



# **PERSPECTIVES ON RESILIENCE IN GUATEMALA**



Honduras  
Photo: Armando García/Interpeace



We understand that peace is not the simple absence of violence, but the prevalence of a framework of social and political relationships that are free from coercion or violence thus allowing groups and individuals in society to pursue their needs and aspirations without fear, with justice and in security.

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# Resilience and Peacebuilding

**By Ana Glenda Tager**

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Twenty years of experience in peace building on the five continents has taught us that in order to transform conflicts we need to not only identify their causes and triggers, but also strengthen existing capacities in society to confront them.

For this reason, Interpeace joined an initiative of different development agencies worldwide that seeks to inquire how, from a resilience perspective, peace might be built.

Under the Frameworks for Assessing Resilience programme, Interpeace seeks to analyze the contribution that a resilience perspective has on peacebuilding, on the basis of principles and values which are fundamental for our organization: a wide-ranging participation of actors involved in the problem, listening to their voices and ensuring they become owners of the processes as a foundation of legitimacy and sustainability requisite for the consolidation of peace.

The project in Guatemala contributes to the global debate on resilience and peacebuilding on the basis of the experience of a society that, 20 years after the signing of peace, is still characterized by a weak State and the persistence of conflictive and violent dynamics that have adapted and continue to redefine themselves over the years. This provides a different perspective from the other two countries (Liberia and Timor-Leste), in which the same process is underway in contexts closer in time to recently concluded conflict situations.

In the specific case of Guatemala, the objective of this process is to provide national actors with a conceptual and action framework that, on the basis of a participatory identification of the ways in which resilience is expressed in our society, will allow us to identify existing capacities in society to transform those conflicts in nonviolent ways and, as a result, strengthen them. This objective will be achieved by means of a wide participatory process under the guidelines of the participatory action research (PAR) methodology that Interpeace has adapted to its own needs, which is complemented by a national survey on resilience and peacebuilding conducted in partnership with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, HHI.

In three articles, this issue of the Journal of Peacebuilding of the Interpeace Regional Office for Latin America addresses the different levels at which the Resilience and Peacebuilding project has been implemented. In the first, the global nature of the project is described, which seeks to contribute to the international debate on resilience and its contribution to peace building. In the second, the coordinator of the Guatemala programme, Mariel Aguilar, reflects on the principal components of the programme in Guatemala, its achievements and challenges. In the third and final article, a number of conversations with four members of the National Group of the Guatemala project discuss the contribution of the resilience perspective for the transformation of the principal problems that face the country's population. The four conversations reflect the richness and diversity of a group made up of individuals from different walks of life who discovered, in the Resilience and Peacebuilding programme, a space to meet and the possibility of shortening the distances that separate them.



A low-angle, close-up photograph of a group of people holding hands in a circle. The focus is on a person's arm in the foreground, wearing a colorful braided bracelet made of yellow, purple, and blue threads. The background shows other people, including a man wearing sunglasses, and a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall mood is one of unity and community.

# **Piloting a resilience approach to peacebuilding:**

**Insights from Interpeace's  
Framework for Assessing Resilience (FAR) project**

Resilience has become a much-used word for those working in international development. It is used variably, and with little precision, but is generally understood to refer to the capacity to withstand and recover from shocks and crises. Specialists attach particular meaning to and emphasize different aspects of resilience depending on their field of work and mandate. The notions of “bouncing back” and “withstanding” have been most strongly associated with resilience particularly as it relates to natural disasters and humanitarian crises – floods, tsunamis, earthquakes and Ebola epidemics – where crises are momentous rather than enduring and can be attributed to an identifiable external shock. Nonetheless, all the while recognizing the specificity of each crisis, it can be observed that the consequences of shocks are often more perverse in societies where there are also long-term stressors that make them fragile and also more susceptible to shocks in the first place. The peacebuilding field focuses increasingly on these stressors: addressing the long term structures and processes that create situations of fragility and make societies vulnerable to violent conflict is considered a necessary step in preventing violent conflict. Therefore, a resilience framework must also include interventions aimed at detecting these stressors and creating the conditions for the changes needed to avert the crisis in the first place. In this conceptualization, resilience is not just about bouncing back and withstanding, but is also about transformation. This “transformative” dimension resonates particularly well with peacebuilders, who have argued that positive peace is not defined simply as the absence of violence, but rather constitutes an ongoing process of constructive social

change aimed at displacing exclusionary, unjust and inequitable structures and systems to foster inclusive and participatory institutions and promote equitable economic models.<sup>1</sup>

There is undoubtedly a risk in “fashioning” resilience to suit the needs and perspectives of different disciplines, but it is also in some regard a testimony to the malleability and usefulness of the concept. The “building blocks” of peacebuilding are no mystery: there is sufficient documented best practice to inform a generic list of necessary conditions for peace: good governance, inclusive economic models, access to justice, legitimate institutions, trust, social and political cohesion. But in any given context, the priorities and interpretation of these factors as well as the pathways to their realization will vary. Many peacebuilding processes are oriented towards state building strategies, often trying to replicate imported models of state institutions; this is operationalized in the form of a string of capacity building workshops and technical support to governments. Recognizing that this can sometimes be effective, it is also important to appreciate the fact that those who are there after a conflict, who have returned or had never left, must have tapped into extraordinary courage and resourcefulness. An assessment of resilience draws attention to capacities and strengths in society, whether as individual personality traits, solidarity networks of communities or alternative livelihood strategies, and can therefore inform more context-specific and nationally owned peacebuilding processes.

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1. See for instance the work of Johan Galtung (1967) and Adam Curle (1974) who talk about the distinction between negative peace as the absence of war and positive peace.

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## **Frameworks for Assessing Resilience**

In 2014, Interpeace launched the Frameworks for Assessing Resilience (FAR) programme to explore the ways in which the concept of resilience can be used both conceptually and operationally in order to advance peacebuilding processes. Recognizing that the assessment of progress needs to be built in to peacebuilding programming, FAR puts a strong emphasis on the development of methods for assessing resilience, specifically as it relates to peacebuilding. In particular, FAR is designed such that the assessment approach is directly shaped by country-level participatory action research processes, which in turn inform and are complemented by quantitative surveys. It is a specific goal of the program to ensure that the criteria by which progress in peacebuilding is assessed, is based on the perspectives of people at the country level themselves, rather than merely imposed from the outside.

The three country cases chosen to pilot the development of a framework for assessing resilience – Timor-Leste, Liberia and Guatemala – are all fragile

contexts, but the specific manifestation of conflict and violence differs in important ways in each case. Timor-Leste is the second youngest nation in the world, grappling with the task of fostering social cohesion and national unity now that the Indonesian occupation has ended; Liberia is confronted with the ongoing task of social reconciliation and the rebuilding of state institutions in the wake of a not so distant protracted civil war; and Guatemala has somewhat moved on from the polarization and instability of the civil war which ended almost two decades ago but remains the site of extreme social inequality, pervasive corruption and very high rates of criminality. Whereas it is common to find country-level conflict analyses that look into obstacles to peace, this research is innovative in that it seeks to uncover the existing strengths, assets and capacities, as well as strategies, processes and structures that allow individuals, communities and indeed societies as a whole to overcome the legacy of past violent conflict, face up to current violence and threats to peace, as well as to potentially prevent future violent conflict. The central objective of developing and im-



plementing effective peacebuilding processes remains the same, but the approach is a new one.

The methodology applied to this project is ambitious in its efforts to be both action-oriented and analytical. It was important to operationalize resilience as an analytical concept capable of bringing forth internal understandings that can become the drivers of peacebuilding processes, in addition to conducting a research exercise aimed at developing frameworks for its assessment. Therefore, the project is designed so that country-level research is driven and implemented by local stakeholders who are engaged in deepening their understanding of existing resilience capacities in their societies and are invested in promoting peacebuilding processes based on this understanding in their respective countries. In Liberia and Timor-Leste, it was the [Platform for Dialogue and Peace \(P4DP\)](#) and the [Centre of Studies for Peace and Development \(CEPAD\)](#) respectively, Interpeace's local partners who led the research whereas in Guatemala, a team from Interpeace's regional Latin America Office implemented the project. In each of the countries, the research teams

conducted nationwide consultations through focus group discussions and interviews in order to define resilience in a context-specific way, and to map the different resilience strategies and resources that people use. The findings of this exploratory phase have been documented in country notes capturing peoples' understanding of their resilience in each case, and currently serve as a basis for multi-sector dialogue processes between key national stakeholders that continue to follow. These dialogue processes are now leading to concrete policy recommendations and action plans to strengthen peace and the resilience needed for peace in the country. Additionally, in Guatemala and Timor-Leste, a national survey based on randomized sampling will complement the findings from the consultation phase and provide quantitative data on resilience capacities, as well as informing and testing the development of indicators for the assessment of resilience, specifically as it relates to peacebuilding specifically.

The country-level consultations, surveys and stakeholder dialogue were complemented by a rigorous and expansive literature review of

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resilience theories and practices. This was conducted at the outset of the project and played an important role in informing the thinking and design of the process and country-level reflections.

After one year of research at the country level, a first Global Methodology Workshop was held in April 2015. This workshop brought researchers from the three pilot countries, as well as international scholar-practitioners and policy specialists working on peacebuilding and resilience, together around the same table. For researchers from the pilot countries, this exchange with scholars and colleagues from the other pilot

countries enriched and contributed to enhance their research, practice and conceptual frameworks. On the other hand, for the international scholar-practitioners present, hearing from the case studies gave them invaluable access and insight into context-specific realities that could better inform both policy and critical scholarship. The combination of a multi-country mixed method research with a practitioner-scholar dialogue, has contributed immensely to the coherence and relevance of the project, and to the reflections of how ‘resilience’ has been considered and interpreted to date, conceptually, practically and in policy circles. The case

studies, practitioner-scholar dialogue and literature and practice review conducted to date in the context of the FAR project are already generating important insights on how to conceive of resilience in the peacebuilding field. This article is divided into three sections. First, it reviews the value addition of introducing a resilience perspective in peacebuilding processes, which are inevitably political in nature. Second, it discusses the emerging findings from the case studies and their implication for the peacebuilding field. Finally it explores how resilience can serve as a basis for creating linkages between peacebuilding and other communities of practice.

## **The value addition of a resilience orientation to peacebuilding processes**

Processes of change can only be sustainable and truly peaceful when they emerge from inclusive dialogues engaging people from all sectors of society. However, people living in conflict-affected countries are often exposed to many peacebuilding activities, and may become fatigued by unending consultations which seem to have few demonstrable results for them. Traditionally, peacebuilding processes begin with a diagnostic of fragility, commonly referred to as “conflict assessment”, to map the drivers of conflict or obstacles to peace. For each problem identified, recommendations are provided to resolve or overcome the conflict drivers and obstacles. People often complain however that they rarely see the change happen, perhaps because they have no relationship to the diagnosis nor to the recommended solutions. Thus, there is a need for more effective means of engaging people through dialogue so that they are able to relate to, and take ownership of the peacebuilding processes. The experience of the FAR project has demonstrated that a resilience ori-

entation to peacebuilding could make an important contribution in this regard.

Peacebuilding that is oriented towards resilience emphasizes the strengths, assets and capacities that exist in society. Fragility is seen as the backdrop against which individuals, communities and institutions act in order to survive at the very least, and improve their conditions as best they can, but the spotlight is shone on the actions undertaken and resources deployed. More specific to peacebuilding, a resilience orientation signifies dialogue processes whose starting point is to ascertain the existing resources that people tap into and strategies available to them in order to cope with or even transform conditions that have previously caused or which may threaten peace and provoke new patterns of violence. The focus is no longer on change, as an abstract concept, but on the actors – individuals, communities, institutions – and the means they have to effect change so as to build peace.

At a more practical, and indeed programmatic level, reorienting the central question of a focus group discussion or interview

from one about fragility to one that asks about strengths, capacities or skills can in and of itself have a transformative impact on the persons engaged in a consultation process. The theory of appreciative inquiry suggests that “inquiry into the social potential of a social system should begin with appreciation, should be collaborative, should be provocative, and should be applicable” (Cooperider and Srivastava, 1987). Arguments put forward in favour of appreciative inquiry highlight that an appreciation of what works or could work promotes innovation and generates new ideas.

*“People experiencing positive affect are more resilient and able to cope with occasional adversity, have an increased preference for variety, and accept a broader array of behavioral options.” (Fredrickson, 2001; 2006)*

In Timor-Leste, participants in group discussions during the consultation phase of the research were very vocal in expressing their appreciation for the dialogue process, noting that it helped to raise their own awareness of the capacities they possess as individuals, as



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communities and as a nation. This process of self-discovery nurtures optimism, leading to new areas of collaboration. Helping people uncover their individual and collective resilience may serve as a catalyst for change and promote national ownership of peacebuilding processes. And indeed, it was encouraging to observe that in a country such as Timor-Leste, where people are saturated by consultations, a resilience orientation seems to have reinvigorated and inspired participation in dialogue processes.

Furthermore, “resilience” as opposed to “fragility” has a converging and convening power. Whereas different stakeholders may have different, and even diametrically opposed interpretations of a problem, they are more likely to agree on the need to address the problem, and may even have a shared appreciation of the existing assets in their society which could potentially form the basis of the solution. Thus, it may be easier to convene opposing parties to discuss the resilience of a country rather than its fractures. Dialogue processes become meaningful when they can bring together diverse stakeholders with different

interests. However, they are often unwilling to sit around the same table because of their different interpretations of the problem. The experience from all three pilot countries is that national actors have greater confidence in, and are more willing to take ownership of dialogue processes that are organized around resilience and focused on change. Government officials in particular are generally wary of such multi-stakeholder dialogue processes because they do not want to expose themselves to criticism from civil society and other groups. However, the FAR project, with its focus on resilience has successfully convened government officials and civil society, as well as private sector representatives (in the case of Guatemala) around the table and engaged them regularly for several months to develop recommendations for strengthening resilience to conflict based on the existing assets in the country. In the case of Guatemala, it is especially remarkable that private sector representatives and civil society actors, who have been at loggerheads on the socio-environmental consequences of large-scale mining and energy production projects, agreed to sit at the same table on a regular basis. It is

even more powerful to note that following the political upheavals that started in April 2015, and culminated in the resignation and indictment of the former president in October, both groups collaborated in facilitating a public forum to discuss how the transformative potential of the pacific protests could be leveraged for long term positive change. A resilience orientation to peacebuilding focusses on what works and the untapped strengths waiting to be utilized, rather than on what has failed or who is to blame. It sets the scene for a forward looking dialogue that can potentially transcend entrenched positions and give actors the confidence to act collectively in order to bring about peaceful change.

Early observations from the FAR project summarized above indicate that at the very least, resilience is a useful addition to the peacebuilding vocabulary and an effective orientation to consider for stakeholder dialogues, which constitute the cornerstone of successful political processes. In addition to its potential as a peacebuilding focus, resilience can also help us to generate important insights on peacebuilding. The following sec-

tion discusses some of these, arguing that a resilience orientation can shed light on the importance of integrating different levels of society and helps to distinguish between structures that promote violence and those that do not.

### **Resilience and Peacebuilding**

For peacebuilding, resilience is needed at all levels of society

In the context of peacebuilding, a definition of resilience is likely to be more nuanced than in the field of disaster recovery and may be more effectively understood as the spectrum of responses ranging from simply surviving all the way to the capacity of a society to transform itself. It is important to put a strong emphasis on the latter, more aspirational end of the spectrum because in order to overcome the legacy of past conflict and indeed prevent the (re)emergence of future violence, a society must have the capacity to transform the structures and processes that polarize populations, trigger confrontations and incentivize violence, so as to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. This is a multi-level process and depends

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on individuals, communities, as well as institutions. A country that is home to well-organized communities and collectivities, will be resilient to a certain extent, because in the face of adversity, as when there are natural calamities, solidarity networks can be activated so that people can help each other. However, if these well-organized community networks are not then also engaged in a relationship of trust with other communities and importantly with the state, the overall resilience to violent conflict in the country is likely to be compromised. In fact, a disarticulation between communities and the state apparatus can in itself be a source of conflict.

The FAR project has given many examples that help to illustrate this point. In Timor-Leste, people consulted both during in-depth group discussions and through a nationwide survey have highlighted the importance of good leadership as a critical factor in maintaining social cohesion. It can be observed that at the local and grassroots level, and in relation to regional or collectivities, people feel cohesive and are able to resolve disputes peacefully within their collectivities, indicating that there is some degree of resilience for peacebuilding. One of the most common reasons for this community-level resilience cited by those consulted in group discussions and interviewed for the survey, is

the strong ties to, and respect for, traditional chiefs and local leaders. We can therefore observe that responsive leadership is an invaluable positive contributing factor to the resilience of communities. However, people displayed much less trust in national institutions and the government, indicating that national leaders are not seen as contributing to the resilience of Timor-Leste and suggesting that there is a resilience gap at the national level. Many of the Timorese engaged in the consultation process described the relationship between communities and the government as disconnected breeds. In a young country such as Timor-Leste where people fought until 2002 to become self-gov-



erned, and also where communities have strong traditional ties and a legacy of organized resistance, real and perceived dichotomies between a centralized government that is often perceived to be catering to a small number of elites while the majority of people feel like they are left to fend for themselves can be a very real source of violent conflict.

#### **Resilience contributes to peace only when it does not produce violence**

The previous paragraphs have highlighted that a resilience orientation to peacebuilding must be mindful of all levels of society, as well as the need for harmony between these different levels. A second point of attention is whether resilience builds on capacities and responses that produce positive or negative outcomes. Here, positive and negative signal a distinction between processes, structures and resources that mitigate or prevent violence on the one hand, and those that contribute or have the potential to contribute to violence on the other. Although peacebuilding is not necessarily normative, there is a clear and uncontested mandate to reduce or prevent violence. Therefore, when assessing existing and potential re-

silience in societies, peacebuilders must pay particular attention to whether these do or could produce violent outcomes, whether directly or indirectly, structurally, or in other forms.

In Guatemala, as well as in Liberia, the FAR research revealed a strong sense of solidarity and capacity for organization and innovation amongst individuals and in communities. In both countries, access to justice and security is limited for various reasons: capacity, corruption, or inefficiency. In the face of this gap, organic arrangements have emerged: vigilante groups, community policing, neighbourhood watch, etc. These signal initiative, resourcefulness and a commitment to protecting the community, and is a source of resilience for peacebuilding inasmuch as it intends to provide safety and justice, two important components of positive peace. However, these groups also often operate as unaccountable vigilante groups and have recourse to violence, , sometimes lynching robbers in an effort to “take justice in their own hands”, because the courts will take too long, or the police is quite simply, absent, needs to be recognized as manifestation of negative

resilience. The violent outcomes that these groups do and can produce is problematic for peacebuilding and these arrangements cannot therefore be seen as positive resilience. Nonetheless, the organizational capacity for collective action which underpins the groups’ formation and activities is an important element of resilience and must not be overlooked. Moreover, these groups play an important function in the communities where they operate and their complete elimination could be highly destabilizing. Whereas, a more conservative approach to peacebuilding would recommend dismantling these groups altogether, a resilience orientation to peacebuilding will rather seek to build on the networks, arrangement and sense of solidarity that underpins vigilante groups, and focus on mitigating or eliminating the violent tactics employed.

Resilience casts a different analytical lens on peacebuilding dilemmas, and although it does not reveal new substantive components of peace – we already knew that leadership, trust, social cohesion, social justice, economic equity, etc., are fundamental to peacebuilding – it sheds light on how each of these are already mani-

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festing in a society and illuminates the dark spots, or the “resilience gaps”. Resilience, when looked at from the inside in, draws attention to what exists, and therefore increases the likelihood that processes of peaceful change emanate from local voices and are consistent with the needs and norms – however dynamic these may be – of the context where they take place. In Timor-Leste, it is apparent that local leaders and national leaders do not enjoy the same amount of trust and that this impacts the country’s resilience. In Guatemala and Liberia, we cannot build peace without acknowledging the pivotal function of community networks in providing security to individuals, but must recognize that they can be violent.

Peacebuilding is a political process of constructive social change, and positive peacebuilding interventions are ultimately about creating the conditions for these transformations to occur. Whereas it is possible to assume that in all contexts, peacebuilding processes are generally oriented towards the promotion of social justice, legitimate institutions, good governance, economic equity, social cohesion and trust, the specific

ways in which each of these manifest, and the gaps that exist will vary depending on the context. Resilience can be a useful analytical concept when it draws attention to the endogenous capacities in societies and how they can be leveraged for such change processes. By drawing attention to what exists, rather than what problems need to be resolved, a resilience analysis is more likely to stimulate peacebuilding interventions that are more context sensitive and have greater ownership of all sectors of society.

#### **Resilience as a common basis for collaboration between peacebuilding and other sectors of intervention**

If peacebuilding is about transformation, it is also multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral in nature. We cannot build peace without discussing development models, security provision, political participation, social services, environmental protection, rule of law or humanitarian protection, amongst others. Depending on the specificities of the context, each of these sectors will be more or less relevant to peacebuilding processes. To some extent, resilience offers a creative vehicle for linking and bridging between different disci-

plines and communities of practice, and integrating peacebuilding processes more effectively in parallel interventions.

The concept of resilience is employed – albeit in different ways – by different communities of practice and can therefore constitute the basis for common language. Conflict is a distinct type of “shock”, best described as a stressor because it is incremental in effect rather than momentous, and is also often produced as a result of internal causes within a society rather than because of external events, although these can play a catalytic role. In fact, conflict, especially when it is violent, is likely to undermine the very sources of strength and cohesion that enable societies to deal with external shocks such as natural disasters. In practice too therefore, there is an overlap between processes needed to build peace and humanitarian interventions required when there is a crisis. Moreover, as noted several times in this article, peacebuilding also intersects with processes of economic development, institution building, good governance, access to justice and social cohesion. It follows therefore that there should be symbiotic and

mutually reinforcing relationship between the specific interventions in each of these areas, especially because they happen simultaneously rather than sequentially. Resilience could provide a powerful basis for exploring the interactions and integrating between different interventions both because the word is already being used in most, if not all of these communities of practice and also because a resilience orientation emphasizes detecting existing assets, strengthening them and bringing about the necessary transformations before a natural calamity happens, global financial crisis causes a recession or long term drivers of conflict explode into violent riots. Resilience is about being equipped with the necessary resources and strategies so as to anticipate the destructive consequences of shocks and stressors and in this regard promotes a preventive rather than remedial approach to peacebuilding.

The FAR project was piloted in Liberia against the backdrop of the Ebola crisis, and has allowed for an observation of how humanitarian interventions, if not sufficiently mindful of conflict dynamics, can quickly become ineffective, worsen the humanitarian crisis and indeed

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Photo: Interpeace

contribute to violence. Conversely, when humanitarian interventions are sensitive to conflict dynamics and build on, rather than erode existing resilience capacities, they will have a greater chance of succeeding. The Ebola crisis in Liberia came and went in a little over a year, peaking for four months between July and October 2014. The initial response to this humanitarian crisis was a highly militarized one: troops were deployed, the US military came in with a heavy boot, a state of emergency was declared, curfews enforced, freedom of movement curbed, and borders closed. This strategy initially worsened the situation, creating panic and instability as it conjured powerful residual recollection memo-

ries of a not so distant war. In July and August, tensions between the population and the government had started to manifest in violent ways, reaching a peak on August 20, 2014 when state security forces clashed with community members in a quarantined zone of the West Point slum community in Monrovia and a fourteen-year-old boy was shot and killed by the Liberian Armed forces.

The transmission channels of Ebola are such that prevention requires extreme precaution in physical encounters, thus affecting many rituals, both quotidian and culturally specific. The imposition of a ban on certain customs such as cremation, although necessary, was

badly received by the population and viewed with suspicion; the enforcement of this ban by military means caused frustration and led to defiance rather than compliance. From a resilience point of view, the militarized strategy was all wrong because it exacerbated the mistrust between state and citizens, and further undermined the bases of community relations and networks, which are in fact an indispensable and powerful source of resilience for Liberians. The government of Liberia and the international community were able to pick up on this and reviewed their humanitarian intervention, investing more heavily as from September 2014 in community engagement, relying on community

networks for a much more culturally sensitive communication campaign. People were much more receptive and willing to respect the Ebola prevention measures from then on, resulting in a decline in the number of new cases and more effective detection of patients.

The case of the Ebola crisis in Liberia revealed the ways in which state fragility played itself out in the context of a humanitarian crisis, drawing attention to the importance of assessing existing sources of resilience and areas where resilience is lacking, before intervening. In 2015, Guatemala, another pilot of the FAR program, experienced a dramatic turn of events in the form of the political crisis that started in April with the International Commission against Corruption in Guatemala's (CICIG) investigations of corruption charges against high level government officials. Here, the state was itself the site of the "shock", whereas massive protests calling for greater social justice and reforms to the endemically corrupt institutional system demonstrated that, collectively, Guatemalans possess the capacity to initiate transformative processes that could potentially strengthen

the country's resilience for peace. The skeptics and the cautious have however pointed out that the demands for change have been varied and fragmented at times: although rallying behind a shared outrage at corruption, differing interest groups called for different degrees of institutional reform, and emphasized issues specific to their circumstances. Whereas it remains unclear what reforms need to be implemented, how these changes must be brought to fruition and who should play a role, there is a clear demand for change, and this is in itself a sign of resilience. That people have been capable of peacefully articulating their desire for a state which fends off rather than breeds corruption, exclusion, social injustices and inequities, is no small feat for a country that has a long history of violent conflict.

The impetus for change was also demonstrated by the results of the first round of presidential elections in September with a surprising victory from a political newcomer whilst the presidential candidate for LIDER, the party most associated with the political establishment targeted by the protests, tied for second place before eventually dropping out of the race. The

true test of resilience will however be during the reform process, if and when it materializes. From a peacebuilding perspective, it will be important that any intervention aimed at institutional reform, does not dismantle the existing formal and informal arrangements at both the community and national level which have up till now been critical to maintaining social cohesion. In other words, reforms should be contextualized within the broader aspiration to strengthen the country's resilience for peace rather than focus narrowly on technical interventions to tackle corruption and strengthen state institutions.

In both the Liberian and Guatemalan examples, although very different in nature, it is possible to observe and indeed appreciate how interventions in response to specific crises, can benefit from being informed by a resilience lens. In countries with a history of violent conflict and/or vulnerability to structural and manifest violence, peacebuilding organizations can play an important role in ensuring that interventions, whether humanitarian, political or economic in nature, do not exacerbate fragility but instead contribute to create positive peace dividends.

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It has been illustrated that resilience can be a useful framework premise for cultivating and the linkages between peacebuilding and other communities of practice, both from an operational and conceptual perspective as illustrated above. In order to be meaningful however, it will be necessary that the peacebuilding community clarifies its specific understanding of resilience, as the combination of processes, structures and capacities that different actors can deploy to promote constructive social change. It is equally important that the international community defers to the role of local actors in defining, prioritizing and conceptualizing the critical resilience factors and elements, as well as how to assess them, in any given context.

## **Conclusion**

Peacebuilding is not a singular process but rather the synergistic coordination of a series of processes and factors ranging from economic development, political participation, and social protection, which together create the conditions for conflicts to be resolved in non-violent and constructive ways. In essence, peacebuilding is a deeply political process that requires the

participation of all sectors of society. Moreover, there is no unique or universal peacebuilding formula: each country, each society, every context must find its own pathway to lasting peace. The inherent complexity of peacebuilding means that practitioners are constantly challenged to innovate in how they work and how they think in order to keep up with changing contexts and the rapidly evolving nature of conflict. Consequently, as a discipline and certainly as a field of practice, peacebuilding is always subject to new trends. In recent years, resilience has become highly fashionable across various practice areas, intellectual disciplines and in a range of policy spaces such as humanitarian intervention, environmental sustainability and international development, and is now slowly finding its way in the peacebuilding field

Interpeace's Framework for Assessing Resilience (FAR) project is an attempt to consider resilience in peacebuilding, to test its applicability, relevance and efficacy, and to produce guidance for its assessment. FAR has been designed as an exercise in participatory action research and combined its exploratory intent with practical process-



es in three pilot countries. Liberia, Timor-Leste and Guatemala can all be qualified as fragile contexts, either because they have recently emerged from protracted periods of violent conflict or because they are vulnerable to different forms of structural violence, whether in the form of repressive regimes, extreme inequalities or polarized societies, and so provide the perfect testing ground for how resilience plays out in three different fragile contexts, each with its unique history, social structure, and political trajectory. At the same time, these are all countries where there is a real need for effective peacebuilding processes that can transcend long standing contradictions and bottlenecks that continue to threaten peace.

FAR has demonstrated that a focus on resilience can be an asset to peacebuilding processes. Firstly, it provides a means by which to de-emphasize fragility and draw attention to the endogenous capacities in society, and in so doing can be an effective mobilization strategy for engaging actors in political processes. Secondly, resilience gives us the opportunity to develop peacebuilding programmes that take into account the specific as-

sets, as well as gaps unique to the society in which they are being implemented. Thirdly, resilience can form the basis for greater coherence and synergy between the different communities of practice so that humanitarian interventions, economic development and peacebuilding actors work more symbiotically. This could potentially make a valuable contribution to the effectiveness of preventive action.

Finally, the value of resilience also lies in the ways it can challenge us to reflect on peacebuilding and revisit our own assumptions about what it means to build peace and, more importantly, how we should build peace. Comparing the use of resilience in peacebuilding to its application in other fields, such as humanitarian intervention or sustainable development, has in some respects highlighted the importance of transformation, the central role of social justice and inevitable political nature of peacebuilding processes. To assess resilience for peacebuilding is to understand the capacities a society possesses and conditions for the transformative processes that can consolidate peace and bring about greater social justice.

**When humanitarian interventions are sensitive to conflict dynamics and build on, rather than erode existing resilience capacities, they will have a greater chance of succeeding**

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Timor-Leste	
APPROACH TO RESILIENCE	Resilience as a set of attributes that exist in society that must be given right conditions or used in specific ways in order to promote peace.
CONTEXT OF FRAGILITY	The overarching context of Timor-Leste is one of nationbuilding: after decades of occupation by the Indonesians, a transitional UN government, the challenge of the Timorese is to exist as a nation. Peacebuilding is thus equated with keeping the country together. The 2006 conflict revealed fractures between east and west in the army, and the 2012 crisis was largely the result of a struggle between leaders.
RESILIENCE TO WHAT?	Resilience for peacebuilding translates into "holding the country together", now that the external, common enemy is gone. The absence of social cohesion and national unity -both as a result of conflicts between elites and because of a deep disconnect between the ruling elite and the population - is seen as the biggest threat to peace and likely to engender violence.
NORMATIVE VALUE OF RESILIENCE	Exploration of "resilience elements" as contributing to both greater peace and greater violence; but tendency to equate "positive" resilience with peace.
ABSORB, ADAPT, TRANSFORM	Nuance not made explicitly in analysis except when commenting on culture as dynamic (resilience stems from innovation in culture) and on legal systems (hybridity between traditional justice and modern law).
LEVELS AND CONSTITUENCIES	Recognition that consultation focused on communities and individuals, rather than macro-level resilience. Interpreted as reflection of the disconnect between the political centre (Dili/Elites) and the periphery in Timor-Leste.

## Guatemala

## Liberia

Resilience as an analytical concept that may provide tools and an innovative approach for bringing together stakeholders in a given conflict.

Positive resilience as a desirable policy objective.

With the peace accords signed almost 2 decades ago, Guatemala has made important strides in recovering from its civil war. But this may have come at the cost of an exclusionary form of governance and the normalization of violence into everyday institutions. There may no longer be a war but violence is pervasive, manifest in the high criminal rates, rampant corruption, extreme social and economic inequality and the marginalization of certain groups. These structural drivers and indeed forms of violence are referred to as conflictivity.

Liberia was the site of one of the biggest UN peacekeeping missions, following the end of the second civil war in 2003. The number of efforts aimed at reforming the justice system, building strong institutions, disarming rebels, reforming the security sector are countless, and in this regard, in the imagination of Liberians, and certainly of the international community, Liberia is classified as a fragile state where efforts must be made to prevent a relapse to conflict.

Resilience for peacebuilding amounts to the transformative processes of social change that will displace the exclusionary processes and structures that lead to conflictivity which has been defined along four axes: fragility of state institutions, socio-economic fragility, socio-environmental conflicts and crime related insecurity.

Against the backdrop of the Ebola crisis, it became key to distinguish between resilience to sudden, external shocks, and resilience to structural/ long term threats to peace such as regulation mechanisms of land disputes, corruption and inefficiency of state services as well as social norms that create marginalization of certain groups.

No use of positive/negative resilience language. Resilience used as an analytical tool/concept to observe actions and identify capacities with a view to addressing specific political dilemmas and problems.

Strong tendency to use resilience as synonymous to “coping with hardship”, although there is appreciation of coping mechanisms that can undermine peace.

Strong emphasis on the importance of (social) change and transformation - in peacebuilding and political processes, Absorbing and adapting can be short and medium term options, transformation should be on the horizon.

Vocabulary gravitates towards coping mechanisms, because of the focus on Ebola.

Analysis explicitly attempts to explain resilience at each level, and state-level or macro level resilience has been treated as an important objective and organizing principle.

Consultation was predominantly at the grassroots level and sought to capture the voices of the people and data presents resilience strategies of individuals. There is an explicit effort to understand resilience from the perspective of women because they are disproportionately marginalized and victims of violence.



For peacebuilding the goal must be not just to enable a society to address specific drivers or root-causes of violent conflict, but rather to strengthen the elements of social and political cohesion that will allow it to prevent conflict from escalating into polarizing and violent dynamics, transforming it from a destructive to a constructive force.

### **Interpeace, Strategic Position Paper**







# Resilience and Peacebuilding

## *The project in Guatemala*

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By Mariel Aguilar

Coordinator in Guatemala of Interpeace's  
Framework for Assessing Resilience project

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*“Resilience is the capacity that people or groups have to face adversity, to overcome and transform adverse situations which affect their individual and collective interests. This capacity also enables people to find alternative, sustainable solutions by linking citizens’ efforts with the State’s own actions”*

**A concept put forward by the thematic working groups of the Resilience and Peacebuilding process, Guatemala 2015.**

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Guatemala today faces social and institutional deficits that constitute the wide-ranging context of violence, inequality, and political polarization, a situation that has prevailed despite the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 that ended an armed conflict of more than 36 years and which left behind thousands of victims, a fractured society, and a weak State.

Social unrest, defined as the structural causes that give rise to conflicts, represents the main challenge to peacebuilding and democracy. In the face of this situation, a number of efforts have been undertaken to address the immediate factors involved in conflicts and reduce their influence through short-term measures. Nonetheless, unrest continues and the mechanisms for dialogue lose their appeal in a complicated context defined by indifference to politics and enormous disparities in power produced by an unjust and unequal



society.

Despite all this, Guatemala is a society that resists, overcomes, and transforms its reality. Guatemala is a resilient society. In order to identify this quality, we must listen to those who day after day, in the cities and the countryside, in politics, civil society and the private sector, struggle to overcome the structural problems that affects us all.

Beginning in May 2014, the Interpeace Regional Office for Latin America have been undertaking a process of consultation and dialogue with actors

influencing the transformation of conflicts by non-violent means. The process is based on the principle that participants can identify the capacities for resilience present in society that will subsequently enable them to build a conceptual and action framework. This framework guides the different national sectors that seek to strengthen resilience capacities identified by the participants. Likewise, the process looks to recognize the contribution of a resilience perspective in peacebuilding.

In order to achieve these objectives, Interpeace pro-



representative of various sectors of Guatemalan society. This has been aimed at exploring mechanisms of resilience that allow individuals, groups, communities and the citizenry to face situations that stand in the way of achieving a life of wellbeing and satisfactions, or those that take the form of conflicts or social unrest.

This basic purpose of this process, called “Resilience and Peacebuilding”, is to stimulate participants to reflect on, analyze and debate the possibilities that a resilience perspective might have in

vides spaces for meetings and dialogue among the participants. By listening to their voices, we seek to stimulate a wide participation of the actors involved in the problems which are addressed. The ownership of the process is a fundamental condition for the legitimacy and sustainability required for the consolidation of peace. By applying participatory action research (PAR) methodology, Interpeace’s fundamental principles and values are brought into play, such as wide multi-sectoral participation and dialogue as an instrument for seeking appropriate solutions by the participants in the process.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that similar processes are being carried out in Liberia and Timor-Leste, countries that are currently living through a post conflict stage. In this context, the experience of our country contributes to the global debate with its lessons learned by a society that, after nearly 20 years since the signing of the Peace Accords, is still characterized by persistent dynamics of conflict and violence. These dynamics have expressed themselves during these years within a context of a weak State, which is absent in most of the country's territory and in general does not provide answers to the most immediate demands made by the population.

In order to implement this process in our country, and to define a methodological strategy to start up a debate on resilience according to our socio-cultural, economic, and political characteristics, an exploratory phase was developed that involved focus groups in the departments of Sololá and Petén, as well as interviews with individual actors at the national level.

These initial activities provided information on two key aspects: the principal problems identified by the participants and the responses they produced. Thereby, a series of situations were identified that affect, directly or indirectly, those people interviewed and/or those participants in the focus groups and in the face of which society is resilient. For analytical purposes, these situations were grouped together along three thematic lines: insecurity and violence, socio-environmental conflicts, and fragility of public institutions.

The results of this phase allowed us to design a methodology for the following phase that involved

a wide-ranging consultation aimed at delving more deeply in the thematic lines identified previously. Key questions were drawn up that aimed to uncover the specific actions that people take in the face of conflicts, who are the individuals or groups that undertake them, the contexts in which they are carried out, their level of impact, and the subsequent assessments of their impact. To promote these reflections and discussions, three methodological mechanisms were employed: a) group discussions in 11 departments: Petén, Izabal, Zacapa, Jalapa, Escuintla, Totonicapán, Huehuetenango, Quiché, San Marcos, Alta Verapaz and Guatemala. Participants in these groups included local and community leaders, traditional authorities, local public officials, representatives of civil society organizations and of the local private sector, churches, and academics; b) sectoral groupings that included women's organizations, young people, political parties, indigenous peoples, "resistance" organizations, private sector, and experts in resilience; and c) 40 in-depth interviews with social actors selected among the participants in the different discussion groups.

The consultation phase was key for the participatory approach proposed by Interpeace, since it promoted the necessary conditions of legitimacy for the participatory action research (PAR) process, as well as generating information that proved useful for subsequent debates.

An important result that was achieved in this phase was the "Summary Document of the Consultation Phase"<sup>1</sup>, which summarizes the diversity of opinions and perspectives that the participants expressed

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1. The document can be consulted on Interpeace's web site.

during the consultation. In addition to the three thematic lines identified in the exploratory phase, during this phase a list was developed of socio-economic situations in the face of which capacities for resilience were developed; these were grouped under the heading of socio-economic fragility.

Following along the logic of the process in the sense of widening the levels of discussion and deepening the analysis on the capacities for resilience that are found in Guatemalan society, a “National Group”

make-up of the two technical working groups that analyzed resilience and the perspectives it offers for addressing socio-environmental unrest and violence and insecurity under the headings of socio-economic fragility and the fragility of public institutions.

The contributions of the working groups, which have been meeting periodically since February 2015, have been of great value both for the theoretical-conceptual analysis and for identifying possible avenues for action to seek consensus-based mecha-



was formed with key national actors who represent the different sectors of society: businesspeople, politicians, government officials, representatives of civil society organizations, and experts in the issues addressed.

The National Group is the guiding party of the process and its purpose is to identify those points where the actors involved converge so that, always respecting their differences, they can seek out solutions to the problems identified previously. This group began its discussions after the results of the consultation phase were validated and determined the

nisms for addressing conflicts and social unrest, specifically linked to the issues discussed.

As a result of the events of April 2015 that deepened the national political crisis by uncovering serious cases of corruption, the two thematic working groups decided to come together as one to become acquainted with and analyze, from a resilience perspective, the citizens' responses that were being expressed in different areas of expression. As a result of these reflections, the participants decided to organize a forum to allow for an exchange of ideas among the diverse actors who were making





themselves heard through public protests or who were advancing proposals to overcome the crisis.

Thus, on 16 July the forum, entitled “What have we done and where are we going”, was held with approximately 136 people in attendance. After the presentations of four speakers and subsequent comments, the participants analyzed the responses of the citizenry before the crisis and provided suggestions to strengthen the citizens<sup>2</sup> movement. Currently, the group is working to define the proposals to provide follow-up to the process, which are based on the issues discussed during this phase of the process and suggested mechanisms to overcome those aspects of social unrest that were singled out.

It is to be expected that these mechanisms will include the commitments of all sectors involved to work responsibly for the transformation of all

those situations that stand in the way of achieving the common good and consolidation of peace.

The Resilience and Peacebuilding process is evidencing the potential to convene that the resilience perspective has brought to the debate on social unrest in Guatemala. It is in everybody's interest to identify the existing opportunities in society to transform the causes that generate conflict. Thus, the principal strength of the process is its multi-sectoral character that has turned it into a meeting ground of actors who, despite their differences (perhaps even thanks to them), have agreed to develop joint solutions by dialogue. A group that, as an expression of resilience, has acquired ownership of a process to start a constructive dialogue with the State and continue thereby bridge the gaps that divide society.


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2. The report can be consulted in Interpeace's web page.

Because violence and coercion are rooted in long-term historical dynamics that permeate a society's social and political life, we believe that the social and political processes necessary to transform the way a society functions take generations, and cannot be achieved through quick-fixes. Therefore, peacebuilding efforts have to be conceived as mid- to long-term strategies that work for cumulative and incremental impact.

**Interpeace, Strategic Position Paper.**





# Four perspectives on resilience in Guatemala

BY OTTO ARGUETA AND ARNOLDO GÁLVEZ





After 18 years since the signing of the peace accords, Guatemala still faces enormous challenges on the road to the consolidation of peace. This is due, principally, to ongoing conflicts that can turn violent given that the State does not possess the institutional mechanisms transform them peacefully.

However, Guatemala is a resilient society that has developed a variety of nonviolent capacities to transform conflicts. Recognizing this capacity is one of the principal contributions of the Resilience and Peacebuilding programme: it reveals that society itself is capable of developing mechanisms to overcome and transform problems.

This section of the journal presents a series of conversations with members of the national group on the contribution of a resilience approach and the perspectives for transformation that the group has identified over the months. The opinions and outlooks transcribed below reflect the richness and diversity of a group made up of individuals from different social sectors who discovered, in the Resilience and Peacebuilding programme, a space to meet and to shorten the distances that separate them.

After an exploratory and consultation phase to determine the principle social problems that Guatemala's population faces with resilience, the Resilience and Peacebuilding programme in Guatemala began a second phase: the implementation of a participatory action research (PAR) process that sought to open up a multi-sectoral political space to analyze in more depth the capacities of resilience of Guatemalan society and to develop proposals to transform society and to overcome the problems identified in the consultation phase. To that end, a national-level group was set up with representatives of the State and civil society, as well as experts in the field.

The national group appointed two working groups, one to look into socio-environmental conflicts and a second to explore the problems related to insecurity and violence. After eight months of frequent meetings and the commitment of the participants, various follow-up proposals were put together based on the capacities for resilience for conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

One of the characteristics of the PAR methodology is its flexibility and capacity to adapt. The methodology invites the participants to become owners of the process and to themselves lead it in order to generate understanding and proposals for social change. This flexibility became evident in the Resilience and Peacebuilding process, when members of the groups decided to include in their agenda for analysis and action proposals the institutional crisis that emerged from the corruption scandals and subsequent street protests that led to the resignations and jailing of the President and Vice President of the Republic.<sup>1</sup>

This section of the journal presents a series of conversations with members of the national group on the contribution of a resilience approach and the perspectives for transformation that the group has identified over the months. The opinions and outlooks transcribed below reflect the richness and diversity of a group made up of individuals from different social sectors who discovered, in the Resilience and Peacebuilding programme, a space to meet and to shorten the distances that separate them.

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1. On 16 April 2015, the office of the Public Prosecutor and the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) presented a wide-ranging investigation on the existence of a web of corruption within the government of Guatemala. It is estimated that the web, called "La Línea", embezzled an average of some 2.5 million quetzals a week by charging up to 30% of the value of imports to importers given its control of the system of customs houses. The investigations led to the arrest of 19 people, from low-level bureaucrats up to high level officials such as the Superintendent of the Revenue Office (Superintendencia de Administración Tributaria) and the Private Secretary of the Vice President, Roxana Baldetti. The Public Prosecutor and the CICIG also announced the beginning of an investigation into the businesses that benefited from the payment of bribes to this corruption web.

The national crisis deepened after the Public Prosecutor and the CICIG presented on 20 May a second investigation on corruption in the government. This time the authorities arrested 17 individuals linked to a corruption web in the Guatemalan Institute of Social Security (IGSS), that included the president of the Bank of Guatemala, the president and members of the board of directors of IGSS and other high level officials. This web enabled a contract with a pharmaceutical firm for dialysis treatment at an approximate cost of 116 million quetzals. The company did not fill the legal requirements and the death of 30 people are associated with the services the company provided.

As a consequence of all this, massive street protests took place, all of them peaceful, the biggest of which brought together close to one hundred thousand people in the central plaza of Guatemala City. These social protests and the investigations carried out by the Public Prosecutor and CICIG, that proved the direct link between the highest officials in the executive branch and the web of embezzlers in the customs houses, led to the resignation of the president and the vice-president of the Republic, who now are in prison awaiting trial.



## Ivanova Ancheta

Lawyer in sustainable management and former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Sustainable Development.

**What has been the main contribution of the resilience approach to a better understanding of the problems the country faces? At the same time, how does this approach contribute to the search for solutions?**

Resilience is the human capacity to convert an adversity into an opportunity: an opportunity for change, an opportunity to search for circumstances that will leave a crisis behind or overcome an adversity. In this respect, resilience in Guatemala is a very important factor: because we have developed many capacities, even though we are weighed down by the worst in-

stances of development in Central America and one of the worst in the world, there is very much poverty, extreme poverty, and that affects many other problems we have in the country, such as violence and the lack of opportunities. And this is something that we live daily.

That is why the concept of resilience is so important to understand ourselves, given that a good part of the population really practices resilience in order to survive and overcome all these adversities. However, the very lack of education has held back the possibilities of making use of this capacity to create better results.

**Can we thus say that Guatemala is a resilient society?**

Yes, if we weren't resilient we would be even worse off as a society.

**How do you visualize this resilient Guatemala? What are its characteristics?**

I visualize it as everyday history, where people have to face adverse circumstances and overcome them. For example, a mother who is head of household, widow, with many children, who has to take care of her house and seeks resources to do so. I believe we are very resilient and there are many very good examples of resilient individuals.

### **In the public sphere, how is resilience expressed?**

There are very many public officials who hold up the government and the State, if it weren't for them the State would no longer exist. And these people are resilient, they have developed certain capacities to overcome adverse situations that occur due to the lack of strong institutions, to the politicization of institutions, to corruption, etc.

### **Can we refer to a resilient State?**

I believe that what is resilient, within the State, are some officials that are frequently technical and remain at their posts. They transcend changes in government or are civil servants and help to carry on the public's business.

I don't think that the structure of the State or the system generates resilience, on the contrary, I believe that the system has brought about corruption. But there are very many people in the government who have been resilient and have had opportunities to improve certain circumstances or at least to maintain them.

For example, there are many cases of officials who enter gov-

ernment to benefit themselves personally, to enrich themselves. That happens, generally, in the strictly political appointments. But there are other public officials who guarantee that the institutions don't end up embezzled or corrupted totally.

### **Are we then talking about individuals whose resilience is preventing the collapse of the State?**

They say that the State has failed and maybe that's true, but it would much worse if there weren't that swathe of people who are good, who do have a concept of citizenship, who have been resilient and have converted adversities into opportunities.

In your experience in public administration, which are the principle challenges that must be faced in terms of resilience?

One of our basic problems is precisely the lack of a citizen consciousness. A collective conscience does not exist from which a will might emerge to want to improve the country. That interest is beginning to show but it must be deepened, because we all have something to give, we all have something to contribute in whatever way of life we find ourselves and we cannot continue to be indifferent to our reality.

### **The recent citizen protests against corruption, could they mark the end of that indifference?**

I believe they are one of the first symptoms of a feeling of impotence, but they don't yet have a clear bearing. In Guatemala we are at present suffering from intellectual and spiritual poverty. There is no content. If you look at the newspapers, you read about value judgements, accusations, there is no underlying intellectual or philosophical bedrock that might provide a bearing and that reflects on the absence of leaders.

### **What aspects, which are already resilient, will have to be strengthened in the public sector?**

A serious reform of the system must be undertaken and I think it should begin in the Congress: on the country's agenda are pending a reform of the civil service law, if we don't reform that the State will always be subject to turmoil.





## Carlos Arenas

Member of an organization called Relatives and Friends Against Crime and Kidnapping (Familiares y Amigos Contra la Delincuencia y el Secuestro, FADS).

### **In your experience, what has been the principal contribution of the resilience approach to the analysis of the problems that Guatemala faces currently?**

In principle, what we need is to learn to communicate and afterwards to build a sense of belonging to the country, accepting diversity and differences, and that is why this space makes me enthusiastic. In fact, Guatemala is a country with strong traumas and for that reason we must learn to overcome together that traumatic part of our history, by means of a process of communication in which we accept ourselves under our ways of thinking but also, at

the same time, with an interest in building for the common good and for the future generations.

I believe that by opening up space for communication and participation we will discover the different ways of thinking and different social groups and thereby achieve a new meeting of the Guatemala we all look forward to.

### **How would you describe that “resilient Guatemala? How do you imagine that “Guatemala that we all look forward to”?**

A resilient Guatemala is a Guatemala that shares common country goals. A Guatemala where, regardless of the differences, we can accept each other and com-

municate. A resilient Guatemala is that which assigns worth to the human being, a country that can progress because it values human beings above and beyond where its inhabitants are located in geographic, economic or ideological terms.

### **What, therefore, are the principal challenges and problems that we face to achieve that “resilient Guatemala”?**

We need to strengthen our resolve to transform ways of thinking, ways of doing, but I would think fundamentally that the opportunity is to be found in education. Education will allow us to build models based on a culture of



Protest against corruption in Guatemala City, 2015  
Photo: Carlos Sebastián for Nómada.gt  
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prevention, a culture of building jointly and putting the human being first.

**What aspects of this society already are resilient, already are positive, and how should we come together to strengthen them?**

The current crisis, born out of the corruption scandals in the government, has had a strong impact on the citizenry and the citizenry has responded demanding justice. There we might find a beginning of resilience that we

must make the most of, as well as of the emergence of all those other groupings of organized society from a variety of origins, of different ideologies, and even of diverse economic status, that are seeking solutions by identifying a problem that is shared by all. This can be built upon to achieve a common vision and will to transform.

I am speaking, in other words, about breaking down paradigms, which is very difficult in our culture, but I think that very important contributions are being made.

There will be need probably to socialize these initiatives among other groups of diverse orientation, that are participating – and maybe not – or that have not communicated sufficiently. In this respect, the group of the Resilience and Peacebuilding programme, in which we are participating, is very valuable given its plural nature; it is necessary to share our vision with these other groups, contribute to the building of a common vision for the country, and thereby prevent divisionism.



## María del Carmen Aceña

Associate researcher at the Centre for National Economic Research (CIEN).  
From 2004 to 2008 she was Minister of Education.

### **What has been the main contribution of the perspective of resilience in achieving a better understanding of the problems that face the country and the search for solutions?**

A good aspect has been the possibility for diverse sectors to sit around a table and acquire knowledge. The concept allows us to understand how we have reacted and how that positive reaction can be applied in our daily lives. Then to define those large issues we have been tackling as a group, socio-environmental conflicts and citizen security; I believe it allows us to

discuss the big national issues without any political banner or preconceived concept. That is positive and that is why people of all sectors of society have been brought together, people with different ways of thinking. I believe the methodology is very good because it has allowed all those diverse ways of thinking to express themselves and has enabled a joint analysis on those positive capacities in society required to build the future.

### **What is a resilient Guatemala like?**

I believe there are two Guatemalas, the Guatemala that is

over 30 years of age, and the one under 30. The Guatemala older than 30 is very conservative, it does not discuss, it accepts. While in the other, those below 30, I see people who are much more dynamic, who protest peacefully, who are active in social networks, that express themselves in different forms. I believe that we are witnessing there a variety of peaceful forms that aim to resolve our problems. What we have seen in these four months is a lot of participation, a desire to lay out and share our internal pain and not keep it penned up inside, and to seek solutions. The combination of



that youth with the experience of those over 30 constitutes, I believe, the great opportunity to move Guatemala forward.

**You have experience in both the public sector as well as the private. How can resilience be understood from the perspective of those two sectors in particular?**

The private sector is a group that transcends governments and the way they have tried to face adversities has been to group together. They have set up barriers so as to not be attacked, and they participate very little. Now they are much more conservative, much less public. That is the way they have acted to defend themselves from attacks. When governments wear out, they start to blame the private sector, especially certain families with many resources, resources which they have earned themselves. For that reason, words like “oligarchy” do much damage because we are talking about a private sector that really is committed to Guatemala. Thus, what we need are more bridges of communication. The people who can and want to make changes are fragmented.

**Does the State of Guatemala have resilience capacities?**

I find resilience capacities in career civil servants. I have seen peaceful resistance in officials who are honest and take a stand against corrupt governments. But that does not improve the condition of the country.

One can analyze resilience well in the case of an event that one cannot administer, for example, the death of someone dear, where capacities are generated. But in the face of corruption I believe people end up ill and that is terrible for a society, because it becomes ill but withstands, resists. The very technical public servants might resign but if they do, what are they going to do for a living?

Thus, what has happened in Guatemala in the last four months means we have a great opportunity to clean up illnesses of this kind, it is the great opportunity we have to change systems. Four years ago people remained silent and that was their form of defence, but not today, now honest people get out on the streets and put their problems on the table.

**Do you believe that that change of attitude has to do**

**with the energy and the values of that Guatemala that you have described as “under thirty”?**

Young people are beginning to understand that if they do not achieve a change of system, they have no future. These are young people who are studying to become professionals, who want to innovate, but they have already become aware that in Guatemala there is no future and for that reason they are waking up, they have more and better information and are connected globally. Protests against corruption and impunity brought together an important segment of the population.

**What other problems that Guatemala faces currently require that resilient attitude in society?**

Violence is the main problem. And to fight it we need that our leaders, in fact, lead that fight. In Guatemala, the CICIG commissioner has a 65% approval rating, the Congress has 12% and the president 8 or 7%. I hope that the next government really assumes its leadership role, and that the president be an authentic leader.



National unity has to involve youth. Young people have good ideas, what they need is patience, understanding that changes will not happen from one day to the next. We must support processes, change systems, after thirty years of democracy during which we did not have sufficient controls within the State and this is the moment to reform it.

The success of this moment will depend on how this energy of young people can be channelled in the direction of processes, of changes, so that the country can really change and young people

can have a future. They themselves became aware that there was no future. And what future might that be if I walk out onto the street and I might be killed in a bus? What future is that in which there are no public services? How can I imagine a future in a country where politics are viewed as a mechanism to escape poverty?

**In terms of resilience, what must be strengthened so that Guatemala can take advantage of that opportunity you have identified?**

We must strengthen the political

parties, by making their financing transparent. Before they were financed through business donations and now they are financed with public funds, if not by drug money.

In addition, at a micro level, people need to talk, to act. For example, if my community has a problem, we must talk about it, organize and take action.

If am really outraged about something that is happening in my neighbourhood, I need to join up with someone else who is also outraged and take action.



Protest against corruption in Guatemala City, 2015  
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Protest against corruption in Guatemala City, 2015  
Photo: Carlos Sebastián for Nómada.gt  
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**Sergio Funes**

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**What has been the main contribution of the perspective of resilience to achieve a better understanding of the problems that face the country?**

I believe that addressing socio-environmental conflict in the country, under the resilience perspective, allows us to identify response capacities in the face of conflicts that have been building up among the more vulnerable populations, in a society, in addition, plagued by inequalities, where there are few opportunities to access justice or the development projects of the State.

People in rural areas have managed to maintain that response capacity in the face of inequalities, and this is a new way of looking at this problem, by analyzing the capacity of the very people to sustain themselves and respond to a very unequal society.

**How does this perspective contribute to the search for solutions?**

We are evolving with reality, evolving politically with reality. It is comprehensible that in Guatemala there still exist very confrontational attitudes among the social and communal orga-

nizations in the face of conflicts. But it is also true that other more conciliatory positions also exist. There are organizations that are willing to sit around a table and begin to discuss, directly with the State and with the business sectors, those issues that affect the people. This is important, even though it be a position not shared by all. The resilience perspective can contribute to helping us get there because we still operated under the logic of the armed conflict, where positions were irreconcilable. But today there is no internal armed conflict and we do not have any possibility



of achieving control of the State in order to solve the problems faced by the people.

That is why we signed up in this space provided by the Resilience and Peacebuilding programme.

It has been proven that we must seek out intermediate positions to resolve conflicts, and that requires that we change our methods of struggle. Not the objectives, the methods.

In this respect, when we talk about resilience, we not only talk about identifying the capacity that existed in the past to resist the effects of inequalities but today, more than ever, to talk about resilience means the development of capacities to link us up and seek out intermediate positions. If we don't give that "jump in" method, we, as social organizations, are not going to get out of the hole in which we are stuck. Some are suffering even more the effects of sticking to those extreme positions. Even though, in the end, it's not even the organizations that suffer those effects but the communities themselves. It's a sad reality but we must accept that the social organizations have a lot of influ-

ence in the way in which conflicts develop. In that respect, we are very responsible for changing our work methods so that we can, effectively, contribute to the transformation of people's lives.

**Would you identify that as a capacity of resilience? The awareness of your responsibility as a social organization and the need to change your methods in order to achieve change?**

Yes, we are talking in this case about adaptive resilience, not of conditions, neither of objectives but of method. We are adapting. Before, our positions were of force, because we had mechanisms with which to apply force, that is, we responded in the same way. Today we must find other mechanisms, we need new ways to adapt to the new conditions that the system itself is offering us.

**You mentioned that the capacities for resilience have changed over time. How have those changes taken shape within the context of social movements?**

At some moments of the country's history, resistance

was expressed in the hills, in exile, in clandestine activities. We were resilient because we developed capacities to face the circumstances we were living in, defending life, in principle. Then we passed on to another stage: the peace accords. When the General Accord for Human Rights (Acuerdo Global de Derechos Humanos) was signed, the necessary conditions began to take shape that allowed people to come out openly on the political stage. Naturally, methods change, conditions required that we change our methods of struggle. When the last part of the peace accords was signed, we thought we were going to transform the country via elections, within the framework of the rule of law, by organizing, social pressure, and all the mechanisms that democracy allows. However, I think we have not made sufficient use of some of those mechanisms in order to transform reality.

**In the context of resilience, what are the main challenges which social organizations currently face?**

One of the main challenges of social organizations is that



Protest against corruption in Guatemala City, 2015  
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we might start to talk not only of social organizations but of authentic social movements. As social organizations we must do battle – the biggest of all – and that is a battle against ourselves. If we do not do that we won't be able to build something that is bigger than each one of us, that is, a social movement. And that can only take place if we have information, capacities to analyze conjunctures, advice, etc.

### **What positive actions are being undertaken already but what must be strengthened to move towards a social movement?**

I repeat: information, political analysis, the knowledge of law is most important; as organizations, we sometimes put forth proposals which are not viable. I am convinced that we must con-

tinue to build spaces for negotiation, I believe that in all sectors there exist positions with a will to negotiate, within the State, in civil society, and we might begin with an exercise to address some of these urgent issues. There are some people who never will sit down at a negotiating table and we cannot wait for them forever. You have talked about very traditional organizations from a historical point of view.

### **What do you find that is new in the more recent organized expressions of dissatisfaction, many of which are emerging in recent protests against corruption, and which even though are not identified with any of those movements, are beginning to emerge with much force?**

I believe we must understand

that as historic national organizations, we don't have exclusive rights nor precedence within civil society. Now there are a diversity of organizations with very revolutionary demands, that do not originate necessarily within the revolutionary left, and which are putting forth new issues: the LGBT movement, special capacities, working children, women, indigenous peoples, all with a diversity of positions, etc. Society is diverse and will express itself diversely. What we need to do is to link up all these different positions and provide more support, as I said at the beginning, in areas of design and political and conjunctural analysis, in access to information, legal knowledge, negotiation strategies for the resolution of conflicts. What we need foremost is training, to know when and how, and not the other way round.













We understand that conflict is natural to society. We understand conflict to be the confrontation of differing interests, ideas and agendas that is inherent to social and political life. Moreover, we believe that conflict can play a positive role in social dynamics as a driving force of innovation and change, when effectively managed.

**Interpeace, Strategic Position Paper.**

