

Resilience and Peacebuilding

The project in Guatemala

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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.

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"¹, which summarizes the diversity of opinions and perspectives that the participants expressed

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 citizens² 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.

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