as an autopsy in which the corpse was returned open to the family after establishing the cause of death: truth, of itself, does not necessarily heal. Even though the *Gacaca* were successful at putting an end to stigmatization and generalization (i.e. that all Hutus had taken part in the genocide), at the individual level the lack of psychological support made the process very challenging.

**Psycho-social healing and sustained societal support to those that directly suffered the effect of violence, is critical for the social body to effectively overcome a divisive past and re-establish foundations of trust to enable 'positive coexistence'.** Finding the right way to address victims' needs in a reconciliation process comes with challenges, such as the risk of using discourses around closure and catharsis that inadvertently makes reconciliation primarily the burden of those who were injured, or the danger of victimhood approaches that may foster conflict rather than promote peace by trapping individuals and communities in conflict-defined roles without the opportunity to transcend and transform. And yet, the design and implementation of 'healing' strategies as part of reconciliation efforts often receive insufficient support from official international and national actors.

## At what levels of society should reconciliation efforts be implemented?

Reconciliation takes place on different levels of society and involves a broad range of stakeholders. It is not simply a bottom-up effort carried out at the grassroots level and focused on interpersonal and community relationships, or a national top-down endeavor including legal and constitutional processes and reform, truth commissions, national reparation programs, etc.

In fact, top-down, middle-out and bottom-up strategies for reconciliation can mutually reinforce each other. Avoiding narrow top-down, externally defined and/or warrior-driven reconciliation strategies is an important mechanism to enable the identification of alternative opportunities for reconciliation work in society, sometimes even while violent conflict rages on<sup>8</sup>. Challenging conflict narratives and the demonization of the other at the community level, for example, can provide 'social space' for the emergence of alternative perspectives sustaining non-violent relationships and creating 'islands' of peace.

7 The *Gacaca* court is a system of community justice inspired by Rwandan tradition. The word *Gacaca* refers to 'a bed of soft green grass' on which a community and leaders known for their integrity and wisdom gathered to discuss and resolve conflicts. This traditional justice was adapted in 2005 to fit the needs of Rwanda in the wake of the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi. Faced with the challenge of trying the 130,000 alleged genocide perpetrators and pursuing justice on such a massive scale, the Rwandan authorities decided to re-establish the *Gacaca* courts, alongside the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Between 2005 and 2012, more than 12,000 community-based courts tried more than 1.2 million cases throughout the country.

8 David Bloomfield, *On Good Terms: Clarifying Reconciliation*, Berghof Report No. 14, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2006



In Colombia, locally-driven initiatives have succeeded in protecting communities from violence by working on local-level reconciliation with victims and perpetrators, and by strengthening the capacities for inter-communal collaboration through the development of regional peacebuilding networks. These initiatives thus began the 'territorialisation of peace' through the empowerment of local actors to effectively shield their communities and simultaneously enhance their capacity to address the post-agreement challenges of reintegration, collaboration and development. A similar finding in the Democratic Republic of Congo shows that community-driven efforts to reconcile warring communities and regional militias through inter-ethnic committees succeeded in stopping violence in some areas, enabling the implantation of state institutions that further contributed to preventing violence and fostering coexistence in a context of inter-communal tensions.

Moreover, recognizing and fostering the multiplicity of initiatives for reconciliation can empower local actors to engage in efforts that respond to their specific needs through culturally relevant definitions and approaches, as exemplified with experiences from the Philippines, Rwanda and Guatemala<sup>9</sup>.

Even though the potential impact of such discrete efforts on post-agreement 'national' reconciliation attempts is uncertain, their contributions in terms of addressing trust deficits between people and groups in society, and in strengthening the capacity of social actors to engage in collaborative interaction, constitute a clear and meaningful contribution to peace. It is also true that the best laid peace agreements at the national level can be undone by re-emerging conflict at the local level. By the same token, successful local level peace processes can be easily undone by failed talks at the national level. In order to be sustainable, reconciliation as a goal and as a process must therefore be owned and sustained by all actors in a society.

All actors must develop a shared responsibility which requires moving beyond the basic dichotomies – i.e. victims and perpetrators, past and future, state and community – while acknowledging the social importance of addressing the destructive legacy of violence, which often mutates from the political to the social. This progression requires the design and implementation of participatory reconciliation processes to allow for the identification and acknowledgement of the diversity of needs and interests in a society.

It is important to dispel the notion that reconciliation needs to follow either 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' approaches, choosing between state actors and civil society or communities as mutually exclusive alternatives. To be effective and sustainable, reconciliation requires efforts involving all 'levels' of society in processes that connect, integrate and bind them into a complex web of relationships of trust. Horizontal reconciliation between individual and communities, and vertical reconciliation between groups in society and political authority, are both necessary and complementary: one without the other would not be sustainable. Reconciliation entry points can be multiple and varied:

---

<sup>9</sup> Arriaza, Laura and Roth-Arriaza, Naomi, Social Reconstruction as a Local Process. In *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 2 (2): 152-172, 2008

**Community-level initiatives that focus on 'horizontal' trust-building to subsequently engage with political authority**

The Magdalena Medio region in Colombia offers an interesting example of a bottom-up engagement with political institutions. A grassroots reconciliation effort started in 1995 in this territory which saw the largest amount of conflicts at that time. The process, which combined dialogue initiatives and development projects, was centered on the definition of a common vision for the future of the people living in the territory. Through the building of a sense of belonging and a cultural identity, the people of Magdalena Medio organized themselves and became a collective force for peace.

This example demonstrates that developing such a collective movement for peace can be a strategic prerequisite to engaging with political institutions to prevent the reconciliation process to be hijacked by politicians or undermined by new conflict dynamics.

**Engaging and utilizing official spaces and processes to reach out to wider society**

The Tunisia Dialogue on Transitional Justice: In Tunisia, 'official' reconciliation processes in which civil society actors relied on the institutional and legal framework of the state for their participation in the official reconciliation processes occurred. Civil society representatives were charged with overseeing the national dialogue on transitional justice. As a result, civil society was the main contributor to the transitional justice law and design of the reconciliation process that resulted from the national dialogue.

**Fostering civil-society coalitions to lobby political powers and support communities**

The Northern Ireland's local partnership structures: In Northern Ireland, civil society played a major role in the reconciliation initiative. Local partnership structures were created to bring together local community groups, ex-combatants, employers, trade unions, etc. They made sure the reconciliation programs would be independent from the politicians and enabled the participation of key sectors of society in the process by giving them a voice and a sense of recognition.

There is often a plurality of reconciliation initiatives that, in parallel and subsequently, work on the redefinition of relationships of trust in society: state sanctioned efforts, civil-society driven initiatives, community-level processes that coexist and combine, generating interactions and complementarities that synergize into larger impacts than each would achieve independently.



## The importance of coalitions to successful reconciliation

As mentioned above, common challenges facing reconciliation include a decline in momentum beyond the immediate post-agreement period and its dependency on political priorities and agendas. Therefore, mechanisms are required to capitalize agency for reconciliation in a society by bringing together a variety of actors straddling state/society, social and community divides.

Such actors help create 'constituencies for reconciliation' that can sustain visions and strategies throughout the socio-political changes characteristic of societies emerging from violence and polarization.

Driven by their common interest in fostering reconciliation, if these constituencies are to join forces, they can become powerful 'coalitions for reconciliation'. These coalitions can be key to prevent the 'fizzling-out' of post-conflict social and political agency for reconciliation as was the case in Guatemala where there was insufficient will to effectively structure and transform society post-peace accords.

## What kind of leadership is required for successful reconciliation?

Such a strategy requires the development of a societal 'leadership for reconciliation', as a diverse and inclusive group that can anchor a shared vision for reconciliation across political and societal divides. As evidenced in the case studies and many country examples, political changes in the aftermath of a peace agreement imply a shift in the relative importance of social actors: some actors that were central to the peace-making effort lose political centrality and influence, while others that were peripheral at that time emerge as key actors in a post-agreement political scene.

Government officials that wielded considerable influence can find themselves out of positions of power due to democratic elections, while prominent civil society actors can assume official posts in government. In so far as shared visions for reconciliation are not widely anchored in society, such shifts pose significant challenges for the sustainability of reconciliation efforts as commitment for a sustained effort can ebb and flow with political changes.

These dramatic shifts in power and influence amongst different groups of stakeholders may trigger resistance to the reconciliation agenda. In Northern Ireland for instance, once the post-agreement public institutions were established, the political leaders lost interest in the wider reconciliation agenda. The presence of constituencies that are willing to push this agenda forward is therefore critical. It is also of utmost importance for those leading or supporting the reconciliation process to develop a very good understanding of the causes of the conflict, as well as of the political economy of peace.

## The role of women and youth is significant in several ways

The importance of women and youth as key constituencies and components of 'strong' coalitions for reconciliation is a critical, yet insufficiently explored factor. However, simplistic approaches that fail to recognize the complexity of these constituencies are to be avoided: neither women nor youth are homogenous groups that can be automatically assumed to share a positive vision and platform for reconciliation. Nor are they always free from participation in the destructive dynamics of socio-political polarization. And yet, the inclusion of women and youth helps the peace process to focus on issues that go beyond those brought up by the armed groups and allows for a greater ownership of outcomes.

Young people can play a critical role in the effective transformation of social attitudes and norms. With the increasing power and influence of youth voices via social media, young people are becoming the primary drivers of social norms. Aware of their own vulnerability to deficits of trust and justice in social structures, young people can become vehicles for positive change in so far as their energy can be harnessed to constructively challenge the entrenched beliefs and positions of their seniors and demand the transformation of their society.

Young people are not a social 'group', rather a demographic one with a multitude of different identities and beliefs. But it is this contrast between the heterogeneity of social backgrounds and homogeneity in terms of their social 'position' - the shared challenges as they enter productive life and assume social responsibility - that makes their participation particularly promising. Youths have strong feedback loops into their own particular groups or communities, thus enabling their transformed attitudes to serve as catalyzers of wider social change.

### **Youth leadership plays a crucial role in resilient Libyan communities**

When looking into the resilient Libyan communities that have remained relatively stable despite conflict, Interpeace's research showed that one factor of stability common to many of these pockets of peace was the leadership role of young people. In several instances, young people who had gained legitimacy during the revolution, renegotiated their relationships with community elders to play a greater decision-making role in governance.

It is dangerous however, to assume that young people will always play a positive role. The involvement of youth in post-agreement violence discussed in some of the examples presented in the symposium - i.e. South Africa, El Salvador and Nepal - exemplifies the risk of simplistic approaches that naively ignore the potential negative agency of youth. In fact, there is a critical need to understand the variety of roles youths play before, during and after a conflict, together with a recognition that these roles can be both positive and negative, proactive and passive, often encapsulating all these dimensions in their experience.

This is also the strongest argument supporting intelligent engagement with youth for reconciliation: a youth unreconciled with its past, present or future, will make the development of horizontal and vertical structures of trust in society unsustainable. In contrast, a youth reconciled with itself and their current and future conditions can be the strongest harbinger of a reconciled society. Integrated schools are a critical example of where this process of reconciliation can be most effective yet is an aspect often overlooked or under-supported.

### **A lack of integrated schooling in Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, only 7% of school-age youth attend the 63 integrated schools which bring together children from Catholic and Protestant traditions. Yet this failing is arguably not due to a lack of willingness as explained in the case study: "Parents actually want to send their children to integrated schools... but there is oversubscription and not enough schools. The political and religious leadership has stalled this process."

Similarly, fostering women's participation in reconciliation processes can facilitate the development of public debate around the transformation of negative gender paradigms that are often associated with -and in some cases underpin - polarizing and conflictual socio-political dynamics.

Effectively including gender dimensions in reconciliation work can be both beneficial for reconciliation and for wider gender relations. A process which constructively redefines gender relations as part of the reconciliation process helps contribute to healthier and therefore more peaceful gender relationships.

It is worth emphasizing that it is the quality of women's participation rather than the quantity that is significant to the overall success of peace agreements. Research has shown that when women's groups were able to influence the peace process, peace agreements were more likely to be reached and implemented.<sup>10</sup> But as in the case of youth, this engagement requires an intelligent understanding of gender roles and dynamics in the different spaces of society.

It is important to recognize women as a plural and varied social category that shares needs, aspirations and goals that cut across social groups and identities, but whose variety constitutes an asset in so far as women connect back into all corners of society with critical roles as educators and careers. Given their role in the transmission of values and culture, women can indeed be instrumental in changing mindsets and the way the 'others' are perceived within their families and communities.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, fostering their convergence around a shared vision for reconciliation can have a huge potential impact on society as a whole.

The precise potential of both youth and women as social constituencies is that they exist as common identities across other social divides and therefore provide a strategic entry point to bridge differences. Yet harnessing the potential of women and youth as critical constituencies for reconciliation would require simultaneously working with them as a distinct group, as well as fostering their engagement into wider 'reconciliation coalitions' that cut across gender, age, class and geography, binding together actors in state and in society around shared visions and actions for a reconciled future.

---

<sup>10</sup> Thania Paffenholz, *Beyond the Normative: Can Women's Inclusion Really Make for Better Peace Processes?*, CCDP Policy Brief, April 2015

<sup>11</sup> Rosa Emilia Salamanca González and Ricardo Mendoza, *Imagining peace and building paths to inclusive reconciliation in Colombia*, in ACCORD Insight n°3, *Transforming broken relationships: Making peace with the past*, Conciliation Resources 2016, pp.22-27

## Building coalitions for reconciliation across groups and demographics requires more innovation

The development of solid and sustainable networks of trust in society, capable of effectively mobilizing social action, cannot depend on the possibility of a single 'agent' or a small segment of society becoming 'the' effective advocate(s) of reconciliation. It requires developing the capacity for dialogue across social and political divides, across state and society, and across political class and civil society. Moreover, practitioners should never promote a reconciliation effort that, intentionally or not, generates the exclusion of a constituency.

This can be challenging, as not every group will be interested or willing to engage with the 'other', particularly in contexts marked by violence and suffering. How can negotiators avoid these groups from dragging or paralyzing societal reconciliation efforts? How can national actors prevent these groups from being left behind by wider societal reconciliation processes?

These questions show the need for a more nuanced understanding of how practitioners can help fix or craft new trusting relationships and the need to continue searching for, and sharing, innovative approaches to interventions targeted to specific groups with particular needs. Innovation of this kind possesses the potential to contribute to a cumulative impact for sustained reconciliation in a post-conflict context.

## Social media is a double-edged sword

Social media offer an interesting mobilizing potential for reconciliation efforts. With a significant degree of penetration in society, particularly among young people, social media may increase access to information and encourage discussion, creating a more enlightened electorate and public, decreasing stereotypes, and helping people hold government to account in constructive ways.

But examples from Myanmar, Russia and the United States evidence the need to be aware of the negative, conflict-fueling potential of social media access and discourse, as tools under what some call the 'new theory of war' include the use of twitter bots to spread malicious propaganda and Facebook pages using inflammatory discourse to misinform and agitate. Therefore, **reconciliation practitioners need to be more aware of the challenges and opportunities new media presents to reconciliation efforts, and to harness them accordingly into their efforts.**

## Institution-building must be part of the transformation

Social-agency approaches to reconciliation cannot ignore the role state and societal institutions, such as schools, the media and religious communities, can play as platforms for transforming relationships and fostering inclusion in society.

The state is both an asset and an obstacle. As an obstacle, institutions can pose dilemmas when they are historically complicit in the patterns of violation at the heart of past conflicts. Notably, these institutions are often inherited by new post-conflict democratic regimes.

In addition, many of the challenges identified in the implementation of reconciliation efforts in post-agreement contexts reside in the deficiencies of state institutions, governmental bureaucracies and political actors.

Weak or inefficient institutions, incompetent or indifferent bureaucracies, persistent authoritarian institutions and mindsets, and self-interested or corrupt politicians are factors that, in different combinations and to different degrees, can challenge the political commitment necessary to sustain the effort required for the development of a reconciled society. Yet it is only through the effective enrolment of the machinery of the state into an encompassing effort aiming for reconciliation at every level that sustainable reconciliation can be achieved.

One example is Northern Ireland, which attempted to tackle institutional prejudice by implementing the Fair Employment Act in 1976 that sought to end discrimination in the work place on grounds of religion and create an environment where all groups mixed. Society then bears witness to the fostering and sustaining of relationships of horizontal and vertical trust through the legal, institutional and policy frameworks that regulate the social and political life of society.

Again, it is not about an 'either / or' mind-set. A reconciliation strategy cannot be reduced to either a social-communal effort that shies away from political institutions, or a state-centric logic that reduces reconciliation to the scope of officialdom. In reality, society shapes institutions and institutions shape society. To be effective, reconciliation agency needs to be anchored in both realms.

Moreover, accountability and the responsiveness of state institutions is a critical element in the development of relationships of trust not only between people and political institutions, but within society itself. Institutions – and not just institutions of state – are potentially both the object and subject of the reconciliation endeavor.

Reconciliation work within specific institutional settings can have both a powerful symbolic and practical effect in society.

#### **Reconciliation through institutional reform in Northern Ireland**

Police reform in Northern Ireland allowed the transformation from a police force into a police service. The mono-communal body associated with discrimination and repression was disbanded in order to create a new body in which members of both communities served side by side under a civilian oversight board. The development of community policing also contributed to breaking the barriers between groups, as the police started working with community leaders, including ex-combatants and leaders of victims' groups.

Similarly, the creation of six north-south bodies in the Good Friday Agreement that were independent of political parties' maintained energy at the societal level by creating local partnership structures and mechanisms between community groups, employers, trade unions, etc. for promoting social transformation and cohesion. One of the most successful projects implemented by the body responsible for education in Northern Ireland took place in the divided city of Derry. Thousands of teachers and students were encouraged to exchange uniforms and walk around the town to understand the others' experiences.

Educational reform can provide a powerful tool for the development of new and constructive narratives of trust and coexistence in society, working with children from the youngest ages. Budgetary allocations are critical to break with historical patterns of institutionalized discrimination and exclusion, underpinning the transformation of values and attitudes.

But important questions remain in balancing the long-term needs of state formation with the short-term needs of a post-agreement, post-political violence stability. How does one teach history in a society divided by violent conflict in a way that simultaneously respects alternative narratives while preventing the deepening of inter-communal divides?

How can transitional justice be an intersecting conversation in relation to reconciliation, the role of truth-commissions, and institutional accountability and transformation, rather than these being construed as separate and unrelated issues? How do you approach institution-building efforts to ensure they respond to 'trust-building' rationales and intent, and not just 'efficiency' considerations?

**Only through state involvement can the social foundations of trust be enshrined into the legal and institutional frameworks that regulate and norm social life. At the same time, only strong social agency can prevent reconciliation from being 'sequestered', instrumentalized or discarded by state actors.** Again, it is a matter of complementarity and balance between dynamics of cooperation and contestation at the interface between state and society. But at the bottom line this balance should add-up to a collaborative and constructive relationship sustained throughout time.

## The international community must tread carefully with solid local knowledge

It is in this complex maze of long-term and localized processes specific to different countries and cultures and contexts that the international community arrives with its own needs, expectations and resources.

Yet international efforts in this maze should be guided by a capacity to understand the political landscape – positive and negative agency for reconciliation; incentives and motivations; obstacles and assets – that only local actors possess. Such a fine-grained understanding of the context will help the international actors assess when their own efforts can be most useful as their role is to support the development of truly nationally / locally-led reconciliation processes.

Their added value can be in fostering synergies between the multiple initiatives operating at the different levels and realms of society, as well as in making sure key stakeholders that are often overlooked, such as women, youth, victims and human rights defenders, are included and protected. The question therefore is how the international community can foster the required local leadership for the design, development and implementation of reconciliation strategies, and how it can strengthen its own capacity to navigate the complexity of multiple and shifting needs and meanings of reconciliation co-existing in any given context.

Using this knowledge to develop a contextually relevant definition of the different reconciliation needs will enhance its capacity to assess the degree to which the initiatives it supports are effectively contributing to the development of horizontal and vertical trust in society, and enable intelligent use of the political, technical and financial resources it can bring.

## Past experiences show clear mistakes to avoid; from short-termism to a lack of sensitivity

In this sense, international actors should become aware that their support can have unintended negative effects. Real-life examples of negative impact include: making reconciliation processes excessively dependent on the availability of external funding or methodologies; pushing for short-term impact; launching reconciliation processes without the capacity to 'stay the course' and sustain their long-term development; flooding financial resources into a country beyond its absorptive capacity; and using resources to impose the doctrinaire or political agenda of a given international actor.

Significantly, this insensitivity on behalf of the international community – or 'external fetishization of reconciliation' – is characterised by the development of templates for reconciliation by international actors that are dropped down on societies in either a standardized fashion or – worse still – ignorant of the local capacities and potential innovative resources for reconciliation that already exist.

Only a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of their own role, and of the specific needs and possibilities of reconciliation in every context, will enable international actors to effectively support national actors in their effort to re-establish relationships of trust in society. In its absence, international actors can find themselves marginalized into ineffectiveness and paralysis, bystanders to an on-going tragedy, as in the current situation of Myanmar.





# Guidance for Peace Practitioners

---

*“Every post-violence situation has some unique characteristics. There is not a single recipe for success. The key is to ensure that those who develop reconciliation processes know the critical questions they should ask themselves.”*

Kofi Annan

Reconciliation is a complex challenge that societies continue to face decades after political violence has ceased and peace agreements have been reached.

Reconciliation is a long-term, changing and multi-layered societal process that transcends in time, format, actors and structures the formats and frameworks international actors and practitioners have at their disposal to assist countries emerging from violent conflict and polarization. Political cycles and priorities, organizational ‘modus operandi’, changing national and international priorities and policies and emerging new crises and points of attention curtail the possibility of sustained, committed and flexible engagement necessary to accompany these processes.

And yet, providing assistance to countries emerging from violent conflict on the challenges of, and opportunities for, reconciliation is a moral imperative that cannot be ignored. There is hardly a better strategy to prevent the relapse of violence in societies emerging from conflict than fostering the relationships of trust among groups and individuals and between these and their political authorities that is the essence of reconciliation work.

The question is how to effectively ‘package’ this assistance so that, within the limits of existing operational and financial frameworks, strategies can be developed that respond to the complex and long-term nature of the challenge.

International and national practitioners of reconciliation need to recognize that their fixed-term interventions need to help create and support long-term societal processes whose needs, goals, actors and dynamics will change over time. In this sense, the challenge is one of effectively leveraging the concrete but limited resources that reconciliation initiatives have at given moments of the socio-political process, to anchor wide-ranging societal process of change transcending them.

A list of concrete ‘dos and don’ts’ would not do justice to the accumulated experience of international and national actors around the world. We therefore believe the best recommendation for practitioners is to ask, every time, the questions that will enable them, and the stakeholders they are assisting, to reflect on how best to address the complex nature of reconciliation. These questions will allow them to understand the challenges and opportunities that are specific to every situation, feeding this insight into an operational strategy that makes the best possible use of existing resources.

The **key questions that national and international stakeholders should ask themselves when designing or implementing a reconciliation process** include:



## What are we trying to achieve with reconciliation in this particular context?

Reconciliation is a transformative process. It is about re-defining the relationships of trust between people, and between people and political institutions in a deeply transformative way. It is not just about enabling negative coexistence – which could be defined as the capacity to sustain relationships of mistrust without violence – but about sustaining interactions among people, and between people and institutions, based on relationships of trust.

However, what reconciliation means and the strategies for achieving it in any given context, and over time, may differ significantly. What matters is to keep in mind a clarity of purpose from each group engaged in the reconciliation process, as they are likely to have different expectations, and to revisit the vision for reconciliation throughout the process as expectations and needs evolve.

The following questions may help define the reconciliation agenda around which relationships of trust and confidence can be built and refined:

- Does the agenda for reconciliation respond to the different and evolving needs and expectations of trust in the different groups in society?
- Does the agenda balance the contrasting reconciliation needs of past and future, state and society, victims and society?
- Does the design process allow participatory and consensual definition of priorities?

## When and for how long should support be offered?

Reconciliation is not a post-conflict add-on. It needs to be understood as a transformative process with a retrospective ambition – aimed at addressing the legacy of past violence – and a forward-looking objective – to rebuild societal relationships for the future. Focusing only on rebuilding damaged relationships may indeed hinder the preventative objective of reconciliation if those relationships generated conflict in the first place. In such a case, the objective must not be on repairing those relationships but on continually improving them both horizontally and vertically.

Actors engaged in reconciliation need to keep in mind that the needs and opportunities for reconciliation together with transformed relationships of trust are diverse and evolving and take place at different levels of social and political life.

As the objectives and nature of reconciliation evolve and change over time depending on the features of conflict and where the country is in the peacebuilding process, intervention strategies must be revisited on a regular basis in order to acknowledge and react to these changing needs and its varying sets of actors, institutions and social settings.

The sustainability of reconciliation is another key challenge. Further down the line after the peace accord, the momentum for reconciliation often fizzles out and those who were pushing the reconciliation agenda may no longer be in a position of power and influence.

In that regard, building constituencies for reconciliation from the outset will help ensure that interventions launched at a post-conflict moment have the capacity to ‘follow-through’.

In order to address the temporal dimensions of reconciliation and its changing needs, peace practitioners need to ask the following questions:

- Will interventions launched after a conflict ends have the capacity to ‘follow-through’ and remain relevant in a changing context?
- Do the interventions acknowledge and respond to the evolving needs of varying sets of actors, institutions and social settings?

## Where should reconciliation efforts be implemented – at what levels of society and in which geographic locations?

Reconciliation takes place at multiple levels in society, across the state-society divide, and in different geographic locations. Therefore, reconciliation processes need to be structured to enable entry points at different levels and locations so that they can help bridge multiple sets of issues and constituencies.

Reconciliation may use different strategies – by focusing on intergroup relationships (horizontal reconciliation); or on state-society relationships (vertical reconciliation); or by taking a top-down, bottom-up or middle-out approach – what matters is to pay attention to the bigger picture and make sure they mutually reinforce each other. Recognizing and fostering the multiplicity of initiatives for reconciliation can empower local actors to engage in efforts that respond to their specific needs through culturally relevant definitions and approaches.

Indeed, reconciliation requires efforts involving all ‘levels’ of society in processes that connect, integrate and bind them into a complex web of relationships of trust.

In order to address **the ‘structural’ complexity of reconciliation**, key questions to be asked include:

- Do the interventions recognize the systemic complexity of the challenge and are they positioned for catalytic effect?
- Do the reconciliation initiatives understand the socio-political environment in which they are operating, and can they adapt to such reality?
- Do processes effectively harness capacities for reconciliation that lie across the state-society divide, support coherence in social and institutional change, and neutralize negative agency in state and in society?
- Does the design process foster synergies and collaboration between the multiple reconciliation efforts that exist at any given time?

## Who should be involved?

Reconciliation efforts need to foster and harness the agency necessary to drive social processes that can transform institutions and norms. Key challenges to reconciliation lie in the sustainability of the effort and leadership for reconciliation. Too often, the reconciliation initiative is driven by those in power.

But strong leadership and coalitions need to be developed beyond the state and armed groups, in order to drive and sustain the reconciliation agenda across the unavoidable social and political changes in society.

The reconciliation needs and interests of actors driving violent conflict, including state and non-state armed groups, are often over-prioritized. But the state can be both a spoiler and an enabler. Safeguarding the reconciliation process from the political elite's intent to control and politicize it is therefore critical. In that regard, the political economy of the conflict and of the reconciliation process need to be well understood. And as war profiteers and negative incentives may become an obstacle, the inclusion of all relevant actors in defining the agenda during a reconciliation or peace process will help strengthen the durability and effectiveness of the process.

More specifically, empowering different groups, such as ex combatants, victims' groups, women, former prisoners, etc. to take the lead in the reconciliation effort is a powerful strategy to create '**coalitions for reconciliation**' that can sustain visions and strategies throughout the socio-political changes characteristic of societies emerging from violence.

If these diverse constituencies can coalesce around their common interest in fostering reconciliation, they can help anchor a shared vision for reconciliation across political and societal divides.

Practitioners should never promote a reconciliation effort that, intentionally or not, generates the exclusion of a constituency. Different groups, such as victims, women and youth are often neglected, and their needs overshadowed by the interests of the state and the armed groups. Giving them a voice and a sense of recognition is fundamental to engage them in reconciliation. Young people can become vehicles for positive change in so far as their energy can be harnessed to constructively challenge the entrenched beliefs and positions of their seniors and demand the transformation of their society. Women's participation can facilitate the development of public debate around the transformation of negative gender dynamics that are often associated with – and in some cases underpin – polarizing and conflictual socio-political dynamics. But it should not be assumed that victims, women or youth share a positive vision and platform for reconciliation. Their precise potential as social constituencies are that they exist as common identities across other social divides and therefore provide a strategic entry point to bridge them.

In order to **foster the capacities to 'act for reconciliation' that exist in the different social and institutional spaces of society**, key questions can guide those involved in reconciliation efforts:

- How can we build strong 'coalitions' for reconciliation by enabling collaboration and convergence among the different groups of beneficiaries at different levels and locations?
- How can we foster the influence of women and youth as strong champions for change and reconciliation in society?
- How can we ensure reconciliation efforts do not entrench the kind of gender discrimination that are strong predictors of new conflict and patterns of violence?
- How can we ensure that victims are at the heart of reconciliation processes in a way that enables them to be harbingers of healing and trust to society as a whole?

## How to advance reconciliation – with which approaches, tools and methodologies?

Reconciliation is a matter of balance and complementarity, identifying and acknowledging the different needs for 'trust' – interpersonal, intercommunal, societal, political – that exist in a society at any given moment, and 'weaving' them into operational strategies that recognize all are necessary to underpin transformed, collaborative and trustful relationships. It is not only about dealing with grievances (accountability) but also with structural issues (political, social and economic inequalities). In dealing with the wounds of the past, psycho-social healing tends to be overlooked. However, sustained societal support to those that directly suffered the effect of violence is critical for the social body to effectively overcome a divisive past and re-establish foundations of trust.

When addressing structural causes of conflict, institution-building and reform can significantly contribute to reconciliation. State and societal institutions, such as schools, the media and religious communities, can become platforms for transforming relationships and fostering inclusion in society. Only through state involvement can the social foundations of trust be enshrined into the legal and institutional frameworks that regulate and norm social life. At the same time, only strong social will can prevent reconciliation from being 'sequestered', instrumentalized or discarded by state actors.

In this endeavor, the international community can play a crucial role in creating the opportunities and favorable conditions under which the process of reconciliation can be initiated and in sustaining adequate resources and capacity. However, reconciliation cannot be imposed from outside, but must be driven from within. Therefore, international actors should seek to understand the local capacities and potential resources for reconciliation that already exist in society, rather than replicating standard approaches to reconciliation. Their added value is in fostering synergies between the multiple initiatives operating at the different levels and realms of society, as well as in making sure key stakeholders that are often overlooked, such as women, youth, victims and human rights defenders, are included and protected.

Key questions related to the formulation of strategies that can address the reconciliation needs of the past while fostering positive coexistence include:

- Do interventions constructively and effectively bridge the reconciliation needs of the past with those that lie in the future – thus addressing both the relationships of trust damaged by abuses and violence inflicted on specific individuals and groups and the relationships of trust that underpin peaceful social co-existence among wider social groups and categories?
- How can security sector reforms or judicial reforms be used as opportunities for relational reconstruction?
- Do the media or education sectors contribute to transforming relationships and fostering inclusion in societies moving forward?
- Is international support delivered in a manner that strengthens and empowers local capacities and leadership in the different sectors and levels of society, and across the state-society divide?
- How can we align international resources in a way that can effectively sustain long-term social processes and not just short-term, one-off technical interventions?



# Four Stories of Hard-Won Change

---

The following summaries provide a a brief overview of the four case studies on reconciliation in Guatemala, Northern Ireland, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa. The extensive research and findings can be found at: [https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2018/11/25a06115-181102\\_kaf\\_reconciliation\\_report\\_web\\_v1.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2018/11/25a06115-181102_kaf_reconciliation_report_web_v1.pdf)

## Case Study Summary: Guatemala

Original lead author, **Dr. Bernardo Arévalo de León**, Senior Peacebuilding Adviser at Interpeace.

### Introduction

Following more than thirty years of armed conflict, the need for reconciliation in Guatemala has been recognized by the state and society as a crucial element of the peace process. However, despite progress at the local and indigenous level, the weakness of the central state and the resulting rise of criminal violence and a lack of socio-economic progress have stalled the path of reconciliation in the country.

### Summary of Historical Background and Reconciliation Process

Guatemala's history of violence can be traced back to its colonial roots. The end of Spanish Imperial rule saw the old colonial elite transform themselves as the political leaders of a new republican state, continuing a pattern of violent coercion of other subordinate social groups, institutionalizing violence into Guatemalan politics. A system of forced labor and the exclusion of indigenous peoples from the political arena came to a brief end in 1944, when a civil-military movement removed the ruling junta of Jorge Ubico. After ten years, the democratic government was brought to an abrupt end by a military intervention in 1954, planned and financed by the United States and spurred by Cold War fears of communism. The state constructed a democratic façade, sparking the beginning of a 36-year civil war in 1960, between left-wing guerrilla groups and the autocratic military government. Indigenous groups were particularly affected by the civil war as traditional social structures were destroyed in the course of heavy fighting in their territories.







In time, the government and regional actors began to understand the need for a political solution to the civil war, leading to a number of peace processes, culminating in the 1996 Peace Accords. As part of the peace negotiations, all actors recognized that socio-political pillars such as public trust at the state and interpersonal level and the ability for peaceful collaboration and coexistence between different social groups had been destroyed and needed reconciliation. Reconciliation was explicitly mandated by the articles of these accords and through the establishment of the Commission for Historical Clarification, whose work resulted in policy recommendations, including a reparations program and prosecution of perpetrators of violence. While the Accords put an end to state-led violence, the failure to create an effective representative democracy and a well-functioning central state has impeded much of the progress of reconciliation. Corruption, lack of socio-economic development, and weak institutions have led to the persistence of a profound disconnect between state and society. Guatemala has become one of the most violent countries in the world as violence has shifted from an open conflict to broader forms of violence which manifests in exorbitant levels of gang violence and narcotrafficking.

These state-level failures, coupled with a continuing culture of impunity for the perpetrators of violence and an inability to address the history of conflict, have prevented a coherent, sustained national process of reconciliation. Meanwhile, at the local level and among indigenous communities, who were the most affected by violence, there has been a clear need to 'restore' the fabric of community life and basic elements of inter-personal and collective trust that were destroyed during the war. Indigenous communities have been active and successful in mobilizing their cultural, social and political resources to rebuild the social fabric even as their economic and political rights are severely neglected by the central state. But at the national level, there was no trust or social fabric to rebuild as the state has historically functioned through coercion and violence. In this context, reconciliation is about the establishment of institutions, frameworks and relationships that are necessary for a functional democratic community – one that reflects and express the voluntary allegiance of people to political authority.

## Lessons learned

- **The lack of conceptual clarity and operational guidance of reconciliation leads to contradicting interpretations.** The meaning and understanding of reconciliation in Guatemala have become subject to various, often contradictory, interpretations by different social actors within a fluid political arena; this has the potential to endanger the success of this process.
- The country is a prime example of the **linkages between reconciliation and social contract**. What does reconciliation mean in a country where there has never been a social contract between the state and the people? And how can reconciliation be sustainable when frameworks and structures for the peaceful resolution of conflicts are lacking? In this context, reconciliation is not about the rebuilding of relationships damaged by conflict but about the development of trust at the interpersonal and collective level; trust in political authority based on its legitimate exercise; and a framework of shared political goals and aspirations that accept and reflect the plurality of society.
- **Prevailing impunity from moral and legal accountability fails to dismantle remaining structures of oppression.** Despite the overwhelming evidence of crimes discovered by the Commissions for Historical Clarification (CHC), government authorities have taken a passive attitude towards the prosecution of perpetrators for crimes against humanity. Coupled with the persistence of other structural obstacles to effective justice, such as corruption and chronic incapacity in justice system, functional structures to effectively address social demand for justice have been difficult to establish. This reinforces a disconnect between the government, the judicial system and a polarized public. However, since 2015, the number of human rights cases under prosecution has increased, with several commanding officers at the time of the conflict, sent to prison.
- **Legal recognition of indigenous people has failed to improve their living conditions, while women remain poorly served by peace.** While dialogue with groups particularly affected by political violence, such as indigenous groups and women, were held and frameworks for positive change were created, implementation has not been effective. 25% of the total of victims of the conflict were female, 88.7% of them indigenous women and girls. During the peace negotiations, women activists in the different corners of society coalesced around a shared political agenda of common interest.

- The peace process acted as a 'precipitator' for the agency of women in society. However, women activists were able to take advantage of the political effervescence of the peace process to promote their rights only to the point in which they started to question the solid foundations of patriarchal culture. The Peace Accords included an ambitious array of 34 legal and institutional reforms addressing historical discrimination and marginalization of women. And yet, Guatemala is the country with the highest gender inequality rate on education, health, economy and political empowerment of Latin America.
- **Indigenous communities have developed their own strategies for peaceful co-existence.** Despite lacking a comprehensive and coherent national strategy for reconciliation, local indigenous communities have used their traditional value framework and transitional justice mechanisms to restore the social fabric and relationships of trust and collaboration. Building on a strong sense of collective identity and through effective use of cultural, social and political resources, they have succeeded in rebuilding a close-knit community life.
- **Societal leadership is the sine-qua-non-condition for effective transformation.** Even when civil society actors possess the will and agency to create change as stipulated within the text of the Peace Accords, the lack of a well-functioning state makes it unable to mediate the multiple and sometimes contradictory efforts of different civil society groups.





## Case Study Summary: Northern Ireland

Professor **Brandon Hamber** is the John Hume and Thomas P. O'Neill Chair in Peace at Ulster University based at the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE). He is also a member of the Transitional Justice Institute at the university, and a Visiting Professor of the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. Ms **Gráinne Kelly** is a Lecturer and Course Director of the MSc in Applied Peace and Conflict Studies at Ulster University, based at INCORE.

### Introduction

Reconciliation efforts in Northern Ireland have been extensive following the end of 'The Troubles,' a period of violent conflict that began in the late 1960s. While a multitude of initiatives, reforms, and agreements acknowledging the need for reconciliation have been implemented since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, these attempts have proven unsuccessful at effectively unifying a deeply divided country.



### Historical background

In Northern Ireland armed conflict emerged in the late 1960s between two distinct and segregated groups: the indigenous Catholic population and the settled Protestant population. A growing civil rights movement by the Catholic population demanded an end to the economic and political marginalization by the dominant Unionists. At the heart of this conflict was the larger territorial and constitutional debate whether Northern Ireland's would remain part of the United Kingdom or unite with the Republic of Ireland. These tensions led to the outbreak of violence and the creation of paramilitaries on both sides, eventually claiming the lives of 3,600 individuals. The introduction of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 terminated thirty years of violence and allowed for the onset of reconciliation processes. Ending direct rule from London saw the creation of the Northern Ireland Assembly, which is explicitly committed to reconciliation and rapprochement.

Additionally, various agreements, including The St. Andrews Agreement, The Hillsborough Agreement, The Stormont House Agreement, and A Fresh Start: the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan, have attempted to facilitate and address past grievances and close the rifts still present in Northern Irish society.

The European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland injected large sums of money to grassroots peace-building efforts in order to foster economic renewal, social integration and regeneration, and cross-border cooperation. The EU also implemented the PEACE III and PEACE IV initiatives, which concentrated on building positive relations between community members, acknowledgment of the past, the creation of shared public spaces, and the development of capacities for a shared society. Despite these efforts, the divide between Protestants and Catholics has not been effectively bridged in many aspects of daily life. "Culture wars" continue with almost daily reports of contestation, marching disputes, and the demarcation of territory.

A critical obstacle of reconciliation in Northern Ireland has been the lack of vertical connection between grassroots activities and high-level political agreements. Community reconciliation projects take place without wider public awareness and the national reconciliation relies on a mechanistic, piecemealed approach involving separate and special structures. Moreover, the dealing with the past debate has proven unable to establish co-operative behavior between social groups due to an overly narrow focus on direct harms from the conflict and the ignorance of the connection to contemporary question such as migration or Brexit.

## Lessons learned

- **Policy-makers have not been effective in bridging social divisions among the two sides.** This is **evidenced** by the presence of 109 Peace walls, brick walls segregating communities. While the creation of integrated schools has been implemented, 93% of pupils in Northern Ireland still attend separated schools.
- **Initiatives that were implemented have not been effective in linking acknowledgement of the past with reconciliation.**
- **Marginalization of women continues to be an element of reconciliation and peace processes.** A gendered analysis of Northern Ireland's conflicts indicated a refusal to acknowledge the significance of women to the reconciliation process which has created numerous obstacles to effective peacebuilding and demonstrated an inability by policy makers to understand Northern Ireland's difficult past.
- **Community and voluntary-based involvement have grown into the most significant part of the reconciliation landscape.** Programs such as the Peace Impact Program (PIP) are supporting attempts to challenge existing power dynamics that enforce social divisions. Projects such as Prison to Peace (P2P) which allows young people to engage directly with political prisoners are proving to have a positive effect on participants' attitudes and knowledge.
- **The inability of policy makers to align reconciliation policies with the needs of local communities has hindered successful reconciliation.**

The incapacity of public institutions to purposefully address entrenched ethno-nationalist dynamics prevent the dissolution of historical barriers of inter-communal mistrust and hinder the fostering of a more cohesive redefinition of society.

# Case Study Summary: Democratic Republic of the Congo

Original lead author, **Claude Iguma Wakenge**, Researcher at the Réseaux d'Innovation Organisationnelle (RIO), Bukavu, DRC

## Introduction

Unlike the other cases which examined post-conflict reconciliation processes, the DRC case study focuses on **reconciliation efforts in a conflict setting**. This study focuses on the need for reconciliation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) due to the conflict around seasonal migration by cattle breeders in the Fizi and Uvira territories. Disputes between various breeder and agricultural groups, the Banyamulenge, Barundi, Babembe, Bafuliiru, and Bavira, over access to pastoral and agricultural land has escalated into a violent conflict of identity and power. This violent escalation has disrupted the social cohesion between communities, led to formation of ethnic militias, caused a loss of life and property, damaged relations between local groups and the central state, and drawn in regional actors. While national public institutions have failed to promote reconciliation through effective structures, local initiatives have been able to encourage rebuilding the social fabric.

## Historical background

Since the early 1990s, the Democratic Republic of Congo has been the theatre of many conflicts which have particularly affected the eastern part of the country. The First and Second Congo Wars were complex, devastating armed conflicts that claimed millions of lives and involved numerous internal and external actors. While a series of accords starting in 1999 succeeded in putting an official end to the war in 2002, rebel movements and conflict persist throughout the country but is especially acute in the eastern provinces. Peacebuilding and reconciliation at the national level has taken the form of various peace conferences and even a Truth and Reconciliation Commission but have generally been unsuccessful. This study focuses instead on the growing conflict resulting from seasonal migration patterns of cattle breeders in East Kivu, in the Fizi and Uvira territories.



Escalating disputes over access to land for agriculture and livestock and the economic management of cattle migration has spiraled into violence. This has both horizontal and vertical dimensions; social cohesion between different communities has been undermined, while tensions related to land disputes have become integrated into the identity of communities. This identity dimension has also taken on an ethnic dimension which only encourages cattle migration as a source of inter-community conflict. At the vertical level, the conflicts related to seasonal migration have weakened the authority of the state, leading to a disconnect with citizens and a lack of confidence in the government. The weak state authority forms part of the justification for the formation of militias, which take on the ethnic character of the community they represent and claim to compensate for the failure of the State. State services (including the Local agriculture, fishing and livestock inspectorate (ITAPEL), have generally failed in their management of pastures and the control of livestock movements. A cycle of mismanagement has emerged as newly formed armed groups block government access and further weaken the relationship between the public and state.

In order to overcome these challenges reconciliation efforts have been supported by peacebuilding practices such as, participatory action research, awareness-raising, the popularization of laws, lobbying and advocacy, mediation, and permanent dialogue. Such efforts are supported by local communities and social structures but also the central government and the international community, including the UN Peacekeeping Mission and various NGOs. Two major elements of this work are the Actions for Peace and Endogenous Development (ADEPAE) and the Network of Organizational Innovation (RIO).

At the local level, a Framework of Intercommunity Dialogue (CCI) and Committees of the Negotiators have facilitated the permanent instalment of mediation structures to improve relationships between communities. Locals have relied on these mechanisms to mediate conflict, which have been effective in decreasing violence. Written agreements between the committees of breeders and farmers under RIO and ADEPAE structures have also been instrumental in reducing tensions. At the state level, the ITAPEL has taken steps to increase its involvement in land management practices to restore its authority with the public. Despite these local successes, obstacles to lasting peace such as a lack of shared understanding of reconciliation, lack of ownership by the government over the locally-developed solutions, and economic weakness put into question the sustainability of these efforts. For the DRC as a whole, the weak state structure, dysfunction of the judiciary, the absence or inefficiency of public services, and the failure of the state in several sectors, are all challenges that undermine the success of reconciliation.

## Lessons learned

- **Reconciliation can build local resilience to conflict.** To manage the socio-political fragility caused by the conflict around seasonal migration practices, local communities in the eastern DRC were able to pursue a range of reconciliation activities. This demonstrates how, **in the quasi-absence of the state, local communities develop their own mechanisms for dispute resolution** and reach an agreement. These local efforts have been effective in improving relations between communities, securing greater access to land, led to growing awareness of the state's responsibilities, and an increased role of women in peace-making efforts and political processes. However, the research shows how essential public authorities' commitment to peace is: without the state commitment to monitoring the implementation of the agreements signed between cattle breeders and farmers, community reconciliation efforts cannot be sustainable.



- **Reconciliation processes should foster both horizontal and vertical reconciliation.** In the DRC, there is a general lack of support for reconciliation initiatives created at the national level. Reconciliation has been limited to the local level mostly, without much involvement from the state. Efforts by civil society actors to foster peacebuilding have been hindered by the inability of the state to ensure basic security in the provinces. The inefficiency of state services to manage pastures and control livestock movements have undermined the vertical relationships between the population and state institutions.
- **The lack of a shared understanding of reconciliation leads to different expectations and assessments of the reconciliation process.** For some communities, reconciliation is understood as a compensation, while for others, it means prosecuting perpetrators. Different conceptual understandings lead to differing expectations and assessments regarding the success or failure of the process.
- **The lack of ownership/leadership of reconciliation efforts prevents local structures from managing themselves and forces local actors to rely on external funding, which has triggered conflicts between facilitators.** Breeders continue to rely on armed groups for their protection and farmers on other groups to defend their claims. The economic dependence of community-based mediation structures such as ADEPAE and RIO, are not financially sustainable; they lack both financial resources and state mechanisms to monitor and support their work. NGOs involved in the inter-community peace process should prioritize advocacy with public authorities to further curb the governance crisis and to ensure that public authorities fully commit to sustainable peace.
- **Inter-community dialogue is critical for social cohesion and the neutrality of organizations conducting reconciliation must be maintained.** Dialogue facilitates improved social cohesion between members of different ethnic communities formerly engaged in violent conflict. The road towards reconciliation requires a process of transitional justice through investigations, court hearings, and fair material and moral compensation.



# Case Study Summary: South Africa

Original lead author, **Piers Pigou**, Senior Consultant for Southern Africa at the International Crisis Group

## Introduction

In South Africa, the transition from decades of violence and oppression under the racist political order of apartheid toward democracy explicitly identified the need for reconciliation. Despite the success of the democratic transition, led by Nelson Mandela, reconciliation remains an ill-defined concept. Meanwhile, the state has been unable to transform an unequal socio-economic order underwritten by entrenched structural exclusion. The post-Mandela liberal constitution is fraying due to challenges from inadequate economic development.



## Historical background

With the end of apartheid in 1994 South Africa's new government and constitution recognized the need for reconciliation in a deeply divided society. This was reflected in the provisions of the negotiated settlement which stipulated various reform measures including a comprehensive Bill of Rights. The new government also established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to document and interrogate the most serious violations associated with the conflict of the apartheid era. Despite these measures, modern South African society is highly unequal, and reconciliation has not laid deep roots. A central obstacle has been the lack of clarity about the definition of reconciliation, and that a focus on racial fault lines has obscured socio-economic structural exclusion. The state's inability to tackle inequality and endemic poverty remain the primary barriers to a stable future and have exposed the limitations of the reconciliation project in the 'Rainbow Nation'.

Frustrated by the limited progress, many Black South Africans lack a strong commitment to the reconciliation agenda, while whites did not embrace an economic transformation which would challenge the structural privileges they enjoy.

The persistence of apartheid era-racial enclaves, manifestations of racism, and the limited impact of remedial options such as the South African Human Rights Commission and Equality Courts, underscore the importance of connecting disparate communities.

Finally, although Mandela's government focused on improving the quality of life, it was unable to shift the fundamental patterns of wealth creation and distribution. Reconciliation efforts did not generate the social bonds, trust, and confidence in the state authorities necessary for resilient societies. If the Truth and Reconciliation Commission focused on gross violations of human rights, it largely failed to interrogate the structural fault lines that underwrote these violations, in particular racial discrimination and patriarchy. Furthermore, the secrecy and privacy of the process leading up to the peace agreement inhibited a subsequent discussion within the society about the structural exclusion in the post-violence period. Macro-level discourse about the 'Rainbow nation' has not translated into action at the local level. The high levels of violence and economic inequality have generated frustrations, which intersect with growing dissatisfaction with ANC's performance and a stalled reconciliation agenda.

## Lessons learned

- **Negotiation and constitution-making processes do not automatically build trust and bridge divisions within society.** In order to build positive relationships and functioning institutions, the constitution-making process needed to bridge divisions between political parties and reframe a new future based on common interests. However, the Constitution failed to commit the country to a defined reconciliation agenda. Instead the agreement neatly sidestepped the structural legacies of inequality, patriarchy and poverty.
- **The lack of a common understanding of the concept of reconciliation can endanger the entire process.** There tends to be a lack of a common understanding of reconciliation beyond the concept of the "Rainbow Nation" with varied interpretations on how it should establish peace and transformative justice. Beyond the general vision of peaceful co-existence and a better life for all, there seems to be no shared vision of a future South Africa and how this would be achieved.
- **The focus of reconciliation processes on racial discrimination failed to enable social, economic and political change.** The state has been unable to tackle the legacy of discrimination and patterns of exclusion, which has allowed the socioeconomic gaps to persist and ushered in violence heightened by political competition.
- **The disconnect between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and contemporary political and economic dynamics and discourses hindered its success.** The TRC was integral in documenting and interrogating the serious human rights violations during the apartheid era, however, it failed to lay out the structural fault lines that underwrote the violations in reference to racial discrimination and patriarchy. A final report was produced but not widely disseminated, limiting the impact of its recommendations. Whilst the TRC has become part of the national school's curriculum, the quality of available materials engaging the subject matter is generally poor.
- **Amnesty provisions and the failure to address past abuses complicate contemporary rule of law and notions of justice and accountability.** It endangers the promotion of a convergent view on how to deal with allegations of certain violations, especially corruption, committed by current political leaders.
- **There is a strong need for a long-term vision, proactive engagement, a national plan of action, and an overall inclusive approach.** Besides a handful of civil society organizations, there have been no programmatic endeavors to proactively address reconciliation within and between communities. Inclusive and proactive engagement with all members of society will enable a greater understanding of differences and a more bespoke response to it.



